

Midyear Observations about China in 1985

As I would be making a mid-year report to the Fulbright sponsors, I decided to write some mid-year observations for myself as well.

Chinese Students

When I came to China to teach American literature on a Fulbright at Nanjing University, I was expecting good students. I had heard that China had them. I had heard of students so eager to read American books that they asked visiting tourists to send them some. I had come from students whom I sometimes had to force to read. What a joy it would be to teach students eager to read! Everyone had heard that Chinese students would approach foreigners on the street to speak English. The image of all these eager students just waiting for us to come and enrich their lives with books and conversation was too compelling to pass up. I loaded up with books, lecture notes, and video tapes of American films, which I had also heard that students were most eager for, and headed for China.

I was not disappointed. My students are wonderful. They wanted books; I was only sorry that I hadn't bought enough for all the students who came--including some who weren't enrolled. They would be going to teach in schools and universities whose libraries are nowhere as good as Nanjing University's, and they needed primary works. Fortunately the Fulbright gave me a generous book allowance to work with. Unfortunately, the students, though eager to HAVE, are not always eager to READ the books. Some say they are taking too many courses and have too many extra activities. In that respect, they are not unlike my students back in America. In their eagerness to please and to meet the deadlines that everyone in China seems to be constantly working toward, my wonderful students occasionally resort to that questionable practice of reading about books rather than reading books. I have outlawed secondary sources. They also would rather hear a lecture about a book than read the book, it sometimes seems to me. In this love of lectures and authorities, they remind me of Germans, who, it is said, if given the choice between going to Heaven and going to a lecture about Heaven, would hesitate only a moment.

Their level of comprehension of written and spoken English seems very high, especially, of course among the graduate students. But I have difficulty getting them to talk and discuss. Some say it is their system which has never encouraged them to speak out their own ideas. Are they afraid that others will criticize them, that they will "lose face" if they don't give the "correct" answer? I don't know; I only know they look like they have many more thoughts than they can express in class in public. They say more to me individually--on paper or after class--than they are willing to say before others. I have noticed too that when someone is brave enough to speak up before the class, the others are not as interested as I am. The class seems to act like the only person who should be speaking to the class is the teacher. Has the Chinese school system done this to

them? In America, my students are just the opposite; they pay more heed to what each other says than to what I say. They would rather hear from their peers than from their teacher; they seem to think that their teachers are rather like their parents--irrelevant and out of touch with college age kids. Chinese students, though, seem to respect the words of the teacher out of all proportion to what they are worth. Maybe the reason they are slow to read the books or assigned readings is that they are waiting for me to tell them how good these works are before they will take the time to read them. Why do they hesitate to taste something new without being assured that they will like it or it is good for them or people they respect value it? Is it that they lack the interest to read and decide for themselves? Or do they need the reassurance that *Billy Budd* is a masterpiece in the opinion of the West)?

When I first encountered my third year undergraduate students, in a course in American Literature, I was surprised at how young they seemed, though they were mostly 20-21. Their knowledge seems very limited. They don't know much about history, except the limited "official" version they had been taught in school, and they aren't willing to die for that. For some reason, they haven't much curiosity, either. They remind me of American high school students. They are groupies. They go everywhere hand in hand with a friend. Once they decide what their major will be, they are blocked into classes with other English majors. They even room with the same people they're in class with all day. I personally feel that there's a big jump American students make going from high school, where they do everything with their peers, to college, where each goes his own way and learns to be on his own. Chinese students are prevented from making that leap into maturity by the group system here which makes it very comfortable and easy to remain a member of a group and postpone individual maturity.

My graduate students here, who have been teaching or working for several years, seem much more like the students I am familiar with in American universities. Although they too are grouped, they have had different experiences. Some are married, some have worked in industry, some have traveled, some have taught in various colleges and in various provinces. They have a sense of their individuality, and they appreciate the opportunity to come back and study. Their curiosity is much increased; they are reaching out for knowledge. They are the ideal students of whom I heard before coming to China. I have been very impressed also with their written papers. They are not shy about giving their opinions on paper, although they are still afflicted with the plague of reticence when asked to speak out. I would have to say that my graduate students in China are better than my graduate students in the U.S.

Reading *DAISY MILLER* in China: A Case Study

I have been attempting to get my graduate students to realize that there can be more than one opinion on a subject, that there is no "correct" interpretation of literature. I have told them about "Reception theory" and "Reader-response theory," and developed a method for this. They were given copies of Henry

James' DAISY MILLER, asked to read it without discussing it with anyone, and then answer ten questions:

1. What is Daisy's attitude to men? Do you agree or disagree? Comment.
2. What is Mrs. Costello's attitude to Daisy? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
3. What is Daisy's attitude to Eugenio? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
4. What is Mrs. Miller's attitude to Daisy? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
5. What is Mrs. Walker's attitude to Daisy? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
6. What is Daisy's attitude to European culture? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
7. What is Winterbourne's attitude to Daisy ? Do you approve or disapprove ? Comment.
8. What is Giovanelli's attitude to Daisy? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
9. What is Daisy's attitude to Giovanelli? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.
10. What is society's attitude to Winterbourne's affair with the "lady from Geneva"? Do you approve or disapprove? Comment.

Respondents were 7 women and 13 men, second year graduate students, mostly 25-30, returned after teaching or working for a few years in some college or industry. They will probably return next year to teach. Only about 3 or 4 are married. They are from all over China. I tabulated the responses as for, against, mixed or unclear.

1. Daisy's attitude to men was described as "free, equal" by 3 of the girls who admired her; but as "unconventional, improper, too bold" by 2 who were against her freedom; and as "open" (good) but "flirting" (bad) by 2.

The men were more strongly for Daisy's "free, unattached, clever, bold" behavior, which 8 favored. One even called her a "martyr for women's rights" and put her along with Hester Prynne and Nora in the company of great feminists. Only 2 thought her too "naive and innocent." 3 were of a mixed opinion about her; one thought she would be fun for the short term, but too fickle for the long run.

2. Mrs. Costello's attitude to Daisy was unanimously disapproved by the girls 7-0, who felt she was "snobbish and prejudiced."

The men too overwhelmingly (11) disapproved of her for being "aristocratic, exclusive, unfair, envious," in her refusal to receive Daisy. One however gave her the benefit of a doubt; given her background and upbringing, she could hardly have been expected to act otherwise. One was mixed in his response.

3. Daisy's attitude ("equal, intimate") to the courier Eugenio was slightly approved by the women: 3 for, 2 against (one felt she was "teasing him") and 2 mixed.

The men, however, resoundingly (9) applauded her for being so carefree and "indifferent to social classes." One, however, took her to task: Eugenio was "not a decent fellow," so she shouldn't have been on such good terms with him. 2 were unclear.

4. Mrs. Miller's attitude toward her daughter was described as "laissez faire: she doesn't interfere or prevent Daisy from going anywhere." The young women were predominately (4) against this saying that "she should be proud of Daisy," or "she should guide Daisy." Only one was for her mother staying out of Daisy's business. 2 were unclear.

5. Mrs. Walker's attitude toward Daisy again earned general disapproval. The women thought she was trying to help Daisy at first, but when Daisy didn't do as she insisted, she cut her publicly and initiated her rejection from society. 5 were against, 1 was for, and 1 unclear.

The men were even more strongly against Mrs. Walker. 10 found her "cruel, meddling, concerned only with social appearances." 3 were unclear.

6. Daisy's attitude to European customs was described as "rebellious" by the girls, 2 of whom were for it (one said that Daisy's "struggle" should have found a better form, which left me thinking that she thought Daisy should have joined some socialist or revolutionary group of her time), 2 against ("When in Rome do as the Romans do") and 3 were unclear, thinking she should compromise or change. These could almost be considered disapproval, so it might be 2 for 5 against. Might this reflect the greater conservatism of girls in general?

The men, however, were more supportive of Daisy. 8 approved of her attitude of "spontaneity," "defiance," and "challenge" to the old world customs. One called her a "revolutionary pioneer." 2 disapproved of her rebellion, feeling she was too "innocent" and "ignorant." 3 were unclear.

7. Winterbourne's attitude to Daisy was not generally condoned by the women, who "sympathized" with him but felt he was "too stiff," "too timid," "forced by society to reject" Daisy, with his realization coming only too late. They seemed to blame Winterbourne for her death: 5 were against his behavior, 1 for, and 1 unclear.

The men were more supportive. 5 were for his attitude and behavior, saying that he "loved and cared for her," "admired her." 3 were against him, saying that he let himself be forced by society to reject her. But 5 were unclear.

8. Giovanelli's attitude to Daisy was disapproved by the majority of the women (4) who thought him an adventurer, looking for his own advantage, causing her death. I thought him "indulgent" in taking Daisy anywhere she liked. 2 were unclear.

The men were quite split: 5 were for him, saying things liked "he loved her," "he indulged and obeyed her." 4 were against him, saying that he "exploited" her. Again, 5 were unclear.

9. Daisy's attitude and behavior toward Giovanelli split the women: 2 were for it because Daisy was "learning" from him, as contrasted with the stiff Winterbourne who wouldn't allow her to do anything she liked. 3 were against her "too innocent" and "too open" attitude toward him, thinking she "went too far" with him. 2 were unclear.

The men, however were strongly (9) against Daisy's attitude toward Giovanelli, feeling she was "taken in by his culture and sophistication," "unfairly leading him on ," "too innocent." 2 were for her attitude to him because she appreciated his culture and was enjoying herself. 2 were unclear.

10. Society's attitude toward Winterbourne's affair with the "lady from Geneva" was unclear to most of the students; some felt society approved, some that it disapproved. The women felt that whether society approved (1) or disapproved (3), it was none of their business (4). 2 were unclear. Men were similarly unclear; more men thought society disapproved (9); only 3 thought it approved. Most (7) were against society's attitude: people should "mind their own business." One volunteered that this relationship couldn't happen in China. An unmarried man would never get away with having an affair with a married lady here, said he.

A postscript to this summary. When I presented these results in class, the students were very interested, especially in the differences between men and women in the results. I playfully pointed out that men admired Daisy's boldness and rebellious spirit, so the women could take heart and be more open and free, for the men seemed to like that spirit. Men were more approving of Daisy's attitude to men, of her friendliness with Eugenio, of her mother's letting her be independent, of her independence of and rebellion against customs. They stopped short of endorsing her freedom only when it came to Giovanelli, perhaps identifying with Winterbourne and wishing he had been the man for her instead of the fatal Giovanelli. The women weren't so approving of her and seemed to imply that her mother or Winterbourne should have saved her. One male student, however, felt dissatisfied with the results. There would have been more uniformity had the questions been phrased in a different way: e.g., "If you identified with Giovanelli, would you approve of his attitude?" All the students should be standing in the same place; only then would the answers be precise. I asked him whether his goal was unanimity, whether he thought there should be a "correct" answer to each question. He couldn't say. Later he said he felt like a political bureaucrat. I told him I thought he sounded like he ought to become a high-level cadre.

Foreign Teachers

Observing and getting to know people is one of the most interesting aspects of life in China. Among the very interesting people here are the foreign teachers. There are some "old China hands" here at Nanda. These people know China best. No one can tell them anything. They do the telling. They are the authorities on China. Any opinion you have will certainly be revised by them.

First among the old China hands here at Nanjing is Margaret Garvie, a retired Scottish middle-school principal. She has no Scotch accent at all. Helen spotted her the first day as being from the educational establishment. Margaret came to China first right after WWII, as an exchange student. She studied Chinese in Beijing, then went to Shanghai and even Nanjing. She was here in 1948 and is a fountain of information about old Nanjing. She had friends in the now-vanished privileged class. She remembers the missionary schools and their favorite female students. She roomed here with 4 Chinese students and tells of sending out for a tub of hot water which 2 coolies carried between them on a bamboo pole to their room. They left the water in the tub to warm their room, then bathed in it, one after the other, taking turns going first.

Deirdre, from Bath, is a contemporary China hand. She wants to make her life teaching in China. She has previously taught in Qufu (Confucius's hometown) and Dongying, a new city in an oilfield. In both places she was the only foreign expert and was made much of, as the Chinese tend to do with their "first foreigner." Here in Nanjing, she is just one of many and complains that there are too many foreigners, especially Americans, here. She wants to be the center of attention. She talks about herself incessantly. The Chinese put up with that, for the experience of practising English. But the foreigners are not interested in the eternal story of her children's book, and will not indulge her. Consequently, she sits with the students in the dining hall. They, like the Chinese, respect her and give her center stage. She has little capacity for listening to others except very indulgently, murmuring "hmmm, hmmm" in a distracted manner, as if she would much rather be off somewhere else. She is not interested in affairs of the world; she complains about many things Chinese--students, pollution, bad manners--but if any of us criticize the Chinese, she defends them and says that the West is just as bad if not worse than China, on that point. She has a Chinese lover, a married man young enough to be her son. In Dongying he was with the waiban office, and she was the only foreigner. His sole duty was to make her life happy there, and he did that very well. Now he is in Wuxi, with his wife and child and parents. They cannot pursue their affair except on a limited basis. His wife wants to divorce him, for which D. thinks she is a monster. When I proposed that the reason for her wishing to divorce Siyu was that she knew about his love for D., D. assured me that such is not the case, that Hai has not the faintest inkling. D. and S. are planning to return to Dongying next year, although D. has many reservations, knowing that you can't ever go back home. Deirdre has started a chorus here, composed of foreign students and faculty. The bulk of the chorus is American students, but she shows a decided dislike for Americans (except young men, whom she flirts with outrageously sometimes). She makes it clear that her priorities are first, Chinese; second, Europeans; and third, Americans. The Chinese are the least

responsible of the three. They come and go with dismaying indifference to all the buttery welcomes she gives them when they do show up. Each one who drops in merely out of curiosity is duly registered in her attendance book and given music. While the Chinese would like to learn popular or at least recent music, preferably American, she insists on our learning Bach's Magnificat, in a notation they have never seen before. I admire her dedication in ignoring all the petty problems like no electricity, no heat, no regularity while continuing with her great work of bringing culture to China. Sometimes she seems to resent the fact that she is not the first emissary of Western art and music to have arrived in China. At Christmas when we were practising for our Christmas concert, we wanted to sing Joy to the World. The Americans all knew it, in parts, by heart, and burst out with it. Deirdre was not pleased. She wanted to be the chief dispensary of Western culture. She was clearly not needed. She would return to Dongying.

These old China hands who have devoted their lives to China will not tolerate a word to be said against China. For every one thing wrong here there are at least two wrong with the West. These people seem to me to be playing a game with the Chinese, to be offering them "the best" of the West. The Chinese on their side are playing the game of receiving and appreciating the best. It's a game of flattery, a game of instant appreciation. The Westerner flatters the Chinese hearer that he/she can instantly hear the best music and appreciate it, instantly pick up a 6-part chorus of Bach's Magnificat and sing along, instantly understand modern British Industry Year after one lecture. The Chinese, duly flattered, flatters back by praising the lecturer and himself that now he understands Western music or business or art. From teaching Chinese students, I know they go for these instant lectures. They think by going to all these lectures they are catching up with all the latest and best that they have missed. They get all the buzz words and think they understand it all. In fact, they don't know the background and haven't read any of the primary sources. They go for secondary sources telling them what to think. It is hard to get Chinese students to read a book and think about it themselves. They want to be told.

Foreign Students

The foreign students here are a diverse group. Most of the white students are from the States and come in groups with an American teacher under the CIE. A few individual students from European countries have scholarships or exchanges with the Chinese government--e.g., Marisa from Holland, Ingrid and Dietrich from West Germany, Carolina from Italy (Costa Amalfitana), Rose Marie from England, Bettina from Germany. The Caucasian students are mostly big strapping folks who have lots of energy and go around in workout clothes most of the time, to be ready to hop on a bike and run down town. They throw parties a lot and had a wonderful Halloween party and another great Thanksgiving party. In the fall semester. A large group of American students here come from Duke. There are also several Russian students who stay to themselves and seem a bit shy or repressed. These students are all studying Chinese. They are not too happy with what they're getting here in the way of teaching. The Chinese won't

give them enough teachers to divide properly into their levels. The teachers are not too faithful about attending class. In the fall semester the Duke group protested the teaching by walking out. The students also complain about the costs here, which have apparently tripled since last year. Tuition is now \$1500, and a double room costs 10 kuai a night (shared by the two). They complain that they are being charged first world prices for third world accommodations and service. There is heating only a few hours a day in winter. There is hot water only after 7 at night. Sometimes the waiban have all their friends come and bathe in the hot showers. (Where people bathe and wash their hair each week is a big problem here in China, because there is hot water only in the public bathhouse, where 10 people stand under a shower head at once. Yu Ningping takes her weekly hot bath at her husband's danwei because there are fewer people there. But then she has to ride her bike back here afterwards and get all dirty again.)

The other students here are from third world countries—many Africans, from Uganda, Nigeria; a few Palestinians from Jordan and Syria. The Africans speak English or French as their national language. They are smaller than the Europeans. Many of them are very religious and pray before meals. They also hold services on Sundays. The Palestinians are supported by the PLO. The third world students are mostly here for 5 years, including a first year they already spent in Beijing learning Chinese at the Yu Yuan Xue Yuan. Here they are studying engineering, computers, sciences. At the Hydraulic Engineering College where Jack teaches there are many Africans learning how to harness water for their countries. One African that I know well enough here is Ezra from Uganda. He is on a joint scholarship from his country and China. However, since he and his friends have been here, his country has had a revolution and thrown out Idi Amin. Now there is a military dictatorship; the new minister of finance does not honor any commitments made by the previous minister of finance, so Ezra gets no money from his home. When he came, he was told that he would get a paid vacation by the end of the second year. He said that no one has ever gotten this yet. A group of Ugandan students spent a month protesting outside the Uganda Embassy in Beijing. As a result they were given checks for about \$50, but these checks have to go to New York to be cleared, and that will take months. But at least he has now begun to receive letters from home. For 7 months during the revolution, he did not hear anything from his parents and 10 brothers and sisters. Some of the Africans have gone home. The African students are a very homogeneous group. The ones here are polite and friendly, because of their religious beliefs. They hold meetings every week to discuss topics of mutual interest, such as, All 3rd world countries should adopt a one-party system for their economic improvement. I wonder whether they look at China and think that things are better here than they are back in their home countries.

The Streets of Nanjing

Walking the streets is a good way to get to know China. Whenever I can, I try to walk around the streets between 7:15 and 8:15 a.m., to see the Chinese on their way to work and school. In the area around Nanjing University, there is a grade school and a middle school. Children carrying school bags, bundled up in warm sweaters and jackets and wearing their red Young Pioneer neck scarves, walk the short distance from their home to the local school, where they will soon be running around the large block that contains the university housing, or lining up in the school yard for morning exercises and relay races. Once children have been sent to school, parents mount their bikes and head for their workplace. High schoolers, many on bikes, wheel in through the front gate of their school and are soon lined up in the courtyard for their morning exercises. College students live on campus, but they come out the front gate to get their breakfast of steamed buns, fried bread sticks, and perhaps a pint of milk. At the newsstand they pick up one of the daily papers. Street sweepers with their large whisk brooms, dust pans, and tilt carts begin sweeping up the streets. They take their baskets filled with trash to the trash dump, a large box with two doors on top. There they burn it.

Some people do their morning exercises on the sidewalks: one man boxes with two swords; another at our back gate does taiqi very slowly. Mothers or fathers carry their swaddled infants to the children's hospital. Food stalls on the street sell fried dumplings. Later there will be red-cooked eggs for 1 mao 6 fen, sweet potatoes baked in a metal drum for about 2 mao. Construction laborers coast along seated on one of the shafts of their tilt carts, heading to pick up their first load of the day--a concrete slab 15 foot long or a stack of long steel rods. Others move bricks off a huge pile onto their tilt carts. Hard hat workers on one of the many construction sites set up their days work. A man begins refining sand, tossing it in shovelful through a tilted framed screen.

The streets are alive with bikers, many of whom turn to look at the waiguo ren (foreigner) out walking through the streets. A man takes a chicken to the curb, pulls out a few neck feathers, sharpens his knife on the curb, and begins to saw back and forth at the chicken's throat, lest he dent his knife by striking off the head against the ground. Women take their laundry out and hang it on rope strung between trees; others hang bedding over gates or clothes lines, using long hooked poles to straighten them. An old man brings out his bird cage and hangs his canary or mina bird on a tree limb. Housewives emerge from their little houses carrying their colorful chamber pots to dump in the drains, then head toward the nearest faucet for water to wash out the pots. They will need to get boiled water from the outdoor faucet into a thermos, then from another faucet, they run cold fresh water into one basin to wash themselves, and into another to clean green vegetables on the pavement before their houses. Eventually they will throw out basins of dirty water into the gutter, preceded by a good spit. Others head toward the closest outdoor toilet, which even a blind person could find by following his nose.

Some Chinese live in small homes along the streets. These belong to older people who no longer have a danwei (work unit) to furnish them housing. I was told that these hovels were built by people who had been dismissed from their jobs and sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. When they were allowed to return, someone else lived in their apartments, so they built along the streets wherever there was enough space outside some danwei wall. I peer into the low doors as I pass, to see what constitutes the essentials of a Chinese home. An old woman sits in a chair, eating her bowl of noodles topped with pickles or whatever. The room is about 8 x 8, and includes a square table, a bed with the bedding already rolled up so the bed can be used as a sofa, a basin, a small portable coal stove, a hot water bottle, kitchen utensils, a few stools, perhaps a comfortable chair or two and a wardrobe. Some houses have a bedroom behind the "front room." A more prosperous home may have a TV, even a curio cabinet. Working people live within the residence buildings constructed for their danwei. They may live on the fourth or even fifth floor of an elevatorless building. If they wish to guarantee that their bikes do not rust or get stolen, they will carry the bikes up to the floor they live on each night and carry them back down again each morning. I get a glimpse through the ever present gate into a courtyard as a girl emerges on her bike. The grey concrete buildings of her compound give me the feeling that she lives in a prison.

I cannot tell much about people from the way they dress. Some are dressed in western style suits, sweaters, ties, raincoat. Others are dressed Chinese style with short mao jackets or padded jackets. It is only by the look in their eyes and on their faces that I can make any distinctions. Some people openly stare at me; these seem to be country people. Others, men and women, look at me with a glance of recognition that I am probably a foreigner teaching at the university and go on their ways, without taking any particular notice. These people have a refinement that is not apparent from their plain clothes. I think that if they were to be moved to the U.S. and dressed more fashionably, they would "pass" for westernized Chinese.

Privileges

In a classless society such as China is at present, everyone is equal-- outwardly, and not even there anymore. There is an apparent prejudice against the poor, who haven't sufficient (or indeed the right kind of) money to spend on the higher priced goods that China produces for export. Good hotels, Friendship stores, special shopping areas are all off limits to ordinary Chinese, who stand outside and gape at those privileged overseas Chinese, Japanese, and westerners who have "the right stuff" to enter, waihui or foreign currency.

As a foreigner in China, I can go into many places Chinese cannot, or must pay 3-5 yuan for the privilege. Friendship stores have the best quality goods, e.g., the best brand bikes made in China, but these must be purchased with waihui, and we have to register about a week in advance of delivery. Chinese must make foreign friends who will change money with them so that they can shop in this store. In Shanghai the sister of a student of mine helped us get our

plane tickets for Guilin. In return, we took her to the Friendship Store and helped her purchase a Japanese TV with a downpayment in foreign exchange. When we go to certain places, like the barber/beauty shop, although there is a line, we go to the head. When we go to the dentist, there are hundreds of people waiting outside, but we go to a special room for cadres and foreigners. On our campus, we live in a special building where we have western style apartments, with western style private bath, kitchen, and separate bed and sitting rooms. Our Chinese counterparts live in one room and must go out to cook and use the bath. Our students live in rooms with 8-10 students. They must study in the cold classrooms or library. We have heat for several hours at night and an hour in the morning; they have no heat. The winter cold brings chillblains to their faces, hands and feet. When window panes are broken in our rooms, we report them and they are soon fixed. The windows in our students or colleagues rooms will stay broken all year round. We earn a salary of 800-900 yuan a month for a foreign expert and 200-300 for a spouse. The Chinese earn 80-120, yet we are both living in the same society, with the same expenses. We eat in a nice dining room with terrazzo floors, oil table cloths, several large wall murals, curtains, wall paper and heaters. Their dining halls look like prison or army messes. A new tennis court on our campus has been installed for the use of the foreigners; a charge of 2.5 yuan prevents the Chinese from playing.

On trains, we can afford to pay the little extra to sit in a soft seat or soft berth car; the Chinese pay half and ride hard seat or hard berth. We have a special waiting room for soft seat so that we do not have to mix with the too many Chinese who are waiting for the too few seats.

But it is not only the foreigner who has privileges in China for each position carries with it its petty power and privilege. Traveling is a privilege, so it is hoarded by those who control it. If I want to fly from Shanghai to Guilin, I cannot buy a ticket in Nanjing, because all the tickets belong to Shanghai. It is the privilege of the Shanghai CAAC booking office to book all flights out of Shanghai personally in their office. They do not share this privilege with any other city. If I wish to buy a ticket without going to Shanghai, then I must use the services of China Travel Service, which has a monopoly of intercity travel. I must pay an extravagant fee for the privilege of buying the ticket without going to the office in the departure city itself. I must pay for a car and driver and guide, even though I may not wish any of these and even though the guide may not speak English or communicate with me at all.

Only Children

Everywhere one sees babies in China, e.g., disguised as a huge many-layered bundle toted by parents through the streets on the way to the hospital. The outermost shell is always a pretty transparent scarf used as a sort of insect and dust net to keep off the pollution of the street. Under that there may be a royal-looking cape and hood of scarlet velvet with a faux-ermine border. Somewhere under all these layers there is the most precious possession of a Chinese family--an only child. A new mother gets a few months off before she

has to return to her job, but mothers want to stay home and devote all their time to these precious treasures. Also they often want to have a boy. A couple in Guangzhou who had their baby on the way to the hospital were told that their child was a boy. At the hospital they were told it was a girl. For many months they refused to accept the child, claiming the hospital had substituted a girl for their boy. Giving birth to a deformed or handicapped child can be a crushing tragedy. A friend of Masako's had a boy born with a cleft palate. The child nearly died. The parents did not know whether they wanted him to live at certain times, since he would never be perfectly normal, and would have a difficult time finding a mate. The Chinese think ahead; this child must bring them their lifetime joys. If his life is sad, so will theirs be.

Diapers are not used for these only children in China, who are encouraged to relieve themselves into drains, over curbs, and beside trees, where their parents squat holding them patiently, with their little feet dangling in the air and their little slit pants handily apart. Chinese children have no inhibitions about using the streets as toilets. I saw a girl around 9 years old squatting on the sidewalk in front of her home, staring up at the foreigners and peeing contentedly as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

When going out in public, Chinese decorate their children with bright hairbows, rouged cheeks, earrings, costume jewelry, handknitted pants and sweaters, handmade suits.

The streets are filled with parents on bikes carrying their little child astride a wicker seat before them. In winter time, a wind-shield may be added to protect the child from the cold wind. Very young children are tied in, and their heads loll forward over the handlebars. Some children fall asleep; others enjoy the ride and carry on conversations with their parents or point to the foreigners with delighted cries of "waiguo ren!" One sometimes gets the impression that it is the child who is telling the parents where to go.

I know one little boy about 6 who is quite a cut-up. He is the boss in his house and he knows it. He watches TV while eating dinner. He must be given a "drink" when his parents take one. "Baijou" he says, when they fill up a little cup with water so he won't be left out. He cavorts in front of their mirror, delighting in himself. Everyone wants to hold and hug him; he is hugely successful. He will not tolerate being interrupted if he is doing something that interests him like looking at a TV program, reading a picture book or drawing. He is on equal footing with his father, who is a faculty member at Nanjing U. Having no brothers and sisters, his rivalry is with his parents. He wants the same consideration they do, if not more.

I tend to think that these children will do well and will be more individual than the Chinese children of the past have been. But Zhang Xiangning tells me that these children, while independent, uninhibited and spontaneous outside of class, are so used to their parents helping them that they show no independence in class and wait to be helped or to have something shown and explained thoroughly to them, laid out in the clearest terms before they will do anything. They aren't risk-takers.

Doctors

Chinese doctors wear white coats and white hats. They are male and female. You can't tell doctors from nurses. I assume everyone is a doctor, just as on a campus they address everyone as "laoishi" (teacher) out of respect. A Chinese doctor's office is at a hospital. There are two desks or tables facing each other at which doctor(s) sit. Patients sit on stools beside the desk. When you come into a doctor's office (usually divided into wai--outside problem, and nei--inside problem), you first must put your health card and your "permission to visit the doctor" card which you got after you paid your 5 fen somewhere. So far, I've been to the clinic on campus for colds, bronchitis and sleeplessness. I've been to the People's Hospital also for bronchitis and for my bowel problem recently. Everywhere the conditions are appalling, by our standards. The examining rooms are dirty and crowded with people sitting on the stools or the examining table waiting their turns to see the doctor, according to the order of their health books on his desk. Outside there are benches with people drooped over on them. In the dark halls an old lady is supported by her daughter, an old man by his son. (What will happen when one child has to look after 4 parents?) A sick wife leans on her husband. A sick son is carried on his father's back. Everyone must wait, except the cadres and foreigners who get to go ahead of everyone or, more usually, have their own examining rooms. If they must go to get lab work done, for example, blood tests or thyroid or chest X-Ray, they will be slipped in ahead of someone.

There's no privacy in these examining rooms. People gather around the doctor and patient, sitting on stools if possible, to watch and listen to the patient's complaints and the doctor's questions and examination procedures. There's an air of equality not found in Western examining rooms. Neither the doctor nor the patient deserves any special respect. While I am waiting my turn I sit on a stool beside the "nurse" who takes my "permission to see the doctor" stub. She asks me how long I've been in Nanjing and whether I know my way around and can go to any place by myself now. She makes me feel she is interested in me. I like it. But in comes Mr. Busybody who comes every day for an injection. He asks where I work, where I'm from, and how old I am, the first three questions that Chinese want to know about everyone. Actually, the interest everyone shows in me makes me feel good here. You can't be depressed long by places, such as hospitals, in China because the people are so good-naturedly curious and meddling that they get you out of yourself by sheer force of numbers. They won't let you alone.

Similarly, when you go to have tests, you go into large rooms with many people and machines. Everyone is waiting to have blood drawn or chests x-rayed or thyroids tested. When a young doctor hears there's an English speaking person there, he'll come up and ask to talk to you. In America, if a doctor comes up to talk to me, I suspect he's going to tell me bad news: my thyroid is too low. Not in China. Chances are he only wants to practise his English.

Privacy

Living alone as I do in Chicago, I am used to privacy. Here in China there is very little. Since I live at the university, I am liable to hear someone knocking on my door with a request from morning till night. Students come to look for books, ask questions, hand in late assignments, give me their poetry to read, but mostly they come to get help in getting to America. They want to practice English, get letters of recommendation, find out how and where to apply, get \$26 U.S. to take the TOEFL, discuss applications, especially the financial statements. Not only do my students come, but anyone I meet accidentally or anyone who has heard of me, or even anyone desiring to meet an American teacher may show up on my doorstep. I sometimes feel that everyone in Nanjing is looking for some way to meet an English-speaking foreigner. We have no privacy where these people are concerned.

Out in the streets there is of course no privacy. We are stared at wherever we go. Our simplest purchases draw a crowd of onlookers who gape and gawk at the amazing sight of a foreigner buying something in China. I once took a pair of culottes into a department store fabric section to buy material to have another pair made. Everyone felt free to pick up my culottes, hold them up, examine them as if they were certainly the oddest sort of clothing imaginable, and laugh hilariously. I joined in the laughter. "Aren't we odd, though?" I agreed. A friend of mine had to go to the dentist and the acupuncturist, with her student as her guide. The student was allowed to stand beside her in the dentist's chair and look in her mouth and discuss her teeth with the dentist. At the acupuncturist, again he stayed on while she took off as much as the modest Chinese would let her. There are no private phones in our quarters, so we must make phone calls in the fuwuyuan's office. Fortunately, none of them understand English, for they would hear our most secret business. As it is, they know everyone who visits or calls or writes us, for they receive all incoming letters, calls or visitors. Oddly, they let persons who have no connection with the university, whom we do not even know, and whom we do not want to be bothered by come to see us; at the same time, they ask my visiting Chinese faculty friends who they are and how long they intend to stay.

I brought along a number of videotapes of American movies; once this became known, a Chinese couple might stop by on a Saturday night hoping to see these movies. I was asked once to judge the English speaking, reading & writing ability of a medical graduate student from another college. I was the first English speaking person she and her boy friend had ever met, so they adopted me and have come by on Saturday nights hoping to see movies, even when I have other company.

Our quarters are cleaned every week by two workers. I have to arrange my bath to avoid having them walk in on me, as they once did. The foreign office owns our quarters. Periodically someone comes in to inventory the items we have; the kitchen has made raids to gather up plates. These intrusions leave me with the feeling that at any time I am liable to be inexplicably invaded.

However, there is a positive side to this lack of privacy, and it is security. In the West, we are left alone. Sometimes we haven't the emotional energy to reach out to others; we are left alone, even when we need someone to call us out of our self-absorption. Sometimes here in China I feel so used up that I try to get away from people and lose myself in my own projects. But this can subtly depress me. I feel cut off from others and isolated. But once I am out in public, that old Chinese curiosity reaches out and grabs ahold of me. A shop girl asks me where I come from, how long I've been in China, etc. I need to be drawn out of myself sometimes lest I become too withdrawn. There is always the security in China that we will be taken care of and not left to die alone. Even if I am in a remote village, someone will notice me and invite me in. I will not have to sleep in the street. The community feeling in China is very strong.

Images and Analogies

How am I to understand China? Through what lens can I make sense of what I see? If I lean back and use analogies as filters to observe, what do I think of when I see blue or green or grey-clad figures scurrying about their morning tasks-- hauling slabs of concrete on tilt carts, sweeping the streets with brooms made of a bundle of twigs, bouncing two baskets of produce to market on either end of a bamboo pole? I think of them as an army of human ants, each working at its assigned task instinctively--some as drones, some as guardian ants, some gathering food, others sorting and storing it, some in the nursery--all without giving a thought to personal choice because as insects, they have no freedom, only instinct. While I am struggling to compel myself to meet challenges here, they do not even think. They are like the slaves that Frederick Douglass wrote about who had no time to consider their lot and were reduced to animals, bearing burdens imposed by their environment and socio/economic system.

This is the China I see everywhere through the lens of my culture. Individuality repressed, they become like colorless people leading colorless lives doing colorless tasks because it is their duty. Human engineering seems to have duplicated what nature has done through instinct, metamorphosing people into insects, subordinating their human individuality to the needs of the community. This analogy depresses me. It is so utilitarian, so reductive, confining the brilliant variety of human personality into a narrow range of neutral behavior that is supposed to be goodness. Here there is no decadence, but there is no grandeur either. All are stamped with the same bland conformity. When there is an occasional burst of individuality, it seems to mimic the worst western taste. The Chinese equivalent of a "punk" is a man with a permanent and a woman with bright makeup.

What is exalted here is not the individual, but the group: the great socialist myth which romanticizes the peasants and working people. On one side of the 1 yuan note, there is a picture of a smiling girl running a tractor; on the other, a flock of sheep with a herdsman against a background of trees and mountains. On the ten yuan note there is a group of smiling socialists, including a soldier, a woman, a farmer, a minority woman, a worker, all wearing badges or medals. On

the 2 jiao note there is a picture of the Chang Jiang bridge over the Yangtse River in Nanjing, a symbol of what China can do technologically unaided. The image of abundance and prosperity and happiness is still glorified, but instead of coming from God's goodness, it comes from the goodness of people working together under socialism. Instead of beauty and art, the symbols of a good life here are health, smiles, groups, machines, biceps, fertility, modern construction.

The perfect socialist image is perhaps that of an army. The individual soldier exists for the good of the whole, living in army camps. Aren't most Chinese still living an essentially "army life-style" existence, more than 30 years after Yanan? The hospitals seem like camp hospitals, with the tolerance for dirt that is necessary under field conditions. The schools seem to follow military discipline, with every hour of the day scheduled and lunch in the canteen only doled out into mess kits for a short hour. Human draft animals haul loads of stone or brick through the streets on tilt carts to construction sites of some huge project being erected in the mud and rains. Housing is army-style: everyone lives "on the base" in government provided barracks. The enlisted men and women live in appalling dormitories, stacked 8-10 per room, with only enough room for a duffel bag, bedding, and a few books on a prison-like desk. The married commissioned officers live in a private room with immediate family members (who may not exceed one child).

Everywhere on the streets one sees state-run stores doling out colorless and shapeless one-size-fits-all clothes. Huge khaki-colored jeeps and trucks monopolize the streets, except for the small private cars for VIPs and foreigners. This seems like various divisions of an army that has settled down into a city where civilians are running around trying to lead normal lives in the midst of field conditions.

Behind the sameness, though, I have seen individuality and intelligence, even heroism. There is the selflessness of someone like Cheng Mei, a young faculty member at Nanjing University. Her story is similar to that of many others. During the Cultural Revolution, her parents were sent down to the countryside. At 10, she was left alone in town to look after her little brother. She managed to survive those 10 years, then in 1977, she took the entrance exams given for the first time, with the reopening of the universities. She was admitted as a member of the famous '77 class, received her BA and then was selected to go on for a master's degree, one of the first in China for many years. She received her MA in English in 1984. She taught in 1984-85, then in 1985-86 was assigned to help the foreign experts as their liaison with the department. She is always being asked to do more by the department, and she never refuses. She translates when any outside agency, e.g. the Bureau of Public Security, comes to read new regulations (e.g. travel and visa) to the foreigners. She accompanies us to the clinic or dentist to translate for us to the doctors. She brings us any messages from the department regarding our classes, class lists, etc. She is often the bearer of unwelcome news, but her good humor and sweetness make us forbear to vent our displeasure against her. She will even make the long trip out to the CAAC office to help locate our lost luggage. On top of her service to us, she also must teach her share of the class load and attend the political meetings. Yet she

never criticizes or complains; she "is only doing her duty" of helping others. She is an example of how a human being can overcome great odds in the struggle of natural selection. Many people in China who have suffered greatly yet survived seem to me to be examples of natural selection. Their attitude toward life seems to be that of stoicism.

For every one Cheng Mei, though, there must be thousands of persons who find not inspiration but monotonous boredom in their tasks, and who are not inclined to make any effort to overcome the difficulties of a huge bureaucracy. How else can one explain the attitude of workers in offices and stores? They take no notice of customers, who are only disturbing their naps or conversations. After I venture a few "Mafan ni?" or "Qing wen?" they may snap something at me that sounds like "What do YOU want?" Whatever you ask, the invariable response is "Meiyou" which variously signifies "We haven't any," "We don't do that," "No, you can't." It is unheard of for the ordinary worker (clerk, aid, technician, waiban) to try to do something that hasn't been done before, e.g., reserve a seat on a flight from Shanghai to Guilin at the Nanjing CAAC office. The worker tilts back his chair and announces that that's impossible: "Meiyou" or "Bukeyi." Why should he try to do something to help us when 1) he would only be making difficulties for himself, 2) he wouldn't get anything out of it. So behind the anonymity of the worker ant, there can be both the strength of Cheng Mei, who would struggle to overcome obstacles and help others even at great trouble, and the weakness of the CAAC employee or waiban or store clerk, who would help others as little as possible.

Besides the socialist myth, I see the "paternal institution" myth, alias, slavery. According to the paternal myth, certain people are not smart enough to look after themselves; they need a paternal figure to tell them what to do and see that they have somewhere to sleep and enough food to eat; in return, these simple-minded people will till the fields, erect buildings, run the machinery, and contribute the labor force that such a society needs. In order to prevent these people from escaping to freedom, their movements need to be strictly controlled: they must have leave from their plantation to travel to another city, e.g., to visit their families--often separated under this system. Guards are everywhere to check their passes, to make sure that they have the permission of their bosses to go somewhere. Never may they leave the part of their country where this system applies, however; they cannot go to Hong Kong or Taiwan; there will be "two systems"--one free and one slave. Indispensable to the paternal institution is the ruling class--the adults and those people who carry out their orders by overseeing those below them. This class lives in special quarters, more spacious and well-furnished than the others'. They are chauffeured in expensive cars; they are served by special persons, e.g., nurses, housekeepers, cooks. Their children go to special schools and sometimes travel abroad to further their education. Theirs is a life of privilege. Between them and the "children" there are millions who indirectly rule. They share some of the privileges of the "adults" but are more like older, trusted children. They may travel abroad for special reasons, e.g., to further their education for the benefit of their danwei. They have an easier time getting passports and visas because their work unit will provide them with

the papers to say that they have permission to go abroad. Other countries collaborate with this system because they refuse to furnish visas to those who haven't the full backing of their work unit. They perpetuate the privileged class. Those who get visas to America the easiest are those who can prove that when they return they will enjoy even more privileges, e.g., a promotion, a better job, a pay increase.

Those under them dare not complain and must always look happy and smile to show how good the paternal institution is to them, and how grateful they are for being taken care of, or allowed to be small sharecroppers under the new responsibility system. When abolitionist-minded westerners visit the "old dominion" bent upon exposing the evils of the "paternal institution" of slavery, they are taken to the best factories, the most prosperous farms, the best living quarters, where the happiest slaves live, or they are shown singing and dancing.

In fact, the Chinese have adapted very well to their role as children taken care of by a benevolent paternal institution. If any myth is well-illustrated here, it is the myth of care-free happy children. This is a peaceful society, except for the usual squabbles that break out between children, when, for example, their bikes collide. Like children, they are only allowed to have bikes. All the cars in the family belong to the adults. One sees trucks and military jeeps driven by ageless children who enjoy getting behind their father's wheel. They bounce down the street with joy. They may have a load of rice in sacks, upon which are sitting other children, enjoying the ride. No matter what their task, Chinese will interrupt it if the chance arises for some fun. Westerners can provide fun, if they'll only play the game. In Qufu we were biking on the road to Confucius's forest cemetery, when we encountered a procession of man-drawn tilt-carts carrying huge ceramic jars. According to the naturalist myth, I felt sorry for these men condemned to haul such heavy loads. But they, seeing our interest and desire to take a picture, stopped, gathered around us, let us take their pictures and try getting in harness to see if we could haul the load. They were enjoying themselves immensely. They weren't pretending to be happy; they were happy children without any real responsibility. They would eventually get their loads to their destination; they were in no hurry. Any chance occurrence that might furnish diversion was welcome; it would lighten the load. Why not enjoy the day? "Laud today" or "seize the day" might have been their motto. We foreigners who are not "in harness" make ideal playmates, like new kids on the block; if we would only play our part and not be so odd and standoffish and critical, if we would only smile and enjoy the fun, everyone would be happy. But no, we find fault or feel sorry and refuse to join in the fun of being children here.

The aesthetic lens through which I usually view my life is not available to me here. It was stamped out with the purges of the bourgeoisie. The good life as I define it—filled with cultural enrichment, beauty, comfort, convenience, romance and poetry—is foreign here, stamped out by Mao's armies. The flowers, cats, carpets, the family and friends, the ordered and beautiful surrounded by works of art—nowhere in present-day China. This world simply is unavailable here; I am unable to indulge in feelings of gratitude to God for having

given me all these good things. God has not given these people in China all these good things. They live in hovels, have little order or beauty, much less romance and poetry in their lives. Where can I find God's goodness and blessing here?

I have consulted others who are here in China teaching or doing research, to discover what myths they use in looking at China. Sandy, a Scottish professor from the University of Sussex who is teaching late developments in geophysics, looks at China through the lens of Time. He says he is fascinated by a people as old as the Chinese, whose ancestors were writing poetry when his ancestors were living in mud huts. (And now these people are living in mud huts while his people are teaching geophysics, one is tempted to add.) China is certainly a place where the myth of time appears to function. There is definitely a Golden Age myth here--the Tang Dynasty (618-907) was the period of a flowering in poetry, philosophy, calligraphy which still stands as the benchmark in Chinese culture. Chinese painters today are still painting subjects from this period; calligraphers are still copying the character styles. If you look at Chinese art or opera, you see chiefly "classical" Chinese buildings and people, which bear no resemblance to what you see in modern China. Perhaps for this reason, Chinese youth are not interested in "classical" forms. The Golden Age has no value for them today.

Personal Rewards

What has living and working in China meant to me?

It has gotten me out of a rut, socially, professionally, perhaps even spiritually. Back in Chicago I have been teaching students who are almost indifferent to an education, students whom I have to cajole and entertain to motivate them to find the subject interesting. Here the Chinese students find American lit interesting because it connects them with the world outside China and they can learn about the rest of the world after their long isolation. It is wonderful to have students who all come to class and who consider an education in foreign literature a privilege. I think education is a privilege, and it is good to teach students at least some of whom think it is a privilege.

Socially too, I have been in a rut. For years I have been living in the same place, going around with the same people, doing the same things. Anyone who met me would only ask "Are you STILL living at 4940, teaching at Chicago State, sailing your boat?" and that was it. Business as usual. Everyone else has also been doing the same things, true, but in truth aren't they all stagnating? When I return, I'll find them all doing the same things. They won't even know I've been away from my office for a year. Nothing has changed in their lives, so they assume nothing has changed in anyone else's either. Being in China has gotten me out of this social rut. Here I am part of a community, rather than an isolated individual as at home. I belong to this university, in a niche true, but belong somewhere. On top of that I have a community of foreign friends that I've met here, with whom I have shared a unique experience, rather like being in a liferaft together. No matter what our ages or countries, we all find this experience totally

unlike any we've ever had. When we get sick or become exhausted, we all understand--even the very youngest, because it's happened to them too. None of us is used to this way of life, except perhaps Deirdre and Margaret, the old China hand types. The rest of us can call on each other for help and get it because we are all suffering in common. Perhaps we have the spirit of prisoners in a POW camp during the war? When I read in May Sarton's JOURNAL OF A SOLITUDE that in the midst of plenty and beauty, with a rich talent she mines year after year, a rich hobby, rich in friends, yet she fights her demons of despair, I think "If she could come to China, she would not feel so unique, so isolated, so cut off; she would feel she was sharing what a billion people, or at least what a large group of foreigners are experiencing here--a common experience."

I guess also this year socially has been one where I've been forced to HELP people even when I didn't feel like it. I haven't felt well many times, but people have come to the door for help and I've gotten up and forgotten that I felt bad and felt better for doing it. I've felt bad but gotten up and gone and given a lecture for Jack at Huaxue (Hydrolic Engineering institute) and felt good all through it. I've learned something about myself as a social being, i.e., that I can usually rise to the occasion and overcome my body's objections if I just GO AHEAD AND JOIN AND HELP, rather than listen to objections that my subconscious fears raise. Mind can triumph over matter. This ends up being a spiritual blessing. I pay less attention to myself here; if I listened to my fears, I'd do nothing but stay in my bed. Fortunately, through people, I can extend beyond myself. My first instinct is always to say "no" but because I'm here to HELP, I overcome my inclination and say "yes." Saying "yes" rather than "no" to life is a good attitude; I hope I can take it back with me. Unfortunately, I don't have the demands made upon me back at home that I have here, so I haven't the temptation to say "no" or the opportunity to say "yes" as often as I have here, where daily someone asks something of me. It's good to be in a position where people have the right to ask things of us and we have the obligation to say "yes."