

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **From Solitary to Society (1973-88)**

I was free in 1973. Old friends and new asked me why I did not leave China after "the Chinese" had treated me the way they did. My answer was, it was not "the Chinese" but Chinese enemies of China. They had treated many Chinese people far worse than they treated me, for Zhou En-lai had protected us expatriates. (He had protected many Chinese too, especially intellectuals, artists, and old revolutionaries.) So why should I leave this land which had been my home for so long? I loved England, and America for that matter; but I had lived in China over half my adult life. My work was here; most of my friends were here. True, there were frustrations with the language and, over the years, a growing fury against Chinese feudalism, bureaucracy and corruption. But when I had returned to England, where I had my roots and to U.S., where I had grown up politically and intellectually, I did not feel fully at home. I did not really belong anywhere; but in China, I felt, I could do the most useful work now that I was no longer young.

Our three sons, Carl, Michael and Paul, now (1973) 24, 22 and 20, felt differently. Then as now, they neither wanted to spend the rest of their lives in the land of their birth, China, where our family had suffered; nor did they want to spend the rest of their lives away from China. So at the time of my release from prison in January 1973 I was grateful to them for staying on in China for several months and enabling me to get to know them again. They were no longer the boys I had left in 1967. They were men tempered by suffering, which is not a bad thing for human beings - provided they are tough enough to survive it. Our sons were. Perhaps a dash of the British sense of humour helped. Each had reacted in his own way to the blows struck at our family and the families of their friends during the cultural revolution. Carl, who had shown no special aptitude for English at school, learnt to read and relish Shakespeare, along with Chinese history and literature, besides listening to records, from Beethoven and Mozart, Alice in Wonderland, and Peter Sellers. Michael, less cool and more impetuous, besides sharing in these pursuits, cycled time and time again from the suburbs to the centre of Beijing

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to protest to the city Revolutionary Committee against the unjust treatment of his parents and requesting permission to leave China. When instructed to renew his residence permit he refused, saying he wanted to go, not stay. Paul, who some of our Chinese friends insisted was "the most Chinese" of our sons helped hold the household together during his parents' absence. He could not stop Carl from reading till three o'clock in the morning, nor interfere with Michael's frequent forays into town, but being a good cook he enticed his brothers away from irregular snacks of junk food and organized decent meals - as well as paying attention to the cultural revolution.

All three of our sons left China a few months after my release from prison. I had feared they would leave before my return home. They had been only 14, 16 and 18 when I was detained. Character and personality may be formed at an earlier age, but during those five years that I was away they had grown from boys to men, and I felt that my absence during the process of our sons' growing up was an especially serious personal loss. I had no such fears about my relations with Isabel. We had been married twenty-five years before I was seized.

What about our sons' reactions to me after those five years? This is my biography, not theirs. But at least I can say that they still loved me - and thought me slightly mad. For when we sat around with friends, summing up my experience, I said: "You have to put it in historical perspective and see that it has its good side, as well". I was thinking of the years of critical introspection, my summing up of my character and world outlook and the influences that had moulded it. This was too much for them. They courteously refrained from saying "Old man, you've been brainwashed. You're ultra-left". But that's what they must have felt. One day Carl went out leaving a half-finished letter to his girl friend (now his wife) on the table. I couldn't resist reading it just as 40 years before my mother had read Kate's letter to me. "He doesn't even know how to read between the lines of the newspaper," Carl had written. "Simply takes it at face value. It's pathetic." He was right. I'd been cut off too long and reading the People's Daily had been such a pleasant pastime in prison that my critical faculties had declined. They have since revived. But at that time I began to realise that I had much to learn from our sons. That realisation grows stronger as I grow older. Another incident around this time must have convinced Carl of my naive ultra-leftism. One day he asked me: "Dad, next time you go shopping at the Friendship Hotel, buy me

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a couple of bottles of "wu liang ye" (the best Chinese white spirit). "I want to give them to Kolya" (a Eurasian friend) "to give to his factory foreman. He's giving Kolya a hard time". I refused and gave Carl a lecture on social morality, saying that we shouldn't abuse our privilege of buying special supplies at the Friendship Hotel and that Kolya shouldn't give bribes. But Carl knew more of the facts of Chinese life than I did and even now, 15 years later, neither I nor many of our Chinese friends find it easy to cope with such matters. How far may one with a clear conscience bend socialist ethics in a society shot through with feudalism. If we don't take a stand it will never end; if we do, we can hardly survive.

All three of our sons left China in 1973, after Zhou En-lai's March 8 reception at the Great Hall of People at which Isabel, I and other foreign victims of factional frame-ups were vindicated. Carl and Michael went in May and took six months travelling across Asia and Europe by land and sea, hitch-hiking, riding local busses and finally reaching England. Paul, the youngest, decided to free himself from elder brother tutelage and went his own way, via Australia. There he dallied a whole year, toting cases in a supermarket, working as a bricklayer's mate and on the railways. In England his older brothers did similar jobs as well as factory work, applying skills acquired in farm tool and auto repair plants in Beijing during my incarceration. Isabel and I had said farewell to them in Chinese, not with the traditional "safe journey" but with Mao's words: "Brave the storms and face the world." Still ultra-left, we did not want them to go to university. But the time came when Carl wrote to us, quoting Blake: he had had enough of England's "dark Satanic mills", where to be well in with his mates he had to know the names of 500 football players. So he went to join his fiancée in the States. There he picked up a couple of M.A. degrees, thanks to America's then enlightened policy of taking "life experience" into account. Michael also quit factory work after being made an auto parts quality control inspector. This forced him either to reject defective parts, which meant docking his fellow workers' pay or passing shoddy work and endangering lives in car crashes. He eventually took a London University degree in astrophysics and then irrelevantly taught Chinese at elitist Wellesley women's college in U.S.A. Paul, after his spree in Australia studied a while in London and then took a job in the China section of the B.B.C. using his knowledge of the language and culture of his birthplace. So my naive, ultra-leftist hopes of having three proletarian sons were dashed. In justice to myself I may say that

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Isabel had held those hopes more ardently than I.

Meanwhile besides resuming teaching in Beijing I started a six year stint as chief native speaker consultant to the Chinese-English dictionary which a number of our Chinese teachers had begun in 1972. Some Western colleagues in the German and other language departments found it intolerable to be penned in an office for hours every day, poring over words. But after struggling with Chinese written characters for five years in gaol and finally learning to read the People's Daily I knew the value of dictionaries and found the task fascinating. In prison I had pitied literate prisoners, who had no such delightful distraction as I had learning to read Chinese.

Chinese is indeed fascinating. It has probably been spoken and written longer than any other living language. Over thousands of years it has accumulated richness of expression, vividness of imagery, charm of allusiveness and ingenuity of word formation. Shakespeare has all that, but English cannot compete with Chinese in pithiness and succinctness, which can convey much meaning in few sounds. English draws on Greek and Latin for its philosophical and scientific vocabulary. Chinese draws on the everyday language of the people. Take the animals at the zoo. Hippopotamus consists of the Greek words for horse and river; the Chinese word is simply river-horse. Aquarium in English starts with the Latin word for water; the Chinese is simply water-creature-hall; such philosophical terms as subjectivism roll easily off the tongue of a Chinese peasant and he can understand them the first time he hears them because they are made up of simple elements of everyday speech. While working on the dictionary I found it a challenge to render into English the light tone and the brevity of Chinese vocabulary, built with single syllable sounds and written characters. Churchill said he liked short words but even his English is not free from long ones. George Borrow remarks: translation is at best an echo. But it was just the challenge of making it more than an echo, of retaining the style, language level and feeling which made my work so appealing. The greatest challenge of all came in dealing with the chengyu: sayings, quotations, proverbs and idioms, generally consisting of only four syllables: "once bitten by a snake, for the rest of his life he recoils at the sight of a rope". Well, the idea is clear, but try to put it into four English syllables! ("Once bitten twice shy" is close but it is reminiscent of dogs not snakes.) Others have a whole story behind them. "To look at the flowers while riding a horse." It's easy to guess that this means to get a superficial view of things. But in this case the

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flowers are pock-marks. The story runs: a go-between was trying to make a match between a pock-marked woman and a man lame in one leg. She arranged for the bride-to-be to sit in the shade of her doorway and for the man to ride by with his lame leg on the far side of the horse. So neither the prospective bride nor groom could see the other's defects. Then there is a saying: "To play the fiddle to a pig", close to but not the same as our own biblical idea of "casting pearl before swine." It means simply to direct your efforts to the wrong audience. So it is not always advisable to take English equivalents. For instance, translating "to grow like bamboo shoots after a spring rain" as "to spring up like mushrooms". That loses the Chinese flavour of the original. Then there is: "The weasel goes to wish the hen a Happy Spring Festival - not with good intentions." The English has twice as many syllables as the Chinese. Chinese abounds in such pithy proverbs - as of course does English, especially in the words of such a master as Shakespeare. But the Chinese ones are generally terser and I had to control my time in grappling with them. One could spend hours on a single saying. I also had to exercise self-control so as not to turn my task into a course of language study. My job was to check the manuscript prepared by Chinese colleagues, paying special attention to the examples of usage. Were they in correct, readable and idiomatic English? Were they of the right language register? Or was classical Chinese being rendered into modern English, was formal language translated into colloquialisms or even slang, was Confucius made to sound like Churchill? If I strove to combine my work with improving my own Chinese, my desk would have become a bottleneck. As it is, my command of Chinese is limited considering how long I have lived in China - perhaps as bad as my grandmother's English after 40 years in England. But I knew enough to be able to raise questions and discuss them with Chinese colleagues. The editor-in-chief had a superb command of the English language and of classical literature. But like most Chinese scholars, when abroad he had moved mainly in academic circles and had little to do with common folk. So his natural inclination in translating was never to use a short word when a long word would do. My aim was the opposite. Yet he was open-minded and reasonable and our discussions were amicable; which is to say he almost always accepted my suggestions! The man I shared an office with and consulted most often was steeped in Chinese history and classical literature, knowledgeable about Western classical music and crazy about ping-pong; he was our expert on all these matters. There were several such

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talented scholars on our staff

I showed these few comments on my dictionary work to a member of the dictionary staff. He had been my student in 1940 when I was teaching in Chengdu. Now he is a senior member of our university staff, which he joined in 1949. I respect him as a conscientious scholar who has persisted in working tirelessly over the decades despite physical disabilities and political dangers. He rejected my version of my work on the dictionary as pollyannaish and propagandist, though he is too mild and courteous a person to apply such terms to a former teacher and old friend. This is part of what he wrote:

In retrospect, after your release from prison you couldn't have felt completely "liberated". You say you found the task of compiling a dictionary fascinating, and that you didn't mind being "penned in an office for hours every day, poring over words." But I venture to say that there must have been an undertone of bitterness and frustration.

The same can be said of your Chinese colleagues. Dictionary making is outside our field. But we were made to work on a dictionary, and we had no choice. In addition, the dictionary was to be made a vehicle for propagating Mao Ze-dong Thought. This put us in a rather dangerous position. There was danger not only of having our dictionary suppressed, but also of our being sent somewhere for remoulding through labour, as had so often happened to people who appeared in plays condemned as "poisonous weeds." The spectre of a literary inquisition was haunting us... To round off the picture, therefore, I recommend that a fuller account be given of the political pressure under which we worked. It was the academic integrity of some of us that saved the dictionary from becoming a mere propaganda tool.

I think some of his points are valid. But I was not trying to write an exhaustive account of the compilation of our dictionary. My aim was merely to describe my feelings about my own work on the project. Clearly they were different from his. This was not only because our philosophy of life was different; for instance I was at that time wholeheartedly committed to the Thought of Mao Ze-dong; he obviously was not. So I feel that he is foisting on me feelings and fears that were his not mine, such as our attitudes towards the danger of persecution. Some Chinese friends still tend to think that we expatriates were and are free from such dangers - until I remind them of my five years in gaol. Still he is right that I used to think more of the suppression of the dictionary than of the dictionary makers. And it is true that I feel bitter at having been robbed of five years of freedom - especially now that my energy and will are not what they were during those five years.

One step we took to save the dictionary from suppression was a misguided attempt to curry favour with

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the Red Guards - by submitting our manuscript to them for political checking. It turned out to be a lexicological disaster. The students took their task seriously and checked not only the political content and "class standpoint" of our examples but also the correctness of the English. So the effort we had made to ensure linguistic accuracy was often undermined by undergraduate ultra-leftism and inaccurate English. For instance, in our original rendering of the name of a certain plant, besides the commonly used English name we also gave the Latin. This happened to include the word *formosa*, meaning beautiful. The Red Guard students pounced on this heresy. *Formosa*, they pointed out, was the imperialists' name for our Taiwan. So the students cut out the word *formosa* and substituted *Taiwanese*. Besides such political deviations many of our rendering of examples into idiomatic English were crossed out in favour of word for word translation. This resulted in crude Chinese-English. After the fall of the gang of four towards the end of 1976 we hastily re-corrected such "corrections".

All translation involves a see-saw struggle between two languages - the original and the target language. Our Chinese-English dictionary was no exception. Word for word instead of idea for idea translation leads to Chinese-English or Chinglish, which I have battled against ever since I've been a teacher. And the battle has been not only between me as a teacher and my Chinese students (and even fellow teachers). It has been a civil war within myself. For after living a long time amongst non-native speakers of English and reading translations from the Chinese, one becomes so accustomed to Chinglish that one's linguistic senses are in danger of being dulled. One of my joys in working on the dictionary was that it gave me a chance to hammer away against Chinglish, to help set the language record straight. All this made my six years work on the dictionary not just a boring matter of words, words, words. It was satisfying even though it lessened my contact with students.

But the satisfaction had its seamy side. Chinglish and the vast difference between the two languages was not the only difficulty. For the first three or four years at least the political situation was against us. George Orwell had good reason to write his essay "Politics and the English Language"; they are closely connected. So are politics and the Chinese language. From 1972 until their overthrow in 1976 the Gang of Four had exercised an evil influence on many Chinese publications, including dictionaries. It had even condemned some of them as "poisonous weeds" and prevented their publication. We did not want our dictionary to meet that fate, so we strove

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to tread the razor's edge between lexicography and propaganda, otherwise our work too would have been suppressed and our efforts wasted. So we had reluctantly to include in our examples of usage, an excessive number of quotations from Lin Biao's Little Red Book of quotations from Chairman Mao. After the Gang was overthrown, towards the end of 1976, we were liberated from some of the political pressure. Some, but not all. For while some quotations from Mao were pithy, pointed and poetic - in Chinese, we were not free to tamper with official translations. Some of these were stilted or pedantic; Mao's language was as earthy as that of the peasants. After 1976 we hastily dug out as many of the verbal weeds as we had time for. But to have done a thorough job would have delayed publication. We had already been on the job over four years and the translators for whom our work was primarily intended were eagerly awaiting a dictionary reflecting the new day and age. Earlier dictionaries had been compiled by Christian missionaries or Chinese expatriates. Their penchant for biblical or anti-communist terms was not helpful. So we did what we could in the time we had and our book came out in the summer of 1978. It is modestly entitled A Chinese-English Dictionary. Better ones would follow. More weeds would be pulled. Meanwhile we received thanks and praise from users, Chinese and native English speakers. I felt happy about the small contribution I had made during the six years I put in on the job, though I am embarrassed when well-meaning friends talk to me about "your dictionary" and ill-at ease when people assume that I am a linguist when in fact I just touched up the English.

Actually the Gang of Four's influence on our dictionary had not been wholly negative. They were strong supporters of "open door schooling" - having students and teachers spend part of their time in factories, on communes and with PLA units, "learning from the workers, peasants and soldiers". But they drove this sound idea to an absurd extreme - so extreme as to undermine it. (One of the lessons I learned during the cultural revolution was that support - excessive support - may be the best way to oppose.) We dictionary makers thought that in the prevailing political climate it would be sound tactics, to prevent our dictionary from being suppressed, to compile it "with the doors open"; that is, in consultation with workers, peasants and soldiers. So we sent out teams, each with a section of our precious manuscript, to factories, communes and PLA units. One group even went to the Beijing city street cleaning department, where elderly professors rode motorized street cleaning

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vehicles and consulted the drivers on urban sanitation vocabulary. This was something even the reddest of Red Guards were bound to approve of, for street cleaners were near the bottom of the old social ladder, the sort of people with whom higher intellectuals would not normally associate. Still less would they have displayed themselves seated above rotating brooms sweeping Beijing streets.

I myself joined a group of teachers - not all dictionary makers - who went to work for a month at a vinylon plant in the outer suburbs. We submitted pages of our manuscript to a cross section of workers, foremen, technicians and office workers. They gave us some good advice. "Too many of your entries and examples are about books and schools and such places, about teachers and students and their lives and interests. There's not enough about industrial life, machinery, plants like ours and people like us." They were right and we put their ideas into practice.

I enjoyed the factory jobs I was assigned - most of them highly unskilled. And I enjoyed hobnobbing with the workers, visiting their homes and learning a bit about non-academic life. My diary reads: "Wednesday 14 April: Started work with repair and maintenance group. First job on cylinder; second on jack. Long discussion as to why the central pillar broke during repair. 15th. Checked electric motor, found a nick. Stripped decelerator. 16th (Good Friday ) Workers drill holes without manager's permission. Re-assembled decelerator. 17th. Made washers." The next diary reference to the factory was for Monday as we returned to school for the weekend, during which I typed factory notes. "19th, Monday: Fitted screws in glass shields for production line. 21st, Wednesday: Fixed metal grill, strainer, hammering and attaching to metal frames. 24th, Saturday: Met workers to get their opinions on dictionary ms. Stripped and assembled." Other entries refer to guided tours of the plant, lectures on its history and of how its output came to exceed the designed capacity set by the Japanese firm which set it up; reports on the women workers and their problems; pre-May Day Singings and so on. But all these entries are too brief to indicate the thrill of my involvement, for a few short weeks, in the work and life of Chinese industrial workers. The brevity of the entries does at least show how tired I was at the end of each day of such unaccustomed labour.

On May Day there was a meeting back at the Institute and I was chosen to speak on behalf of the foreign

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teachers working at the vinylon plant. This was only three weeks after momentous mass demonstration before Tian An Men - the Gate of Heavenly Peace. The occasion was Qing Ming - Clear and Bright - the traditional time for sweeping the graves of ancestors. After 1949 this was turned into a time of remembrance for those who gave their lives for the revolution. In 1976, on April 5 and 6 Qing Ming was turned into a time of mourning for Zhou En-lai, who had died on January 8 that year. The mourning was turned into a militant protest against Zhou's bitterest enemies the Gang of Four. The size and spirit of the crowds - some two million people turned out - was a signal to the gang's opponents in the government and C.P. leadership, that if they acted against the gang the masses would back them up. They got the message and acted five months later. They delayed action out of consideration for the feeling of Mao Ze-dong, whose wife Jiang Qing was a leading member of the gang. Mao died on September 9, 1976 and the gang was overthrown soon after. The five months delay was justified by Ye Jian-ying, who masterminded the operation, in the words of an old saying: "Spare the rat, to save the plate" - the legend referring to a rat scampering onto a banquet table and squatting on a priceless porcelain platter.

Meanwhile, between Qing Ming in April and Mao's death in September the gang persuaded the old and ailing Mao (he was 83 and suffered from Parkinsons) to deprive Deng Xiao-ping of all his government and Party posts.

Why do I recall these well-known historical facts? Because in the original draft of my May Day speech at the Institute I linked Deng Xiao-ping with the Gang of Four as a target of criticism. Fortunately I showed the draft to more politically astute Chinese colleagues, who convinced me that he did not belong in that company. After 30 years in China, including five years in prison on a Gang of Four frame-up I was still not sufficiently alert to the subtleties of Chinese politics. But at least I listened to my friends' advice and left Deng's name out of my speech. Yet the lesson had not sunk in. At meetings which the Institute was forced to call to criticise Deng, some teachers ostentatiously read the newspaper and many of the women knitted sweaters. Instead of realising that these were acts of political opposition I condemned them as showing a "lack of discipline". And I was disgusted by the listlessness of the anti-Deng street demonstrations which were compulsorily called by people's organizations. At the age of 66, though my thinking had gone through great changes since the regard for ritual

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and religion thrust on me in childhood days, I still seemed to crave the comfort of faith in some system of discipline, respect for some leader or ultimate authority: God, Royalty, Lenin, Stalin, Mao. The period of wavering between Stalin and Trotsky had been unhappy and brief. My faith in Stalin and Mao went along side by side and even at the end of the '50s I saw no problem in this, though Michael Shapiro and others alerted me to the contradiction. When finally the split took place I sided wholeheartedly with China and Mao, yet tried to salvage something of my decades of faith in Stalin to say nothing of my admiration for the Soviet people. After my release from prison in 1973 some friends whom I highly respected spoke of differences between Mao and Zhou En-lai. At first this struck me as impossible as I had previously considered differences between China and the Soviet Union, between Mao and Stalin and Krushchev. I seemed to hanker after a sort of socio-political "monotheism".

My faith and feeling were expressed in 1976, three years after my release from prison. When Zhou En-lai died in January that year I joined in the nationwide mourning. I admired his humaneness, selflessness and incorruptibility and also felt personally indebted to him for his public vindication of me (among others) in his speech at the Great Hall on March 8, 1973. I spoke at the big and small commemoration meetings and wrote in a public letter on the first anniversary of his death:

"We" (Isabel, our British Comrade Margaret and I) "join with the Chinese people and progressive people all over the world in commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Comrade Zhou En-lai...we recall his many noble qualities and pledge to learn from them and to strive to apply them throughout our lives. We recall his loyalty to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Ze-dong Thought; his selfless devotion to the service of the people of China and of the whole world; his modesty and spirit of self-criticism; his simple way of life, which brought him so close to labouring people, for whom he showed the warmest concern; his upholding of the equality of men and women; his adherence to principle, together with the flexibility necessary to uphold principle..."

To-day the tone of the letter strikes me as extravagant, but eulogies are eulogies; and I stand by the content. When Mao Ze-dong died nine months later I wrote another open letter on an even more elevated plane. It contains much that I do not stand by and which history has refuted; but it is a fair reflection of my thoughts and feelings at the time:

When Chairman Mao's death was announced over the radio, the sad strains of the funeral

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dirge were followed by the heroic song of struggle, the Internationale. The changing music symbolised our task - to change our sorrow into strength.

For it is not enough to feel only sorrow on the death of our great teacher. We must and do feel as well the strength that his teaching has given us. The revolutionary theory and practice which he continuously developed throughout nearly 60 years of tireless struggle he passed on to us all until the very end of his life. Just in these last few months he has led the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people in defusing the time bomb of Deng Xiao-ping's counter-revolutionary revisionist line.

He has pointed out where the main enemy is, that class struggle is the key link. His teaching has strengthened the unity of the 800 million Chinese people and the unity between the old, middle-aged and young cadres. All this has created conditions for the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie in China and ultimately for the victory of the oppressed over their oppressors all over the world.

Foreign bourgeois commentators have said that the death of Mao Ze-dong marks the end of an era. This is false. Chairman Mao has done his life's work so well that his era will go on after his death and despite our sadness we can and must face the future with the strength, courage and optimism which characterized his whole life and the lives of all the great Marxist leaders and teachers. Despite our sadness at his death, when we look back over the superb achievements of his life, we must feel happy. Never in the history of mankind has any man led a nobler life. This is something to fill the Chinese people with pride and joy. But Comrade Mao Ze-dong belongs not only to the Chinese people. He is the symbol of proletarian internationalism, the leader and teacher of the proletariat and the oppressed peoples and nations of the whole world. He is loved and mourned by them. He will inspire them after his death as he did during his life and his teaching will lead them on to the final victory of Communism all over the world.

That was what I thought and felt - in 1976.

Five days after Mao's death I was one of the thousands who filed past his body in the square before the Gate of Heavenly Peace. He had been embalmed, but embalming was a forgotten art and the job was not well done. It might have been better, for the Westerners at least, among his followers and admirers to spare them the sight. With me the process of mummification went against the grain. Twenty-two years before, in Moscow, our Soviet friend Masha had urged us to see Lenin's body in Red Square, promising that we, as foreigners, would go to the head of the queue, in front of all the Soviet people who waited for hours to catch a glimpse of the corpse. This privilege, we said, would be against our principles. So, much as we loved Lenin, we turned down the offer, much to Masha's dismay. But in Beijing in 1976, rejection of the invitation to pay our last respects to Mao would have been misinterpreted, so we went. There I faced another problem. The Chinese, in paying their respects on such occasions, bow their heads, three times - no doubt an ancient Confucian custom. Despite the tone of my open letter I could not bring myself to bow. So when I found myself before the body, in the blaze of

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arc lights and flash bulbs, I self-consciously raised my fight arm, as we had done in Spain, in the clenched fist communist salute.

My acts and emotions had somewhat similarly been out of step at the time of Zhou En-lai's death eight months before. One afternoon we teachers were meeting in our teaching groups. Word was whispered round that Zhou's body was to be driven from the centre of the city to the Cemetery of Martyrs to the Revolution (Ba Bao Shan) in the western suburbs. It was to be done secretly, on the orders of the Gang of Four, for fear that mourners in their thousands would line the route in an anti-gang demonstration. The teachers in different groups quietly considered what they should do. Isabel unobtrusively left her group and cycled 40 minutes through the snow and stood with fellow teachers in the growing cold and darkness, waiting for the hearse. It never appeared. I had said to myself and others, 'I think the premier would have preferred us to get on with our work.' Maybe he would have felt that way but his countless admirers, above all among teachers and other intellectuals, believed differently and many went off to stand for hours in the bitter winter cold. I was faithful to him in my fashion and Isabel in hers, which was closer to the hearts of the people. Zhou was loved and respected not only by intellectuals. He requested that his remains be cremated and the ashes scattered from the air; so there would be no mummification, not even a tomb. But when eventually his corpse did reach the crematorium at Ba Bao Shan, the workers there had not the heart to place his body in the flames until called on to do so by his widow Deng Ying-chao.

The year 1976 was marked not only by the deaths of Zhou and Mao but also Zhu De, the old commander-in-Chief of the Communist forces in the wars against the Guomindang and the Japanese. It was the year of the earthquake centred on Tangshan, in north China, where hundreds of thousands perished. Even Beijing was affected. In an article about it written soon after the event I wrote, under the improbable title: "Earthquakes and Class Struggle":

Quakes are times to test social systems. The Chinese people's war against the recent earthquakes reveals much about the nature of Chinese society. At the same time the Chinese - or more accurately the Marxist - approach to this war raises unexpected questions for those of us from other societies. Here I would like to set forth my own efforts to answer some of these questions, drawing largely on events at the Peking Foreign Languages Institute, where I teach.

1. How does the anti-earthquake war reveal 'the superiority of the socialist system', of

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- 'newly emerging socialist things', of the new type of socialist person?
2. How could the masses 'take class struggle as the key link' in fighting this war?
  3. How could they 'take the struggle against Deng Xiao-ping's counter-revolutionary revisionist line as the motive force' in combating quakes? How could the anti-quake struggle 'restrict bourgeois right'?
  4. In what way was the Chinese people's optimistic, energetic, self-reliant and collective conduct in fighting earthquakes 'a victory for Marxism-Leninism-Mao Ze-dong Thought'?
- Such questions are new to seismology.

\*

The battle against the quakes showed how the new social system has drawn people closer together and drawn them away from individualism and exclusive concern for one's own family.

I remember the Japanese air-raids on Chengdu in 1941. As the planes approached, the people streamed out of the city into the surrounding fields - grandmothers tottering on bound feet, mothers and fathers carrying babies in baskets swinging from shoulder carrying poles. Some slipped on the narrow raised paths and fell into the wet rice fields; but rarely were they offered a helping hand. One helped one's own family. That was old China.

Today family love is as strong as ever - but it is different. The father of one of our students works in Tangshan, epicentre of the recent quakes, where death and destruction were widespread.

Some of the boy's comrades urged him to go to Tangshan to find out what had happened to his father. But he was a member of a rescue and relief team at the Institute and said: "If my father is dead, I'm sure he died at his post. I should stay at mine and carry on his revolutionary work. If he's injured, I'm confident that the People's government and the Liberation Army will look after him. If he's neither killed nor injured, then he'll be at his post. If I were to leave mine he'd consider me a deserter."

Such collective ideology does not easily displace the old individualism. It comes only through experience and struggle....

The block of flats we live in houses 46 families of teachers and other staffmembers. It used to be called simply South Building. About a year ago it was re-named 'Red South Building.' This was not just a change of name; it was part of a nationwide movement to strengthen social organization in the cities. It drew neighbours closer together in public health work, care of the old and sick, organization of the children's leisure time during school holidays, public order and security. As the head of one Red Building committee put it, the overall aim was 'to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat' - not by issuing orders but by unifying thinking and conduct on the basis of study of the Thought of Mao Ze-dong.

During the earthquake emergency our Red South Building, under the leadership of the Institute Communist Party Branch and Anti-quake committees, directed the setting up of light shelters outside the evacuated brick buildings. It looked after the very old and the very young, attended to rubbish disposal, mobilized the children to kill flies and mosquitoes. It set up daily classes, focusing on selfless and heroic deeds of people in the stricken areas and on scientific education about earthquakes. These activities drew neighbours closer to each other than ever before. The unity brought about by Red Buildings and Big Socialist Courtyards was for common aims and against common foes - the earthquakes and class enemies hoping to take advantage of temporary disorder or panic. The new organizations, therefore, took precautions against theft and rumour-mongering.

In an Institute summary of the first month of anti-earthquake struggle it was stated: "In class society every struggle against nature is linked to class struggle. Ever since Liberation the class enemy has always tried to make use of natural disasters in his efforts to undermine the new

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social order and restore the old."

'Under certain conditions,' says Mao Ze-dong, 'bad things can be turned into good things and good things into bad ones.' The loss of life and property in the Tangshan earthquake was enormous, perhaps unprecedented. But some good things arose from the ruins, among them the tempering and testing of the Chinese people, the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party. A meeting of all the students and staff of the Institute was held to hear a work summary of the first month of struggle against the quakes. There it was announced that 19 of the 21 members of one department Party branch had, in the opinion of department masses, done their duty as communists. Nothing was said of the other two branch members. Tens of thousands of Party members in different places were subjected to similar scrutiny and the Party will be all the stronger for it. The same applies to government and people's organizations. The PLA came through with flying colours. So did the mass of workers and peasants. Tianjin's Number One Steel Plant was severely damaged by the quakes at the end of July; on the morning of August 12 they turned out their first heat of 'anti-quake steel'. In Peking, 11 severely damaged flour mills topped their prequake daily output by 36 per cent within a month. In Tangshan itself the Kailuan coalmine went into production again 10 days after the first quake. The people's communes in the worst hit area pledged 'Three No's': No change in our determination to go all out in socialist revolution; no change in our determination to make ours a Dazhai-type country; no reduction in our supplies to the state.'

During the bitter experience of the earthquake the Chinese people responded to Chairman Mao's injunction: 'Be prepared against war and natural disasters. Everything for the people.' They demonstrated that, armed with his thought, 'Man Can Conquer Nature!'

These are brief and scattered extracts. The whole piece is several times as long.

There have been great changes in China since I wrote that piece in the autumn of 1976. And there have been great changes in my thinking. Yet I have a nostalgic yearning for those thoughts which I no longer think and for those times that have changed.

Somehow in that year of disasters, 1976, I found time and energy on top of my teaching and dictionary making, to write several other articles. They were inspired by the cultural revolution which did not officially end until the fall of the Gang of Four in the late autumn. One was the story of the "re-moulding" of a juvenile delinquent which I'd heard while working at the vinylon plant.\* It was highly ideological and didactic, with plenty of quotes from Mao Ze-dong and a fair amount of jargon. Yet it expressed an enlightened approach of reform not merely punishment. Other pieces were on education: against elitism, for bridging the gap between mental and manual work. Such topics and the way I handled them still strike me as sound to-day, despite the current condemnation of the cultural revolution as an unmitigated calamity. It was a calamity in many ways with its senseless cruelty and mortification of the mind, its denigration of intellectuals, who are essential to China's

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modernization, its brutal treatment of old revolutionaries who had paved the way for socialism. Yet, faced with the current call for complete condemnation I feel torn, pulled in different directions.

However, I was ready to join in the general rejoicing when the Gang of Four fell. This occurred in the middle of October when the Institute customarily hosted an outing for the foreign teachers and their Chinese colleagues to the Western Hills to see the red leaves. In accordance with Chinese tradition the occasion was more gastronomic than aesthetic; still less was it athletic. Isabel and I were among the very few who scaled Devil Scaring Peak; the majority meandered about the base of the hill ready to get a head start to the restaurant which was to be the scene of operations. As the banquet proceeded the school leaders and teachers ate the food and drank the liquor with the usual spate of toasts. In fact (with suitable support from myself) they drank the restaurant dry.

It later emerged that the whole of Beijing was drunk dry by the end of the celebrations; there could hardly have been a more significant indication of public opinion. At our party joy was unconfined, for the gang had made our Institute a special target, branding it a "hotbed of bourgeois education". Not surprisingly our "democratic personage president" disregarded his doctor's instructions and drank himself into three days hospitalization; the vice president, whose ill-health, accentuated by years of political harassment to the point at which he could normally hardly walk, climbed half way up the mountain; and the editor-in-chief of the Chinese-English dictionary on which I was working said to me repeatedly: "David, this is the happiest day in my life," feeling confident at last that the dictionary was no longer in danger of suppression. And then as an afterthought: "David, I am not drunk" - a sure sign that he was. A good time was had by all. These reactions on the part of leading members of the university staff were matched at the lower levels. There was general joy and there were high expectations among intellectuals following the overthrow of the Gang of Four, who had branded intellectuals as "stinking number nines" - the dregs of society.

A year later Isabel and I took part in a more sedate and more private celebration - for the 30th anniversary of our crossing the unmarked boundary into the Liberated Areas on November 1, 1947. To mark that momentous event in our lives, the President and other members of the university leadership invited Isabel and me to an elegant Beijing Duck dinner. After laudatory speeches they presented us with a beautiful set of blue and white crockery.

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It was a generous and thoughtful recognition of our years of service during which, they stressed, we had gone through thick and thin with our Chinese comrades. This occasion, coming as it did four years after my release from prison might be taken as underlining my rehabilitation. We appreciated the kind references to our "contributions" but insisted, in replying, that we had received from the Chinese people far more than we had given. Both sides were sincere.

Yet on all such occasions - and there have been several - in my inner heart I am dissatisfied. This is not out of modesty. I really feel that I have made certain contributions in education and, for want of a better word, propaganda; that is, in writing books, articles, circular letters and broadcasting. But on these special occasions to honour us I feel that there is generally a false emphasis on our "going through thick and thin". We are proud of having come to China in 1947 when the civil war was not yet won; of having tasted the simple life of the Liberated Areas - a "hardship" which we actually found delightful. It is true that we have born no grudge despite our incarceration during the cultural revolution; that we have worked hard (as the majority of our colleagues have done). And so on. It would be churlish to resent well-meant recognition of this. But I would prefer more recognition of my work as a teacher. True, I am not a trained teacher, only an experienced one. And with no academic qualifications other than my Columbia University B.A. degree I tend, no doubt defensively, to regard the term "academic" as no compliment. Yet while trying to avoid self-satisfaction I think I have done a little to improve China's language teaching. Over the decades I have introduced or supported methods of teaching language and literature which though unremarkable in the West, are regarded as advanced in China. Beijing Foreign Studies University (formerly the Foreign Languages Institute) is to-day officially rated as China's outstanding tertiary education institute in the teaching of English, and I may say, without immodesty that I have helped it to achieve this status.

In pre-Liberation China missionary schools nearly all courses were taught in a foreign language, especially English to the neglect of Chinese language and culture. In the Chinese-run schools there was a heavy emphasis on the grammar, reading and writing of foreign languages; but most graduates left school knowing about English (or some other foreign language) but unable to speak or understand it. As Deputy Dean (in effect head) of

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the English Department in the '50s I stressed the importance of having command of the language, not just knowing about it. And I stressed the importance of the spoken language, of using English as a means of communication in both speech and writing. This led me into collision with the "visualists" and grammarians. I stressed modern writings in English rather than the classics, which I personally loved. I spoke and wrote for decades against unidiomatic "Chinese-English" or Chinglish. I did this largely through lectures in our Institute and also over the radio as well as through articles in a little magazine with a big circulation (of several hundred thousands) mainly among students and teachers. I published little in learned journals. My most notorious magazine article was entitled "Throw Your Dictionary into the Wastepaper Basket", a phrase borrowed from an American professor at a prestigious Chinese university. She and I were equally in favour of teaching students to read whole books, not get bogged down in words and grammar.

Besides this I strongly promoted extra-curricular activities: the use of English in daily life; "Background Talks" by visiting native speakers. From foreign embassies I borrowed such films "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner", Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man", "Ghandi" and "Roots", which besides teaching language did much to lessen race prejudice and increase general knowledge.

My whole approach was utilitarian and non-academic, at times anti-academic. I opposed the teaching of Beowulf and Chaucer and over-emphasizing theoretical linguistics for undergraduates. Inevitably some of my learned Chinese colleagues took issue with my vulgar approach. They criticized some of my reading selections for not being "fine writing". Some of the dialogues I composed for the training of Oral Interpreters (about "Meeting Mr Smith at the Airfield" or "Explaining Beijing Opera to Mrs Jones") were termed "too naturalistic in tone". More outrageously I made tape-recordings of foreign experts from Asia, Africa and Europe speaking English with their local accents. Failing to find a representative Indian at the Friendship Hotel I fell back on our gramophone record of Peter Seller's in Mr Mukerjee's version of "My Fair Lady". The students found these tape-recordings interesting, useful, and entertaining. The academics were not amused. My practical approach was discounted by scholars of Shakespeare, whom I loved but regarded as irrelevant.

But I stuck to my non-academic guns. Let my academic friends think of me what they would.

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In 1977 our Institute enrolled its most brilliant students ever. During the cultural revolution college entrance exams had been suspended and new students were admitted on the "recommendation of the masses" of the communes, factories or enterprises where they had been sent "for re-education by the workers and peasants". I heartily approved of this method, thinking it democratic. In fact it was not always so. Perhaps more often than not, it was the factory or commune officials rather than the masses, who made the decisive recommendations - often of their own sons and daughters or those of their friends and relatives. So the re-introduced college entrance exams were actually more democratic than "recommendation by the masses". They offered the chance of a college education to a generation of youth who had been deprived of it by the cultural revolution but who had gained - albeit at the cost of some suffering - experience of life. And as there had been no entrance exams for years, there was a reservoir of talent to be drawn from. But the number of places in the universities was limited, so those admitted were the cream of the crop. Besides experience of life they had the strength of character which had seen them through hardships. It was a joy to teach them - and to learn from them, as I did in seminar discussions and when they came to our flat in groups for English conversation a couple of times a week.

Besides having students round to our home I was involved in another extra-curricular activity: arranging for the showing of English language films.

Notable among these was "In the Heat of the Night", directed by Norman Jewison, whom I had the pleasure of meeting. One evening there was a special showing in Beijing of a Chinese film about Norman Bethune, the Canadian communist surgeon who had spent the last year and a half of his life in China working for the medical service of the Chinese communists' 8th Route Army. He died at the front at the age of 50 in 1938. His name had become a household word in China because of Mao Ze-dong's eulogy of him. Later he was made a Canadian National Hero. In 1977 Jewison came to China as head of a team of Canadian film-makers hoping to make a film about their fellow countryman. Meanwhile the Chinese themselves had made a film about Bethune. At its premiere Jewison and his colleagues were invited as guests of honour. So was Isabel, the only Canadian then teaching in China, and I was included as a "Canadian by marriage". After seeing the film Isabel and I tagged along with the Canadian team for a drink in the lobby of the Beijing Hotel. Having known Bethune in Spain, I

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had been profoundly moved by Mao's eulogy of him. And I had been carried away by the Chinese film even though by Western standards it was sentimental and the part of Bethune had been rather inadequately acted by a non-professional Westerner who happened to be working in China. I eagerly asked the highly professional Canadian team what they thought of the film. There was an embarrassing silence, finally broken by Jewison: "It was made with much love." It was the kindest possible panning of what he and the other film makers thought was "schmaltz". Jewison is a humane man, as his films show, and that gracious remark endeared him to me. Later he sent Isabel and me an old copy of "In the Heat of the Night" (which had been released ten years previously) to show non-commercially to our Chinese students. It played to packed houses in the canteen, which then served as our auditorium. The film was all the more welcome because the xenophobia propagated by Jiang Qing and the rest of the Gang of Four had cut China off from access to foreign films - except a few from Albania and North Korea. "In the Heat of the Night" was soon being shown in colleges all over China and wherever it went the local Public Security were demanding a special showing for their personnel; not to censor it but to learn from it. For in the story both the black and white detectives jumped to false and opposite conclusions, each led astray by racial prejudice. After ten years of frame ups and imprisonment of innocent people the Public Security organs were being called on to implement Mao Ze-dong's old injunction - often more honoured in the breach than the observance - not to jump to conclusions but to rely on evidence. Word of the film even got to the ears of Ye Jian-ying, who had been Chief of Staff and was now second only to Mao in the political and military hierarchy. I had been put in charge of distribution of the film and one day was informed that Ye wanted to see it the following Saturday night. "Sorry," I said, "it's booked for that night. He'll have to wait his turn like everybody else." This was considered outrageous. But after 30 years in China I still could not reconcile myself to Confucian truckling to rank. I preferred the orderly procession of London bus queues.

In the late '70s I was with those who advocated certain General Knowledge or "Content" courses in English to strengthen the students' command of the language and its use as a means of communication. I myself kicked off with a course pretentiously termed "World History". Actually it was only a survey of general knowledge of the history of the last 5,000 years or so.

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History, or what passed for history, had been my favourite subject when I was a schoolboy. It consisted then of the old anecdotes about Alfred and the cakes, Canute and the waves, Sir Walter Raleigh chivalrously spreading his cloak on the mud so that the Virgin Queen would not soil her shoes, the unflappable Francis Drake finishing his game of bowls as the Armada approached; foolish old German George III wondering how the apple got inside the dumpling - in short, 1066 and All That. In gaol I had dreamed of compiling a Marxist Child's History of England less childish than that of Dickens. Now at last, in my late sixties I had my chance to indulge my early love and pass it on to my Chinese students.

After a few years at it I broke with my old custom and consented to write a piece for one of the university's learned journals\*, entitled "Experiences in Teaching World History in English". Not that the article was learned. It read in part:

We try to present history from the standpoint of historical materialism... But without jargon, dogmatism or mere reliance on authority... I have heard that some students say: "that chap Crook teaches history from a Marxist standpoint". This is not intended as a compliment!... I myself, however often find myself instinctively using Mao's approach to history and repeating his ideas. But I find it advisable to quote or paraphrase them first, allow time for the ideas to sink in and only then give the source.

We try to avoid Eurocentrism, characterized by Joseph Needham... in his comment: "to some people Western music is music; all other music is anthropology"...

We reject Hegel's paradox: "History teaches us that we learn nothing from history." So without forcing the issue, on occasion we relate the past to the present and foreign history to Chinese...

The essay type questions on the exams are formulated so far as possible to demand independent thought, not just memorizing. They include such questions as: "Compare and contrast the Meiji Restoration with China's modernization before and since Liberation"... Why was Africa called in the West 'The Dark Continent'? Was the name justified? Has a similar attitude to Africa existed in China? What is the significance of the following quotations: 'Paris is well worth a mass'. 'The State That's me'... What is the relationship between Christianity and imperialism? Has Christianity done China harm or good? How should it be regarded and dealt with in China to-day?...

During one seminar some students disagreed with my statement that while some slave labour had been used in the building of the pyramids, Egypt was not a slave society at that time. On other occasions students have corrected statements of mine. At the end of such a class, in which students display the courage to think and speak for themselves, I say: "This has been a good, lively discussion". This tends to surprise those students still under the spell of the traditional notion that teachers are the ultimate authority... Because of this ancient tradition many students do not dare to use their brains or are reluctant to say in class what they really think. They are evidently afraid of getting low marks if they do not simply regurgitate the reading or parrot the lectures.

...The women on the whole speak less in class than the men, evidently acting in

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accordance with the Confucian canon of female modesty and decorum... To my personal knowledge some otherwise "advanced" young men are chary of marrying a "pushy" girl, who speaks out; still less one who shows signs of being their intellectual superior...

In a seminar on Ancient Greece one student said that I, as an Englishman, should be proud of Lord Elgin's taking the Marbles from the Akropolis in Athens and putting them in the British Museum in London. (I disagreed. D.C.)... In a discussion on Egypt one student said that he had recently read in a "scientific magazine" (sic) that the pyramids could not have been built by the Ancient Egyptians. Their construction called for too advanced skill in architecture, engineering, mathematics, organization and administration etc. So they must have been placed on earth by creatures from outer space, as the "scientific" magazine suggested. When asked whether the same applied to the Great Wall of China, he answered indignantly: "Certainly not!"

In discussing the Enlightenment, the whole class at first unreservedly supported Voltaire's statement: "I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." The teacher then recalled an experience in the student movement at Columbia University in the mid thirties. In the name of free speech Hitler's Nazi consul in New York had been invited to speak at the University. We leftists launched the slogan: "No free speech for those who suppress free speech". After a hot debate the class qualified its blanket endorsement of Voltaire's saying and acknowledged the necessity of making concrete analyses of concrete cases. It was the teacher who had provided fresh food for thought; it was the students who digested it.

The article goes on to list certain shortcomings and achievements of the course. How did they balance up? Modesty impels me to dodge a direct answer, so I will simply say that our approach and emphasis were suited to socialist society. We cut kings and queens down to size and played up the people's heroes and heroines: Spartacus who led the great slave uprising against Rome over 2,000 years ago; and Toussaint L'Ouverture the son of a black slave who at the end of the 18th century led the black slaves of Haiti and Santo Domingo to victory over the armies of Spain, Britain and France.

We extolled the peasants of France and of England who rose in the 14th century Jacquerie and the Great Rebellion of 1381. We tried to do justice to women in history, from Sappho to Boadicea to Joan of Arc. We exposed racism, showing the achievements of Black Africa before its ruination by slave traders and colonialists; and anti-Semitism, of which Lenin wrote: "Only the most ignorant and downtrodden people can believe the lies and slander that are spread about the Jews...the most oppressed and persecuted people ... (who) have given the world outstanding leaders of democracy and socialism...".

To make up for our own ignorance at the beginning of the course (we learnt as we taught ) we invited experts on certain subjects: the American Quaker Dr Graham Leonard, an Islamist and a dramatic lecturer, who electrified the student audience with his resonant rendering of the muezzin's calling of the faithful to prayer; Dr.

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Janaki, an Indian who had lived many years in Africa, who accused the students of being racist; and Isabel, whose initial lecture on Christianity from a Marxist standpoint I built on in subsequent years. It was all a far cry from 1966 and all that.

Whatever its shortcomings I like to think of World History, our first "content course" taught in English, as a small step towards realising a long cherished dream of Isabel's and mine, shared by many of our colleagues, Chinese and foreign: the transforming of our Foreign Languages Institute into a university. To establish a school of higher learning worthy of the name of university must take at least decades perhaps centuries. But we have made a start. And now, less than ten years after World History was launched our official name is "Beijing Foreign Studies University".

I would rather be remembered for such feats as these - modest though they be - than for having eaten millet, worn homespun clothes and survived the fumes and flies of village latrines, for which kind Chinese friends still praise me.

At the end of the '70's the Ministry of Education saw fit to honour Isabel and me by appointing us "Advisers to the Institute". That rank, I was told, was on a par with President of the Institute.

When the President called to inform us of the honour to be bestowed on us I asked: "What is an Adviser supposed to do?" The Chinese word for Adviser is guwen, gu meaning to advise and wen meaning to enquire. The President smiled and answered: "Well, you're supposed to gu and to wen." "I've been doing that for decades," I replied. At the announcement ceremony we were presented with booklets bound in ornamental padded tapestry. I made a polite speech of acceptance on behalf of us both. (Isabel abhors speech-making, though she does it well when she has to) and seized the opportunity to express my philistine views on education, saying that the Institute laid too much stress on classical literature and linguistics; we should teach what the students and the country needed, not what we teachers loved or happened to excel in.

Over a decade as an Adviser I find I have submitted memoranda to leaders at all levels from deans of departments to government ministers and once to the General Secretary of the C.C.P. Though no respecter of persons I always strove for a polite and positive opening before concluding with constructive criticism or

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complaints. Years before, on an outing to the zoo with our children I had remonstrated with people who baited the animals, Isabel criticized me, saying I should leave China's problems for the Chinese people to solve. But as an Adviser I proffered advice right and left - and most of the time Isabel, after improving my memoranda, added her signature. The subjects raised ranged from methods of teaching and examination to crowded canteens. I focused for years on the library, to extend its opening hours and make books more accessible to the students, allowing them to enter the stacks. This is an ongoing struggle in China, where the written and printed word has been sacred since ancient times and access to information for the people goes against feudal tradition. Housing was another problem I harped on. An immense amount of building has been done since the People's Republic was set up and students returning to our campus after a few years absence can hardly find their way around. The problem now lies in who gets most of the housing that is put up, the intellectuals, as called for by party policy, or the top-heavy administrative staff. Many teachers maintain that the odds are weighted against them and that it takes longer to allocate the flats than to put up the buildings. There is some truth in that, for the flats are assigned on a system of points for seniority, size of family and so on, all of which calls for discussion. Democracy takes time. I complained to the Ministry of Education that one party Secretary was not carrying out Party policy towards intellectuals; that he was building a factionalist power base and was unqualified for his post. Another time I pointed out that while the University President was honest and hardworking he was autocratic, "divorced from the masses" and not up to the level of his task, so he should yield to a more competent candidate. I constantly maintained that the teachers were underpaid and so had to resort to moonlighting; and too many old professors retained posts for which younger, upcoming scholars were better qualified. In a word I rather fancied myself as a tribune of the people. The Ministry, for its part, took my concerns seriously, replying to my memoranda (though answering letters is not common practice in China) or even having a vice-Minister call on us to discuss them.

The most public, if not the most ambitious of my efforts to improve China's university education was at an educational conference in Taiyuan in the summer of 1985. The other delegates, Chinese and Western (mostly American), were experienced academics and I had misgivings about accepting the invitation to attend proffered by

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the chief organiser on the Western side, our friend Dr. Lynne Belaieff. I protested that I was hardly qualified to be included in such scholarly company. But Lynne insisted that whatever I might lack in the way of academic degrees I made up for in experience of the China scene and that I might be useful in bridging the gap between East and West. So I went, but with no intention of presenting a paper before such a distinguished gathering. In the end I agreed to present an unacademic paper. Despite, perhaps because of its unacademic nature, my contribution was well received, especially by the Chinese academics, one of whom thanked me, saying: "You said what we would have liked to say." Here are extracts from my effort. It was in a way my swansong as a teacher, though I continued to serve as an Adviser to our university.

**Some Problems of Chinese Education**  
**As Seen Through the Eyes of a Foreigner**

First, spoon-feeding or, as the Chinese idiom has it, duck-stuffing. The evils of duck-stuffing are recognized by Chinese and Western teachers alike. But recognizing an evil is one thing, getting rid of it is another. That is not so easy. At our Institute we run two-year refresher courses for teachers at middle schools in many parts of China. One of our most capable and creative teachers was assigned to teach them "Intensive Reading". This course, as traditionally taught in China, focuses on grammar and vocabulary, on linguistic phenomena rather than on reading. But this teacher is not a traditionalist and she set about teaching the teacher-students how to read, using a communicative approach. She succeeded in this. But at the end of the course the student teachers said to her: "Your method is fine, but we'll never be able to use it on our students when we go back to our schools."

Why not? Drawing language and ideas out of students, instead of cramming them in, calls for more time, effort and command of the language on the part of the teacher. A teacher with a limited command of a foreign language, unless he tries to teach it in Chinese (which alas is often the case) can cope only by preparing every word in advance and sticking word for word to a text. If students are encouraged to use their brains, and not to act like human tape-recorders, then they may come up with awkward questions, which the teacher is unprepared to answer. This means that we urgently need better trained teachers, with a better command of their subject, who know, incidentally, how to pronounce those difficult words "I don't know"....

So for the time being duck stuffing is still with us. It is worst of all, perhaps in the required course of politics, which is supposed to mean Marxism. It is strange and sad that in this great socialist country of China, politics is the course that students most dislike.

Why? Because so many teachers of politics lecture with their noses in their books, merely reading the text aloud, and they demand that the students apply the same mechanical approach in answering questions in tests and examinations. If their answers depart from the lectures, the texts, the official definitions by a single word - even though they convey the idea accurately - marks are deducted. This cultivates mechanical memorizing, not creative thought. It may perhaps be called instruction but it is certainly not education. And it is out of place above all in the teaching of Marxism, which all Marxists know is not a dogma but a guide to action. So why do teachers of politics use this dogmatic method? Some of them, perhaps, because they do

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not know Marxism; others for fear of making mistakes. Chairman Mao used to say that people have the right to make mistakes. Lenin said the man has yet to be born who never made a mistake. Cultivation of creative thought and the dynamic development of Marxism demand that teachers and students be allowed to make mistakes.

In the 30s Mao Ze-dong wrote an essay "Against Book-worship". It was needed then and it can be read with profit now. Book worship is still with us and is still an obstacle to creative, independent thought.

One might think that book worship would produce well-run libraries. It does not. Librarians often protect the books from the readers, especially from student readers; teachers are somewhat privileged. From what I have seen and heard, all over China, it is harder than it should be for students to borrow books from libraries and harder for a student to enter the stacks than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The librarians' intentions may be honourable. They are afraid that books will be lost or stolen, thinking that would be a waste. But the greatest waste is a book unused. It is true that some books may be lost or stolen. All over the world people honest in other matters are dishonest about books. In USA and other countries libraries use electronic devices to protect library books; but still they get stolen. Perhaps the stealing of library books will disappear only under communism. But meanwhile, just because a few students steal a few books, libraries should not make it difficult for all students to borrow any books. Librarians should not protect books against borrowers; they should help students borrow books. China's policy of opening up should be applied to libraries. Without proper access to books students cannot study independently and creatively. Will easy access to books involve dangers? Maybe. All life involves dangers. Here again let me resort to the unfashionable practice of quoting Mao Ze-dong. He said in 1957: "It is a dangerous policy to prohibit people from coming into contact with the false, the ugly and the hostile ... It will lead to mental deterioration, one-track minds and unpreparedness to face the world and meet its challenges" (On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People).

For libraries to be well run and for librarians to work efficiently, there must be good systems and good training. Some otherwise quite well-run libraries lack such an elementary practice as a dual card system, so that one may go to the library and ask for a certain book. "Sorry, it's out". "Who's got it? When is it due back?" "Sorry, I don't know". All this because of the lack of proper systems, proper training. Many librarians are fine people who are devoted to their work, and give good service. Many but not all. Poor service arises partly from indifference, which in turn stems from job allocation. When it comes to assigning work to a person who seems to be incompetent, not conscientious or in poor health, the question arises: "Where shall we assign so-and-so?" "Oh, let's put him in the library". This shows the failure of some leaders to understand that librarians are very important people; and that to realize their full potential they need training. We have experts of all sorts, Chinese and foreign, in all sorts of fields. But how many are there in the important field of library science? More such experts, accorded the respect they deserve, would make for better run libraries.

Accessibility of books facilitates independent study. It also brings with it the danger of over-reliance on books and even resort to plagiarism. There's a saying in Chinese: "All the writing in the world is copied" (Tian xia wenzhang yi da chao). That may be true. For the whole of human knowledge all over the world, all through history, hangs together. But in scholarship, if we knowingly use another scholar's ideas, we should give him/her credit by citing the source of quotations. Failure to do so is plagiarism, an outstanding problem in many countries, China among them....

Last year a student writing a graduation paper on Ernest Hemingway's works asked me to recommend him some good critiques of them. I said: "Don't read the critics, read Hemingway. Don't write what they write about him, but what you think of him. Don't rely on

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the authorities. Use your own brain." Perhaps in China it is an ancient tradition of modesty to rely on authorities rather than on one's own judgment. If so, we teachers should inspire our students with self-confidence and self-reliance, to help them think for themselves.

Whatever the case, there seem to be different attitudes in different societies towards copying or plagiarism.

The socialist modernization of China's education, calls for the removal of feudal obstacles in thinking, in institutions, in methodology. Plagiarism no doubt has historical roots in feudalism. In imperial China there were nearly two hundred types of classified material some of which were not for the eyes of the emperor himself. Access to information was for the ruling class, not for the people. And even after Liberation the influence of this heritage of hierarchical restrictions on access to information lingers on (I do not refer of course to precautions necessary for national security). It takes the form of keeping archives closed to scholars and library stacks closed to students, to say nothing of inflated lists of "internal" material. As long as feudal hierarchical thinking dominates the minds of some officials, they will treasure their own access to information and withhold it from the masses. This is a typical feudal obstruction to socialist modernization of education.

Feudal thinking conflicts with modern educational methods in other ways. Take seminars for example. I have taught a third year survey course in world history for the last few years. With the students who entered in 1977 the discussions were lively, sometimes uproarious; but I much prefer a shouting match, with several students talking at once, to the silence which has often prevailed with the students of the last few years. The students of 77 had worked in factories, state farms and other enterprises, sometimes for as long as 10 years. They had some experience of life, which they were able and willing to relate to history. To-day's students have entered college straight from middle school, where they have been subjected to teacher-centred education and duckstuffing. They have not been encouraged (I do not say they are unable) to think and speak for themselves. On one recent occasion, however, a particularly bold spirit was daring enough to take issue with a view that I had expressed. I praised him for doing this, instead of smacking him down, much to the astonishment of the rest of the class. In spite of welcoming divergent views, I find that getting a good discussion going is harder than drawing teeth. The problem is most acute with the women students. Some of them are extremely bright and a few do speak up in class, but many stay silent. They have evidently been influenced by Confucius code of conduct for women. Some of my Chinese friends tell me that men students disapprove of women students who talk too much or too loud, especially in public; and that such young women will find it harder to get married than their more demure sisters. Whatever the case, the girls often keep quiet during the discussion and then raise interesting questions to me as we are leaving the classroom. "That's a good question", I say. "Why didn't you bring it up in class?" They merely smile.

Sometimes discussion flags for lack of student preparation. This is partly because students' programs are overcrowded. Some juniors and even seniors have, until recently, had as many as 26, even 28 class hours week. This may be necessary in primary school and even, for instance in foreign language study, in the first year of college. But for mature university students it is unreasonable. This surfeit of class hours is partly an expression of teacher-centrism. But it also stems from the students' hunger for foreign knowledge from which they were cut off by the narrow nationalist influence of the Gang of Four. Now more and more elective courses are becoming available and students have been signing up for more than they can cope with. They have no time to think, to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest". But young people are understandably in a hurry. It is hard for them to grasp the principle that learning should last a lifetime....

I'm sure you know all this. Certainly China's present leaders know it. Current policies make that clear. But policies are not always or immediately put into practice. The advance from

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policy to practice takes time and struggle.

So although these problems are not new, they are still unsolved. But astonishingly, in spite of that, Chinese students have achieved great things.

How has this been done despite the problems and obstacles I have referred to? Through the hard work of teachers and students. But we must not and cannot rely on hard work alone. The results of doing so are not commensurate with the efforts. Why should we do things the hard way when they can be done better and faster, more efficiently and economically? Once the problems referred to are tackled, the achievements will be still greater. Then China's education will play its proper part in her socialist modernization.

My complaints and suggestions were not limited to the field of education. I wrote about obstacles to normal contacts between Chinese and foreigners. Here again tradition was the heart of the matter, for since ancient times China was the "Middle Kingdom" and peoples beyond the pale were "barbarians". Such notions died hard even among those who consider themselves communists, and middle level bureaucrats dreamt up excuses for keeping Chinese and foreigners apart. The pretexts commonly advanced were "security" and consideration for the foreigners. So they had to live in golden ghettos to which access by Chinese students and even teachers was intimidatingly restricted. It is true that people from developed, industrial countries do often find Chinese living conditions hard to take; yet perversely the foreigners may want to live together with Chinese. Some even want to marry Chinese, especially Western men captivated by Chinese women. Mixed marriages - "stealing our women" - is a touchy matter in many societies. In China, perhaps especially so. Bureaucratic obstruction to mixed marriages was intense under the influence of the Gang of Four and at times permission was requested, and granted only after being raised to the prime minister, Zhou En-lai; and latter to Deng Xiao-ping.

Gradually I felt myself called on to deal with a myriad matters.

Why did I do all this? To gain public approval or simply from social conscience? Whatever the reason I felt the urge, daring even to "smack the tiger's bottom" - the tiger in this case being Deng Xiao-ping.

In 1984 there was to be an unusually magnificent celebration on October 1, China's National Day. It was the 35th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Many people, including myself, asked why all the fuss for a 35th anniversary? There's nothing special about the number 35. The only conceivable answer was that Deng thought he might not last until the 40th by which time he would be well over 80. Whatever the reason this celebration was to be on an extravagant scale, despite repeated calls for frugality from the top leaders. The main

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extravagance was in the use of manpower in the military parade through the vast square before the Gate of Heavenly Peace, from which Mao Ze-dong had proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The march past was to be a model of parade ground precision, goose-step and all. This affected even students. They were to be recalled early from their summer holidays so as to be put through their paces and create a good impression when they paraded past the reviewing stand. This was more than I could take. I wrote the following letter to the State Council:

June 29, 1984

To the State Council

I strongly support the plan to hold a special celebration in honour of the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Republic. (My wife, Isabel and I had the great privilege of being on the reviewing stand in Tian An Men Square on the first National Day.)

However I believe that recalling students early from their summer holidays for the sake of practising marching in this year's National Day parade is a mistake and will be counter-productive. I have taken part in two wars (against the fascists in Spain and in Japan). My experience, which is shared by many, is that an adequate proficiency in marching can be achieved in a short time; beyond that, little or nothing positive is achieved. On the contrary, the trainees are likely to become resentful and cynical. Students have already indicated their dissatisfaction at the amount of training they have been called on to do.

If the aim is to make an impression on foreign visitors, I venture to predict that it will be counter-productive and that there will be negative reports in the foreign media about "the militarization of Chinese students etc."

I suggest:

1. During the long summer vacation students be encouraged to take part in production, in raising the cultural level of the countryside and in reading books to broaden their general knowledge, which is hardly up to the level required of a great, developing socialist country.
2. If students are called back ahead of time, they should take part in cleaning up and beautifying the city. A good deal has already been achieved, but much remains to be done.
3. Some special projects be launched, which will fire the imagination and enthusiasm of the youth; e.g. tree-planting and maintenance, digging new subways and swimming pools, making new roads, controlling pollution etc.

Sincerely,

David Crook

So far as I recall the letter had no tangible result, though it may have planted a doubt in some bureaucratic minds. Isabel and I were honoured with tickets on the reviewing stands. We saw Deng Xiao-ping in a jeep emerge from the massive imperial gate, tour the square and take the salute. Our feeling to say the least were

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mixed. The goose step in which the soldiers marched as they passed the great gate reminded me of my childhood in World War I, when we ridiculed the Kaiser. Well, I thought, dixi et salvavi animam meam - I have spoken and saved my soul. (Four years later, in 1988, I saw Chen Kai-ge's powerful film, "The Big Parade". It showed the irrationally rigorous training of P.L.A. men from whom the 1984 guard of honour was chosen - so rigorous that men fainted in the process. This, I thought, was the sort of bull-shit we rejected in Spain and later in the R.A.F. in World II. It adds little if anything to efficiency in war.)

The following year, however, I was given the opportunity to meet Premier Zhao Zi-yang. It was at the time of the Spring Festival, 1988. Our old friend George Hatem (Ma Hai-de) had remained on friendly terms with top party leaders ever since living side by side with them in the caves of Yan'an during the anti-Japanese War. Now George had suggested that Zhao should give a Spring Festival party for the "veteran foreign experts", of whom there were thirty odd. Isabel and I were among those invited. A week or so in advance we received a phone call from the Foreign Experts Bureau. Someone wished to come and see us to discuss arrangements for the Spring Festival Celebrations. As usual I wished we could have been spared the courtesy of a visit and be left to get on with our work but I realised that it would be boorish to suggest that such things could be settled well enough by phone. Two officials turned up and broke the great news: we were to be received by Premier Zhao Zi-yang. The party was to be informal and there would be an opportunity for us to bring up any questions we liked. In fact, they said, we could start doing that now so that the Premier would know what to expect. Isabel and I talked so long and raised so many questions concerning education that when we finally sat down to the festive dinner I was placed directly opposite Zhao at the long table laid for thirty-eight guests. My position directly opposite Zhao was not so strategic as might have been expected, for there was a decorative row of potted plants between us which made casual conversation difficult. But I was determined not to lose the opportunity of stressing the need of more money for education. China, for all her long and glorious civilization and traditional love of learning was close to the bottom of all the world's countries in its per capita funding of education. This was a delicate matter for a foreigner - even a "veteran foreign expert" - to raise. So I broached the topic tactfully. Zhao had made a little speech of welcome in which he said that everything which promoted the forces of production should be supported.

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So now, craning my neck over the fence of foliage I said: "Don't you think that the more money a country spends on education the faster it will get rich?" The Premier at first agreed, then added: "But that's not an absolute. It's no good for us to send physicists abroad and when they come back with their Ph.Ds to have no jobs for them." I agreed. There were unemployed Ph.Ds in the West driving taxis for a living. But what I had in mind was not only financing Ph.Ds in the natural sciences. It was, as Comrade Deng Xiao-ping had stressed when he came back to power strengthening the whole educational process, starting with the kindergarten. It was hard to maintain the conversation over the intervening greenery, but before getting back to the elegant dishes. I managed to squeeze in a reference to Japan's far-sighted focusing on education after the Meiji Restoration of 1867.

Though the banquet and the decorative foliage had made conversation difficult, the Premier had evidently taken it seriously, for a couple of days later a reporter from the Guangming Daily, which is directed at intellectuals, came to interview us. (Isabel, of course, had opened a second educational front with her opposite number at the banquet table).

This time, sitting comfortably in our own living room, with neither protocol nor potted plants in the way, we could let ourselves go. We pointed out that while "Educational allocations generally absorb 4-5% of the national gross output value in other developing countries... in China they stood at only 2.33% in 1980, and 2.43% in 1984...(and) intellectual workers earn less than physical labourers.\* Such inadequate funding, we maintained, was one of the chief reasons for the sorry state of education in China. Another was conscious or unconscious contempt for education and intellectuals by old revolutionaries in high places, who had licked the Japanese and the Guomindang without benefit of a university degree sometimes without finishing primary school. This was the cause of teachers' low pay, poor housing, backward teaching methods. It explained why so many teachers wished to quit their profession or go abroad to study and not come back to China.

After the interview I compared my own - and Isabel's - position and prospects with those of Chinese teachers. We were well paid and housed, by Chinese standards. We were well cared for by any standards in the world. We were surrounded by friends and, deservedly or not, held in esteem. We had quit teaching not in the winter of discontent but with the advent of old age - an old age of guaranteed security. We had no wish or need to

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go abroad except on the round-the-world holiday trips which were offered us every three years on full pay and fares paid. We were always happy to go and always happy to return to China, which meant coming home. We had suffered some of the slings and arrows of outrageous ultra-leftism, factional fighting, other people's struggles for power. But all in all we had had a good and useful life. And as I had vowed in gaol, since my release I had seized the chance to make up for lost time.