

CHAPTER 14

Seeing the World & Spreading the Word (1974-88)

In gaol I had vowed to myself "If I ever get out of here alive I'll make up for the time I've lost." I did - especially in travel, in China and in other countries. I felt: My rehabilitation inside China did not go far enough afield. It needed to be as international as myself: an expatriate Englishman with an American background, a Canadian wife and friends in many European countries. In 1974, a year and a half after my release from prison Isabel and I left China for three months. In each of the countries we visited we spoke tirelessly and confidently - in defence of China and the cultural revolution.

Here are some extracts from my speech at the founding convention of the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association (USCPFA), which reveal part of my thinking at the time - September, 1974:

Friendship between China and the U.S. will change the world - and the world needs changing. It's not simply a matter of the U.S. learning something of the social and political revolutionary experience of China and China learning something of the technological experience of U.S.... Historical development is uneven and the day may well come when China may aid the U.S. technologically and the U.S. may aid China politically.

Mao's line in education ... is to produce socialist-minded, educated working people, not intellectual aristocrats. Education must be integrated with productive labour, education must serve proletarian politics, workers must become intellectuals, intellectuals must become workers - no intellectual elite. That is the line of Mao Ze-dong. Then there's the anti-Mao line ... this line is derived straight from Confucius...

(enrolling students) ... Last time we sent out teams to Tibet - and that also is worth taking note of - students from among the former serfs and slaves of Tibet.. We're not allowed to recruit anybody who has not done at least two years of honest work in factories or on the communes... there is nobody to-day who can legitimately - oh, there are a few who wriggle through - go from primary school, to secondary school to university. You've got to have that period of work... If you're in a commune you can apply to go to university, or without applying you can be recommended by your workmates... then consideration is given to these applications by the local leadership and they have to give their approval. Then there is an examination... but it is not very academic. It's simply an investigation to find out if the person has the minimum amount of literacy, a smattering of general knowledge... language deals with the whole field of human experience. There has to be some sort of examination.

The ones we get have engaged in work and that generally means work with their hands. You can't exclude those who work with their heads; you can't work with your hands without using your head... How can you call these people peasants, they're really the sons and daughters of cadres and the cadres may to a greater or lesser extent have had certain privileges, so these are phoney workers and peasants. Our conclusion is if they've done a couple of years real work on

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the farms or in factories we'll accept them as workers and peasants. In Peking we've had the custom of inviting students round to our flat on the campus to sit around and talk for an hour or two...The sort of people we get will give you some idea of the type of students we have ... a girl who'd been a shop assistant in a village store. She was not satisfied to stand there behind the counter ...she got hold of a flat tri-shaw, she'd load it up with goods and peddle it out to the fields... We've had tractor drivers. One of our students has worked for six years as a tractor driver up in the North-East on a state farm breaking virgin soil under very tough conditions. It gets pretty cold there and the winters are long and as soon as his team had made the place habitable they'd move on to another place which is unfit for human habitation...We've got students who've herded sheep in Inner Mongolia. A girl comes and sits down looking very meek and mild ...and the others say, you know she's a very good horsewoman...We've got railway workers and barefoot doctors who've delivered maybe as many children as Dr. Han Suyin...primary school teachers, factory workers ...commune cadres even Communist Party Secretaries. So these youngsters have some experience of life and language deals with life and that is a tremendously important qualification. The youngsters we used to get... without experience of life didn't do such a good job as interpreters. These students come from the people and they have a strong desire to go out and serve the people...But the mere fact that you've come from the people is no guarantee that throughout your life you will dedicate yourself to the service of the people. History has many examples. In my own country an outstanding example might be that son of a fisherman Ramsay MacDonald. There are better examples. Zhou En-lai didn't come from the people, he came from the top people. But he's betrayed his class just as Ramsay MacDonald betrayed his class. Just as Karl Marx betrayed his class...So we feel its necessary for the students for a certain time each year to go and work in factories, on communes ...There's no such thing as "automatically red" (cf "red diaper babies). Some of the students think 'I'm alright, I don't need to study politics, I don't need to go out and do manual labour...' The scotching of this fallacy is another of the great achievement of the cultural revolution.

We haven't solved all our problems; we haven't reached perfection. When you've reached perfection you've reached death. There are plenty of problems left to solve in China as in other countries. Mao Ze-dong described the seizure of power in 1949 as the first step in a 10,000 li long march and he wasn't using a poetic metaphor. That's what it is. The problems that you face after seizing power are greater, more complicated, more arduous than even seizing power. You have been warned. Mao Ze-dong says that the main problem in revolutionising education is revolutionising teachers. ...One of our friends said to one of our teachers: 'How did you come to change your approach to education?' He said, 'Well, when our Institute was down at the May 7 cadres' School we had to build the homes we had to live in. And the logs floated down the Yangzi River and we had to carry them a few miles to the site of the school and build our homes. We had to carry big logs on our shoulders. One day I got up and had a good breakfast and started carrying this young tree and after I'd gone a couple of miles my legs had turned to jelly. And I thought: in the old days people who had to carry logs like this and a lot further than this had to do it without any breakfast. And as I was sitting down, recovering my strength I thought, the students we've got now are the sons and daughters of those people who had to carry logs on an empty stomach. And I began to ask myself, is it really so important to teach these students Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice?'

Well, we've got problems but I think we can say that the achievements rather than the problems are the main stream. ...We are trying not to stuff the students full of knowledge, what the Chinese call duck-stuffing...the way Peking ducks are force-fed. That's not the way to educate. The way to educate according to Mao Ze-dong's principles is above all to teach the students how to think.critical analysis, to ask the whys and wherefores.

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That is a small part of what I said. I believed it all then and a good deal of it now, but to day I feel that the picture tends to be idealised. Apparently at that time I had still not fully grasped that elementary truth that policy does not always correspond to practice. Much of the audience were evidently equally naive, for they gave the speech an enthusiastic welcome; partly, perhaps, because I spoke better than now, for then I was a stripling of sixty-four.

Still, some of my "youthful" dreams, I believe, may be realised; for instance that some day backward China may be in a position to teach the U.S. a technological trick or two. As to U.S. having something to contribute to socialist China in social and political institutions, that idea is already accepted, to an often naive degree. Many Chinese students, these days, idealise U.S. as a paradise on earth - until they get there. My own view is now that Lenin, in his State and Revolution, which influenced me so much in my youth, was basically right in exposing the sham of bourgeois democracy. That was right for Russia in 1916. But China to-day is still grievously afflicted with its special brand of feudalism, and a dose of democracy would do it good, especially in popular understanding and official practice of human rights.

As to Mao Ze-dong I quoted him often, always approvingly, and so far as I could judge, the audience approved too. Nowadays both in China and abroad that would be considered, to say the least, naive. I myself have broken Mao's spell. I can think of him critically - but still as a great leader of men. I do not go along with the blind rejection of him with which some people have replaced their former blind worship. I still strongly support Mao's principle that the task of the teacher is to teach students to think, not to stuff them like ducks or turn them into mechanical memoisers. But I realise now, as I did not then, that other of his ideas on education, if not wrong were distorted in practice or carried to excess. And my wholesale acceptance of the denunciation of Liu Shao-qi counter-revolutionary, history has proved to be wrong. He and Mao had opposing strategies. Perhaps neither was wholly right nor wholly wrong. Certainly Liu should have been treated as a legitimate political opponent, not as the epitome of evil. In fact, looking back, his approach was at times closer to reality, closer to the political awareness of the mass of the Chinese people than Mao's. Political guidance must present challenges if it is to lead to progress; but it must set goals that are possible. Mao tried to "stom the heavens". Sometimes

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he succeeded and sometimes failed. But in education - which he himself said was the field in which he wished to be remembered in history - he was right. He was right in stressing that education should be available to the sons and daughters of working people and that all students should be educated in the use of their hands as well as their heads. Now, years after my speech, these principles of his have either been abandoned or were never implemented. The same applies to student "participation", which is to say campus democracy. Yet without these things China's modernization will be delayed, distorted or unrealised; while the elitism which the cultural revolution was designed to prevent will proceed apace.

As to the youth who Mao said were "like the sun at eight or nine o'clock in the morning". To-day many people say that they are cynical and careerist. Certainly more of them are so than twenty years ago. Maybe I myself was among the starry-eyed. More likely, I think and hope that the morning sun has gone behind the clouds and will soon re-emerge.

Soon after speaking at the U.S.-China Friendship convention I returned with Isabel to Britain and from there we set out for China. The Chinese have a saying "We have friends all over the world". That is true and it has spilled over onto us in the course of our years in China. So on our way back we visited friends who had once been fellow teachers at the Institute.

In Paris we placed a bouquet of red roses at the memorial to the captured Communards who were stood up and mowed down against the wall of the cemetery of Père Lachaise. The heavens were symbolically black overhead and the clouds burst into such a downpour as we clambered back into our French friend's little Citroen that he could not drive until the storm slackened.

Former Beijing colleagues showed us the battlefield of Waterloo, the scenery of Switzerland, the grandeur that was Rome. But for me all this beauty and history was outshone by the glory that was Greece. This took me back to my junior year at Columbia forty years before. That was when I read Homer and the Greek historians, dramatists and philosophers. This pagan soil was holier to me than that which nourished the burning bush of my Jewish forebear Moses. So we splurged our proletarian pay and became bourgeois tourists. First to the Archaeological Museum in Athens. There we met a marvel of modern Greece in the form of a middle aged, multi-

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lingual guide, skilful, steeped in her subject and a fervent patriot. From the museum she took us to the Acropolis, the City on the Hill. When she spoke of the Elgin Marbles - now in the British Museum - she worked herself into a fury. After calming down and looking at her watch, she allowed our party half an hour to look round on our own. I stayed behind for a private talk with her. This dialogue ensued:

"Never mind," I said. "When the British people come to power, we'll return the marbles."

"What, the British! Never. The British will always be British!"

I took this as a euphemism for "thieving bandits".

"You should have faith in the people."

"What people? Look at the Russians. They never returned a thing"

I was stumped, but before we parted I asked her if she would be interested in a book by an eminent British scholar and historian of ancient Greece, our friend George Thomson. I did not mention that he was a Marxist, though this being ten days after the overthrow of the Colonels' Junta, I might have safely done so. She was graciously interested. Back in China I wrote George's daughter, her father being old and ill, asking her to send her father's book, Aeschylus and Athens (a Marxist interpretation). My request must not have been made clear, for the book sent was not the one I had requested. Instead it was Thomson's latest volume. George was versatile, an expert in more fields than ancient Greece, and the book sent was From Marx to Mao. I do not know whether our Greek guide ever read it, for we never heard from her again. That unfortunate mistake lay months ahead. Meanwhile, from the Acropolis Isabel and I climbed another hill, Mount Areopagus, after which Milton named his essay, Areopagitica. As a student I had no patience for Paradise Lost and Regained, agreeing with A.E. Housman that: "Malt does more than Milton can, To justify god's ways to man." But while studying literature at Columbia I was inspired by two passages in Areopagitica:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but flings out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.

And:

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Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

Leaving Athens we set out to see more of Greece and splurged on a day-long tourist trip to Argos on the Peloponnesian Peninsular. Argos to-day is little more than a village but in Homer's time it was a famous city, and the thought of it, too, took me back again to my student days at Columbia forty years before. We drove all day under a brilliant sun shining in a bright blue sky which was reflected in a blue-green sea. The road switchbacked and twisted through rocky hills, with here and there little shrines to the memory of the men who died building it. As we peered over the parapet of the Corinth Canal which cuts Greece in two my musings on the wars between Corinth and Sparta against Athens were sidetracked by modern memories of Cheltenham College. For when the Jewish house there was phased out the former housemaster had set up a small Jewish school called Corinth College. I have no idea why. Perhaps for the sake of alliteration. From Corinth we went on to Mycenae, home of the most ancient civilization of Ancient Greece. It flourished a thousand years before the Athens of Pericles. For me the climax of our tour was the 2,500 year old open air amphitheatre at Epidavros. It is still in use. Its tiers of 1400 stone seats are set in a semi-circle of hills and the acoustics, which we tested, are such that every member of the audience can hear the song and speech of the performer on the central stage. I wondered whether the recently built Royal Festival Hall in London could do better, or the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, where I had in my youth stood through a Wagner opera - an experience never to be forgotten or repeated. One thinks of the Ancient Greeks as surpassing us in the arts rather than the sciences. Perhaps in this case they were aided by Orpheus.

Why, I wondered on the airplane winging its way back to Beijing, should I and millions of other moderns be so mystically captivated by Ancient Greece? I had been brought up on Bible stories not Greek mythology, which I learnt about later, at college. The answer must lie somewhere in my personal generation gap. Childhood was the time for obedience. "Little boys should be seen and not heard," I was often told. In revolt against this and the "Thou shalt not" of the Ten Commandments, I grew to appreciate paganism and Prometheus after starting to eat pork. I dozed off, hoping that our pilot and his craft would not meet the fate of Icarus, whom

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at college I had admired for daring to fly so close to the sun that it melted the wax of his wings.

We came safely down to earth in Beijing and I was soon busy teaching, giving lectures on the lands we had visited.

During the holidays we went on trips to distant provinces arranged for foreign teachers and their Chinese colleagues by the Foreign Experts Bureau. In the summer of 1975 a two weeks trip was arranged to the North-East (formally Manchuria). Trips in those days were different. They were not just tours of temples and beauty spots interspersed with banquets.

The climax of the North-East trip, for me, was our four day visit to Daqing Oilfield and I wrote an exuberant 9,000 word article about it (published in Eastern Horizon Magazine, Hong Kong in June 1975) under the title: "The Quantity of Oil and the Quality of Life". It reads in part:¹

The quantity of oil produced at Taching is inseparable from the quality of life there - a life quality crystallized in two of Mao Tsetung's principles: 'Arduous struggle' and 'Rely on our own efforts' and in the oil driller Wang Chin-hsi - 'Iron Man Wang'.

The epic of Wang Chin-hsi - his will-power and energy, which inspired Taching workers to unload 40-ton derricks from railway cars by hand and drag them for miles on tree-trunk rollers across the prairies to the drilling site, in the absence of promised Soviet machinery. This has been told before. So has his leading the way in plunging into a pool of cement to mix it with arms and legs, to seal off a sudden 'well-blowout' which threatened disaster. That was in the pioneering days of Taching a dozen years ago. But on our recent visit we learnt fresh facts: about the Iron Man's part in the struggle between Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line for building the oilfield and Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao's revisionist line of capitulation to Khrushchev's pressure.

Reading the whole piece over now, years later, I feel much as I did after listening to the tape of my speech of the previous year. I cannot bring myself totally to repudiate the cultural revolution even though it robbed me of five years of freedom. In June, 1975, it still had over a year to run. And its professed principles (which were distorted in practice) inspired me then and do so now. But now I know more of the evil that was done in their name, and that I abhor. I am even heretical enough to have grave doubts about the dictatorship of the proletariat. But I still admire the cultural revolution hero Iron Man Wang, whose guiding principle in building

¹ Spelling of Chinese names should now be altered to hanyu pinyin - the romanization of today. Thus: Daqing, Wang Jin-xi, Liu Shao-qi, Lin Biao, etc.

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the Daqing oilfield under the most arduous conditions was: "If the conditions exist, let's go. If they don't exist, create them." I am still for Women's Liberation and against Confucianism which obstructs it. I still respect the Yan'an spirit of arduous struggle, hard work and plain living, even though in my old age, along with many youngsters, I have slipped into soft and easy living. Soft and easy, that is, by China's old revolutionary standards, though far from luxurious by those of the West.

To-day I would lavish less praise on Iron Man Wang who, I now realise, would have lived and laboured longer if he had used his brain as energetically as his brawn. And I would heap less blame on Liu Shao-qi. And is my picture of Daqing idealised? Did I unquestioningly accept as fact what may have had a dash of fiction. I do not know. I know only that I was profoundly moved by the epic of Daqing. And until now I have not thrown away a tattered old shopping bag bearing with the slogan of the times: "In industry learn from Daqing". Shop assistants look at it and smile, thinking no doubt "Another old conservative revolutionary".

I really have no right to make slighting comments on Iron Man Wang's fantastic physical feats in temperatures below zero, for he performed them with a noble purpose. I performed some myself around those times, but mine were accidental and stupid. Over the years I have three times fallen through the ice while skating or walking across the frozen Kunming Lake in the Summer Palace Park. Once Isabel, an American friend and I were walking on the ice towards an island and I was telling them a story. It was Jack London's "Loss of Face", about a buffalo hunter who was captured by American Indians. To escape torture at their hands, for preying on their means of livelihood, he fools the chief into chopping off his head with one blow, by rubbing on his neck an ointment which he claimed would withstand the blade of the sharpest tomahawk. As we approached the island the ice grew thinner and gave forth explosive cracks. But I was so engrossed in my story and so eager to reach its climax, that I paid no heed and fell through the ice into the freezing water up to the waist. But I went on telling the story. A few years later I fell in up to my shoulders. The previous week Isabel and I had discovered a stretch of glass-like ice and went back the following Sunday. Meanwhile a sluice gate had been opened and the glassy ice had turned to water. Isabel, a Canadian to the manner born, who had played hockey at college and still had good eyes, was ahead of me. She wheeled and shouted a warning. Too late, I had taken up the sport at forty and never

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learnt to stop sharp. So on I went into the watery path of the newly opened sluice. My sole satisfaction was that I managed to roll out onto the ice unaided. Though well into my sixties I never suffered from these icy immersions, except from loss of face. For I would buy a bottle of double-distilled spirit, Er Guotou, the poor man's Maotai. Then I would sit on the homeward bus knocking it back as though it were lemonade - to the amazement of my Chinese fellow passengers.

While 1976 was a year of disasters for China, with the death of veteran leaders of the revolution and the tragedy of the Tangshan earthquake, for our family it was a year of happy reunion. Our three sons and one daughter-in-law came to visit us. So we decided to leave our earthquake shelter on the school grounds and go on a trip to Ahba, an autonomous Tibetan district of Sichuan Province. Why Ahba? It was there that Isabel had done her early anthropological fieldwork in 1938. And to reach it we had to pass through Chengdu, the provincial capital, where Isabel had been born and where, 24 years later I had met and become engaged to her. A suitable place for a family pilgrimage. We travelled for a couple of days in a comfortable railway sleeper, then by car deep into the rocky, wooded mountains which Isabel had six times crossed on foot in five-day treks. Finally we reached the village where she had done her anthropological research, high up in the hills, and later we visited the lama temple where she had witnessed the devil dances. It had now become headquarters of a commune brigade, with quotations from Mao Ze-dong on the massive pillars in place of lines from the Buddhist scriptures. At times we had found ourselves following in the footsteps of the Red Army on its Long March of 1934-5, when it fought its way through forests, crossed rolling prairies and treacherous swamps, climbed over snow mountains "three feet from heaven" as Mao wrote in a poem. Unlike the Red Army we were never reduced to eating our leather belts; we were wined and dined.

In that summer of 1976 the radio was still largely under control of the gang of four and they were blaring forth condemnations of Deng Xiao-ping. Hearing them I turned with an approving smile to our hosts and said: "You see, even up here he can't run away. He'll get what's coming to him." They smiled in polite disagreement. The gang of four did indeed engineer Deng's downfall more than once before they themselves were overthrown. But for a time I failed to see through them. My powers of political analysis, after considering myself a Marxist

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for 40 years, left much to be desired.

Talking Our Way Across Two Continents

At the end of May 1978, Isabel and I talked our way from the west coast of the North American continent to the east, confidently making speeches on China. I would make the opening and Isabel would field the questions. To-day, having longer in China we find it harder to understand, its problems more complex, and we speak, if at all, more diffidently. Is that the caution of old age? Are we more aware of our ignorance? Or are things really more complicated? Whatever the case, in 1978 we cheerfully spoke, mostly under the auspices of Friendship with China Associations, at universities including Stanford, where our son Carl was completing his graduate studies in East Asian History. (He had sadly explained to us that to have access to the necessary material in Chinese, he had to leave China and go to U.S.) Then he and his bride-to-be drove us through the wooded mountains of Yosemite Park and on across the Rockies towards the East, where they were to be married. We parted company temporarily at the mile-high city of Denver to make more speeches, between there and Pennsylvania, where the wedding was to take place at the farm of our bride's uncle, old friend William Hinton.

Half a dozen speeches later we found ourselves one evening in Chicago at the home of an "old lefty", now a wealthy architect. We sat down to a dinner of inch-thick steak and all the trimmings. The wall to wall windows of the dining room overlooking Lake Michigan stretched from floor to ceiling. The waters of the lake lapped at massive grey stones forming an embankment on which the house rose. The rooms were high, some stretching up two storeys. Opening one door we found an indoor swimming pool. The walls of the living room were lined with book-cases. On a coffee table we spotted a volume of Marx and I indelicately asked: "How do you reconcile this with your way of life?" The wife was defensive but the husband replied unabashed: "If I lived differently, it would not help change the social system. I've given the best years of my life trying to improve the lot of humanity." I thought uneasily of the gap between our way of life in Beijing and that of half a billion Chinese peasants.

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In Ann Arbor, Michigan, where we spoke at the university, we stayed with our old friend Norma Diamond, the Professor of Anthropology. One evening this distinguished scholar insisted with the enthusiasm of a teenager on taking us out to the movies. We consented in a somewhat superior adult way, thinking it proper to humour one's host. The film was "American Graffiti", about four young Californian men in the early sixties, driving wildly around city streets at night in search of girls and hassling and being hassled by the police. Not, I thought at first, a subject to grip three mature academics. And yet it gripped us and sparked a sociological discussion about those times and the different mentality of the late sixties when similar characters were involved, on one side or the other, in the anti-Viet Nam war movement.

That seemingly uneventful evening launched me onto a path from which I have not looked back - that of a film fan. In those few months in the West I fell in love with films: "Coming Home", with Jane Fonda (I fell in love with her too); "Annie Hall" with Woody Allen and his mad blend of New York Jewish humour and Freudian introspection. After the film I went to the men's room and my neighbour in the next urinal asked what I thought of it. "Not quite the thing for my Chinese students in Beijing" I answered. "But I liked it. Especially that part where the Southern girl-friend's old mother sees Woody in her mind's eye looking like a Chassidic Jew with curly side-whiskers." The questioner stared at me, shaking his head as he buttoned his flies, then went out without a word. I have been a Woody Allen fan ever since. In New York we saw "Saturday Night Fever", which won me to disco dancing - as a spectator. I have never been able to get out on the floor and do it. And later, in London, I dashed across town to see "Julia", which took me back to my own underground anti-fascist activities in the '30s. And Isabel and I would rush home to see the latest instalment of the cockney soap opera, "East Enders". Does such a mundane matter as a 68 year-old school teacher becoming a film fan merit mention? I rationalize my film fanaticism with the thought that movies are the modern equivalent of novel reading; and Karl Marx, according to Engels, would keep three or four novels going at once as relaxation from writing Das Kapital. If he were alive today he'd be a film buff too.

Other little incidents from that trip to the west still stick in my mind. In Philadelphia I stayed in the old wooden frame house of some Quaker friends on the edge of a Black neighbourhood. After so much travel by road,

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rail and air my trousers had less than a knife-edge crease and before speaking at a meeting one evening I went in search of a "press while you wait" establishment. I walked many blocks through the local neighbourhood until I found one. I went in and was asked by a strikingly beautiful young black woman what I wanted. They did not often get white customers it seemed. I explained. She smiled at my English intonation and said: "Sorry, we don't have any changing room here" and turned away. I looked around the shop. "You can go in over there," she said, nodding to a door under the stairs. I went in among the mops and managed after some contortions in the cramped space to struggle out of my trousers and hand them out. They came back pressed after a few minutes of cheerful chatter among the employees and I struggled back into them. Did they get a kick out of treating "whitey" in this fashion, I wondered, or was I imagining it? Anyway, I had no objection to being made fun of by such a beautiful young woman.

In Hull, just across the river from Ottawa, in spite of its English name they speak French. The French Canadian secretary of the local China-Friendship Association came to make arrangements about my speaking there. As he was about to leave he remarked casually: "By the way, you'll be speaking in French, of course." He was telling me, not asking me. A Canadian Quebecois friend working in China had apparently told him I'd be able to cope. I did. In fact Isabel said it was my best speech of the tour, no doubt because it was the shortest. Later, in Montreal, at the Exhibition of "Man and His World" journalists turned up to interview us. We coped comfortably with the English language press; then a plump, pipe-smoking gentleman asked a question in French. I answered him in the same language, apologising for not having used French much for many years. He courteously brushed my apologies aside and after I had fielded a few questions he paid me the compliment of putting a new tape in his recorder. Next day the story was printed, with the comment that the "English teacher from China" had answered questions in fluent but "long unused French". I thought at first that I must have used the 17th century idiom of Corneille and Racine whose plays I had seen in Paris as a boy; but our Quebecois friends assured me that it merely meant I was out of practice.

So we proceeded cheerfully to Britain, making speeches from London to Edinburgh. Then we took the bus to Ramsgate on the south coast and went on by hovercraft to France. On the way from the French coast to

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Paris the coach stopped at a roadside restaurant for an early supper break. Across the road was a World War I cemetery. As we mused in horror among the miles and miles of crosses on the graves I recalled my childhood reading of Deeds that Thrilled the Empire. Now in my late sixties those tales of Victoria Crosses had lost their glamour. We clambered somberly back onto the coach, headed first for Paris and then for Spain. The thought of that war still thrilled me.

Back to Spain - After 41 Years

The event of my life in my late sixties was returning to Spain after an absence of forty-one years.

The trip had been put off until after the death of Franco in 1975. When the news of this for me happy event came over the radio our family and friends celebrated it with wine and I talked of my hope of seeing Spain again. Three years later that dream was to come true. It was not just the dream of an elderly man in search of his youth. I had long looked on my going to Spain in my twenties as a moral high point in my life. True it unexpectedly and fortuitously led to something which to-day I repudiate, my anti-Trotskyist work for the KGB. But when I volunteered in 1936 for the International Brigade my heart was pure.

Now, in 1978 I had bought a couple of cassettes ("Tal Como Es") and brushed up my once fluent but now rusty Spanish. Our youngest son Paul and our daughter-in-law Marni joined Isabel and me and we set off from Paris in a hired Peugeot with Marni at the wheel. We drove across la belle France; England is not the only green and pleasant land, I had to admit. In the foothills of the Pyrenees, after much map reading and memory racking we located Puigcerda and the short stretch of international road off which I had dashed into France in the illegal border crossings of my youth. It all looked different. Was it along this hedge or that one, across this field or another that I had sprinted? In any case, I sighed, I couldn't run that fast now. The family patiently endured my mental meanderings until we reached Barcelona. There, by-passing the Hotel Continental on the Ramblas where once I had masqueraded as a journalist and spied upon George Orwell, we headed for the dark, narrow streets near the port in search of less pretentious lodging. We found a dump into which we were enticed by the doorman-

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night-duty clerk. He turned out to be an old anarchist who had been gaoled under Franco and within a couple of minutes he and I were singing the melodious and stirring anarchist song "Sons of the People". I had learnt it in 1937 as part of my "dissident" anti-Stalinist cover. At that time my knowledge of Barcelona was limited to what I needed to know for my work; the Continental Hotel, the POUM headquarters on the Ramblas, my safe-house refuge on Calle Muntaner. Now, with Isabel, Paul and Mami I discovered another Barcelona I had known nothing of: the now underground Roman city, which had done trade with ancient Phoenecia; the narrow lanes of the medieval city, with its superb churches, Columbus' ship anchored in the harbour, the museums including one dedicated to Barcelona's celebrated son, Picasso - all the splendours of Catalan culture.

We left Barcelona at last, enticed by Madrigueras, where the British Battalion had trained in January 1937. En route we put up for one night at a village celebrating a fiesta in honour of the Holy Virgin, where demure maidens, immaculate in their mantillas and flowing crinolines, at midnight started dancing in the village square to the music of Elvis Presley. Next day we found ourselves in another type of fiesta, organized by the Communist Party of Madrigueras. It had been a long, hot dusty drive and we headed for a tavern. The walls were plastered with C.P. posters. After a bite and a drink I looked round for a likely contact. A couple of tables away sat a burly, broad-shouldered young chap who turned out to be the baker, Bernardo. As I told of having been in Madrigueras before he was born, his Spanish exuberance bubbled forth. Our family had to come over his family's table and we had to have more drinks before moving on to his home to meet his parents. From there, after more drinks we were taken to another house where the Party Branch, organisers of the fiesta, were lunching. More drinks. Speeches.

Mine was ultra-left, hinting that the Party secretary's talk of peaceful transition to democracy was a dangerous illusion; but not so ultra-left as to lessen the conviviality of welcoming back a member of the International Brigade. "You must stay the night. The fiesta doesn't really get going till close on midnight," said the Party Secretary. "The village is crowded but Aventino here will take you round and find you a room." As we walked round the once familiar village streets I told Aventino of the family I had known, who lived on the Calle Nueva and whose daughter, Antonia, had taught me Spanish. He promised to try and track down the surviving

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members of the family. He came back breathlessly an hour later. My Antonia was now his wife. We went to their new home and talked of old times. The slim, teen-aged Antonia, now a plumpish middle-aged woman, recalled incidents I had long since forgotten, including my parting present of lace. Aventino had warned us to say nothing to our landlady of my having been in the International Brigade; she was once a well-to-do widow, deeply religious and anti-Communist. When we returned to our rooms at two in the morning however, Antonia was too full of youthful memories to observe security and burst out happily with the news: "Here's David. He was here 41 years ago with the Internationals." It took time and tact to re-establish relations with our religious landlady, who talked at length of how we had desecrated the church by using it as our mess hall. But we finally became friends. When we left the village Antonia and her family showered gifts on us, including a fine saw-toothed Madrigueras-made bread knife which we still use every breakfast time. And Bernardo gave us loaves of his bread, the size of young cart-wheels. There is no generosity to compare with that of the poor, as I had learnt when we left that same village for the front in February, 1937, laden with tangerines.

Another long, hot dusty drive and we approached the battlefield of Jarama. Crossing a likely stream we stopped the car to question three road repairers, one old, two young. "Is that the Jarama River?" I asked. Yes, they answered, in a tone implying, why should you in your fancy car want to know that. I offered an excuse. "We thought we'd eat our picnic lunch there." (Bernardo's cartwheels, the cheese, the wine, the pears which Antonia had pressed on us). "Better not," we were told, "That river's polluted." "Maybe," I said, "But that river has a history. I was here 41 years ago." "During the war?" "Yes, during the war". The old man looked at the car. "You were with Franco?" "No, with the Republic." The old man dropped his pick and held out his hand. I took it. Then we drove back and ate by the polluted river.

There were more incidents, not all of them so heart-warming. On the way to Madrid we stopped in Toledo, to see the city which I knew only from El Greco's paintings. It had been controlled by the fascists when I was last in Spain. We visited the cathedral and the superb medieval synagogues, attracted by signposts in Hebrew, no doubt for the benefit of rich American tourists. Then to Al Cazar, the fortress which had been unsuccessfully besieged by the Republican militia. Now, three years after Franco's death, the public address

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system blared praise of the fascists who had heroically withstood the siege. Well, I thought, it's true we lost, but we fought the good fight.

Madrid, like Barcelona, was no longer the city I had known. In those days of my hospitalization in 1937 it had been quieter, despite the bombings and bombardments. Now, with its streams of noisy traffic it had a new, brash personality. We hunted down the back streets around the Puerta del Sol, for a cheap pension. Suddenly I saw a Chinese restaurant with the proprietor in the doorway. I went to him to ask him about a place to stay. But Chinese, the language of my daily life for the past 30 years, had been driven from my head by one brief week in Spain. Not a word would come and I had to call on Paul. That linguistic lapse showed something of the depth of my week's digging back 40 years. Despite my tangled thoughts and feelings, muddled all the more by the differences in the world communist movement, I felt I had to contact the Spanish Communist Party. I phoned. But it was late, I was tired, irresolute, confused by thoughts of Stalin, Trotsky and Mao Ze-dong. My Spanish failed me. I hung up the receiver in the middle of a sentence. Next morning we drove on, through the Basque country back to France, buying goatskin wine flasks like ordinary tourists. But when I am in London - every three or four years - I go and pay homage at the statue on the south bank of the Thames to the 400 odd Britons of the International Brigade, many of them Jews, who fell fighting in Spain.

Teaching & Touring on China's Frontiers:

Mongolia and Xinjiang

1979 saw the start of a series of visits to the outlying areas of China's Minority Nationalities: Tibetans, Mongols, Uighurs, Muslims (Hui) and others.

Isabel still had the anthropologist's special interest in these peoples, ever since she had done field work among them in the late '30s. No doubt her interest sparked mine. Besides, we both felt that during the long summer holidays we should not only have a change of scene and explore China, but that we should do something

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useful. This led to the idea of teaching summer sessions in places where native speakers of English were few and far between. So when we were invited by an old graduate who held a post at the University of Inner Mongolia, we accepted eagerly.

A by-product of our month's stay was an article I wrote, called "The Framup of a Nation" - the Mongols. (Eastern Horizon, Hong Kong, April, 1980). Specifically it was about the Inner Mongolian People's Party (IMPP). It was based on interviews with Mongols, some in the capital of their region, Huhehot; others as we bounced in a jeep across the grasslands; still others in yurts and commune offices close to the border of the Mongolian People's Republic.

The IMPP we were told was an active revolutionary party from 1927-33. Then it split and became increasingly ineffective until 1945, when the Japanese armies were defeated. After that it once more became a political force and helped set up what later became the first Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China - Inner Mongolia. That was in 1947. From then on, little was heard of the IMPP, until 1967, when the cultural revolution was under way. Suddenly a witch-hunt was launched against all past members. Later, in the growing frenzy of the cultural revolution this spread to practically all Mongols and even to their friends among the Hans. The villain of the piece was said to be Kang Sheng, the mentor of Mao's wife Jiang Qing, of the gang of four. Kang's aim and that of the gang was to discredit the Premier, Zhou En-lai. Jiang Qing had long been guilty of racist arrogance against the people of the Minority Nationalities, while Zhou had been a staunch defender of them, honouring that clause in the Chinese constitution which states:

The People's Republic of China is a unitary multi-national state. All the nationalities are equal... Discrimination against, or oppression of any nationality and acts which undermine the unity of the nationalities are prohibited...

This concept has often been more honoured in the breach than the observance - but not by Zhou En-lai. According to our informants the strategy of Kang was to exploit the contradictions between Zhou's followers and the gang so as to create disunity in Inner Mongolia. The resulting chaos, they felt, would make the area easier to control once they, the gang, seized power. All this I recorded in my article which gave needed publicity to "The

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Frame-up of a Nation".

But this indulgence of my youthful dream of becoming a journalist was not our main aim in Inner Mongolia. Our real job was teaching and there in the land of the yurts and yaks we enjoyed exceptional facilities. We were treated as 'distinguished visitors from the capital' and given a free hand. So we focused on teaching English through films.

We had brought with us a mixed bag of movies: "Alistair Cooke's America"; Jewison's "In the Heat of the Night"; a charming Australian story, "Gentle Strangers", about love between scholarship students from abroad, who were not supposed to fall in love; documentaries of sheep farming, and that old favourite, "Jane Eyre". But it was not so much the medley of films as the method of using them which was new, at least in Inner Mongolia. Watching foreign films can be a good way of improving one's knowledge of a foreign language - provided it is done in depth. But at our institute and so far as I know in other schools in China films were shown once and regarded mainly as entertainment. We did things differently. First we would tell the students the story and provide some background. Next there would be a showing followed by questions from the students. After these had been cleared up we would show the film a second time. Finally there would be a discussion in small groups.

Alistair Cooke's liberal and loving portrayal of his adopted country made for a more balanced appraisal of the United States than the horrific picture presented during the cultural revolution. "In the Heat of the Night", with its sympathetic portrayal of the black detective by Sidney Poitier, helped dispel race prejudice. This was a key issue in Inner Mongolia, where the attitude of some Hans towards Mongols was hardly different from that of a Georgia cracker to "nigras". Besides such gains in general knowledge and outlook on life the students learnt a fair amount of spoken English, which helped pry them away from the traditional approach to language learning. So we were encouraged by our experiment in teaching through films and continued it in later summer sessions in other Minority Nationality regions.

The next summer, 1980, we went to Xinjiang in the far west. Again, besides teaching by showing films I wrote an article for Eastern Horizon (November 1980) dealing more extensively with the problems of race relations in China's multi-national society.

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Xinjiang occupies 16% of China's area but has only 1% of her population, I wrote. 40% are Hans, the other 60% belong to a dozen minority nations - Uighurs, Kazaks, Mongols, Tartars, Uzbeks. Then, touching on race relations:

Early on the festival morning (rozyet, the end of ramadan) my Sri Lankan colleague (from Beijing) and I, both wearing gaily coloured Xinjiang skull caps and accompanied by two Han friends, were driven by our Hui (Muslim) driver to the mosque...When our two Han friends made to go in with us the driver suggested that they wait outside.

My colleague and I, on the other hand, were most cordially welcomed. The two Hans incidentally were so oblivious to Muslim customs that they had brought no head gear.

The service lasted two hours and a half according to the old-fashioned pendulum clock on the wall behind the immam. (It was) two hours behind the national standard time...a calculated expression of how the minority nationalities treasure their legitimized autonomy. The gang of four had insisted on Beijing time, charging that adherence to local time was a sign of 'separatist ideology'.

My article noted many such details. For instance:

The proportion of Hans has grown greatly since Xinjiang's liberation 30 years ago. "The Hans don't want to be here and the "minorities" don't want them here", one person told us...The Western media and China watchers have recently reported skirmishes between Hans and minority nationalities. We ourselves saw none during our month in Xinjiang...

It was true that we saw none; but, when, after completing our teaching, we asked to go to Kashgar, the centre of Uighur culture and commerce, the request was turned down 'because the arduous journey would be too much for people of your age' - from which we inferred that there was trouble there. Our inference was later corroborated. Meanwhile we had observed at the university that while the staff and top leadership consisted of both Hans and "minorities", who evidently got along well, the student dormitories were segregated. This, it turned out was by their own choice:

...the minorities believe strongly that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, while the Hans tend to bury themselves in their books. Yet the Hans avowedly admire the minorities' enjoyment of life, just as the minorities admire the Hans' diligence in study... Meanwhile they have imposed a sort of segregation on themselves in their dormitories, choosing rooms on different floors or at opposite ends of the same floor. This enables the Hans to quietly burn their midnight oil and to study on Sundays, while the minorities...late at night or over weekends, knock off for a song and a dance.

I listed other problems. The minorities often had only a limited command of their own language, which

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they had learnt as children at home but not studied systematically, having attended Han secondary schools in order to pass the university entrance exams. Then at the university they were burdened with studying their own tongue, Han and a foreign language. So when it was time for their graduation, they were not up to the level of the Han students and tended to be looked down on as "second class graduates".

I went into these and other complexities of race relations, showing that even given goodwill on both sides - which there was - the matter was hard to deal with. But I did not gloss over the problem or paint too rosy a picture. I was beginning, after years of doing positive propaganda for China, to be critically realistic.

I tried to be the same about U.S.A. when showing American films. In the article on Xinjiang I wrote:

Lin Biao-Gang of Four propaganda presented American society as totally evil. After their fall there was a swing to the opposite extreme. Not only American science and technology were praised, so was almost every aspect of American life, American democracy, American culture. Illusions about this capitalist paradise were reinforced by some Chinese television programs..The American euphoria reached its climax last year, during Deng Xiao-ping's visit to U.S....

So we showed an American film, "Nightmare", based on actual events in Mississippi in the '60s and '70s, exposing race discrimination in the South and the reign of terror on a county prison farm. Other films, and lectures on American literature served to present the balanced picture I aimed at. Balance, scientific objectivity, not extremism in either one direction or the other, that was at last becoming my watchword, in teaching and in writing and speech-making.

Earlier in the year I myself had been thrown off balance for a time. The Institute arranged a trip for the foreign teachers and their colleagues. Our first stop was Chengdu, in Sichuan, Isabel's birthplace and the scene of our courtship in 1940-41. After a nostalgic tour of our old haunts we went with our colleagues to visit a famous Buddhist temple. It was the first day of the lunar new year or Spring Festival. At the approaches to the temple gate was a long line of people waiting to go in. I was amazed at the size of the crowd and walked the length of the line. The majority were women, most of them old ladies with tiny bound feet, many accompanied by grandchildren wearing Young Pioneer red scarves. And every few yards there were stalls selling not the spicy Sichuan snacks that I expected, but incense sticks. As the crowd moved ahead (we privileged foreigners were not

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expected to queue) the little old ladies stepped carefully over the threshold at the gate, assisted by their grandchildren. Then they made the rounds of the Buddhist shrines and statues, muttering incantations and even kneeling on the flagstones to kowtow. I was amazed and horrified, almost to the point of nausea; one did not see such things in the capital, Beijing. Thirty years after the founding of the People's Republic, I thought, and still they are not liberated from superstition. And they're even indoctrinating the younger generation, wearing their communist red scarves. Our group consisted of several nationalities, from the different foreign language departments of the Institute. Some had been guerilla fighters in Latin America or in the maquis in France, others had been left-wing political activists in European or Asian countries or in USA. We were all struck by the unexpected sight and on the boat journey down the Yangzi River and through the Gorges, we discussed it. Some were more coolheaded or more accustomed to such things than I. But after hours of argument we reached agreement. The public practice of incense burning, incantations and prostrations had its good side. Marxist materialism had never grasped the minds of many of the masses; the superstitious practices had probably been continued secretly all along. Now they were out in the open, because the people felt free. That was a good thing not a bad one. I was finally won round to this view. One had to take a long view of social revolution.

In the next five years (1981-85) I travelled more in China and abroad, hopefully broadening my mind and other people's. In 1981 I taught a summer course at South-West University at Emei in Sichuan Province, where, as the Chinese Communists used to say during the war, Jiang Jie-shi 'sat on the mountain watching the tigers fight', one tiger being the Communists themselves, the other the Japanese. My teaching over I was joined by the rest of the family, including Isabel's China-born sister Julia and we all climbed the 10,000 foot holy mountain. Its narrow paths, worn by the feet of pilgrims over the centuries, were now thick with Chinese tourists who slept in the temples overnight, as we did, disturbing the contemplation of the monks. Isabel's parents, like many other West China missionary families, once had a summer bungalow on one of the mountain's spurs and she had climbed Emei many a time as a child. She was to the mountain born, not I. But after nearly three days climbing we reached the summit in time to celebrate my 71st birthday as well as to peer over the precipice where religious fanatics once jumped "into the embrace of Buddha." We celebrated our arrival differently over a bottle of Sichuan

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spirit shared with a congenial couple of Yugo-Slav honeymooners.

Next year, on our way to Canada we stayed for a week with a Canadian-Japanese couple in Japan. I wondered with a mixture of hope and fear whether this was the shape of things to come in China. The order and efficiency were impressive; you could set your watch by the arrival of the computerized subway trains, where orderly queues formed at lines on the platforms where the doors of the trains would open. Inside the trains the picture was less entrancing. Drunks lurched and leant on one, people pored over porno comic books or plugged into their compact Walkman recorders to listen to rock 'n roll. I asked one Japanese friend, an academic, how he coped in these surroundings. "I think," he replied, "or listen to Mozart on my Walkman." On the whole I found our visit pleasant, stimulating and slightly scary. When we took a morning industrial tour, as we went round the plants I found myself singled out for special attention by the accompanying photographer. I was wearing Beijing style cloth shoes and "cadre's" cap and after key workshops in the electronics factory and aircraft maintenance plant were omitted from the usual tour, the local friend we were with suggested that I had been sized up as a "Chinese industrial spy".

Following this brief interlude in Japan we went on to Canada and U.S.A. to visit old haunts and old friends including two of our sons, Carl and Michael. Travelling from the West Coast to the East we did little speech-making. After close on thirty years in China I felt less and less sure of what to say about it. What had once seemed simple now appeared complicated. Besides there were more and more experts on China in the West and I was happy enough to listen to them, unless their pontifications were too outrageous. Best of all I liked to engage in discussion. It was stimulating to be forced to question one's own long held beliefs.

As usual on our trips abroad we went to Brown's Corners, the crossroads hamlet where Isabel's ancestors, the Browns, had settled at the turn of the 18th century. I enjoyed these visits to our farming relatives, hardworking, generous church-going folk who accepted their Jewish in-law open-heartedly. What was good enough for their Isabel was good enough for them. They were not all having an easy time of it, for an old 100-acre farm was now too small to carry the cost of the machinery without which one could not compete on the modern market. One cousin was in process of change from landowner to proletariat, hiring himself out to do

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custom tractor work, clearing the country roads of snow and working as a builder in town, leaving his wife and sons to work the land. His plight whetted his interest in China and mine in Canada. I envied Isabel her roots and her intimate knowledge of them. I had really known only one of my four grandparents, the grandma who spoke English with an accent. As to the other three, I didn't even know precisely where in the Russian Czarist Empire they came from.

From Brown's Corners we headed east to stay with our second son, Michael and his family. Michael was then teaching Chinese at elitist Wellesley Women's College, near Boston. Its campus is a gracious park, with a lovely lake for swimming and boating, wooded hills and rolling lawns, dotted with solid stone structures and wooden frame houses set among trees. How different it was from our workaday Beijing campus with its barrack-like buildings constantly being added to, which had made it a construction site ever since we moved to it 30 years before. The fast-growing towns and cities of ancient China seemed so young compared with many of the mellow old towns - especially around Boston - of modern North America.

I found another surprising contradiction involving time and tradition at the home of friends at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The wife was a third generation Japanese American, in love with Japanese culture. The husband, of Scandinavian extraction, shared his wife's fondness for Japanese paintings, furniture, handicrafts and cuisine. But her parents, one generation closer to Japan and perhaps less sure of their place in American society, ridiculed their daughter's treasuring of her Eastern heritage. "Why do you stick to all this old-fashioned Japanese stuff?" they protested. "We're Americans. We don't sleep on tatami. We've got a beauty rest. Much more comfortable." I suspected that the younger generation were more comfortable in other ways, less worried about social acceptance. I sympathised with the older generation, smiling inwardly at my own wearing of Harris tweeds to assert that I was British.

In Boston, 40 minutes drive from Wellesley, I indulged my old habit, begun in London and Paris over 50 years before, of delving into history on the city streets, plodding along the well-blazed Freedom Trail, recalling 1776 and all that: Boston Common, the Old State House, the old churches and meeting houses. I delighted in the quiet flagstoned, tree-lined squares and classic houses around that most classic house of all which once belonged

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to the midnight rider and silver smith Paul Revere. Boston has a charm of its own, with its glass and concrete skyscrapers towering over two and three storey 18th century houses.

In Boston, or more precisely Cambridge, just south of the Charles River, we fell foul of our film fever, to which we were all the more prone because of the sign over the box office "Kids and Seniors Half Price". We saw at least a couple of films a week during our 10 weeks in North America: "On Golden Pond", with Katherine Hepburn growing old gracefully and Henry Fonda growing disgracefully old was something with which I could uncomfortably identify. Our grandchildren forced us to take them to see "E.T." and asked hopefully as we left the cinema whether I had cried. I hadn't. I don't care much for science fiction as a rule but this had the redeeming features of tolerance for creatures not like us, the healthy instincts of unspoilt children which compared favourably with those of their elders. What moved me most was "Ordinary People" - precisely the characters I like to see portrayed in films, instead of people who do not tread the face of the earth I know. But it is less the story than the circumstances which stay in my mind. I watched the video in the home of a friend, lolling on a bed, my arms around our divorced hostesses' four year-old daughter. The little girl took to me and snuggled close, happy in the embrace of a surrogate father. I felt happy, too. I loved, admired and respected our three sons but often regretted that we had never had the different joy of a daughter. I had a taste of it for those few hours of "Ordinary People".

Next, New York, to which I returned with mixed feelings of nostalgia and nervousness. It would take me back to my youth, to my intellectual and political awakening, to "girls" who would now be in their sixties and seventies, to familiar places. But would I be mugged? I was warned not to enter Central Park after dark, where once I played tennis with White Russian princes, nurse-maided bankers' brats, listened to the band concerts near the West Side Y where I had lived. But New York, I knew, would be different, just as I was now different. As it happened I was not mugged, though Isabel and I often walked after midnight between the homes of friends, one near 71st, the other at 93rd Street. But the uptown friend warned us, when coming home to her place on Riverside Drive late at night to walk down 92nd Street not 93rd, which was full of "S.R.O.S." - Single Room Occupants - old or unemployed people maintained at public expense after release from gaol or lunatic asylums. When I went along the street by day, which I made a point of doing - after all, I had been an S.R.O. of a sort

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myself in 1929 - I found folk friendly enough, sunning themselves on the stoops. Only one experience was mildly exciting - a trip to the South Bronx and the Lower East Side. These once middle class Jewish neighbourhoods were now poor and Black. But Nancy, our uptown host herself Jewish, urged us to visit them. She was an ardent member of the "I Love New York" congregation. But even she insisted we'd have to go by car, so we did - in a beat-up jalopy owned by a Chinese student, who drove apprehensively under Nancy's guidance. South Bronx was an urban wreck. Once an apartment fell empty it would be pillaged, especially for the copper gas and water piping. That was the beginning of the end; the building was soon an empty shell which became a nomad encampment. As we turned down one street we spotted a group of black youngsters huddled round a fire hydrant. "Quick, turn up the windows" warned Nancy. Sure enough as we drove past they aimed a jet of water at us through a rubber hose. This was the sort of sport they were reduced to, deprived of any other. On the Lower East Side, where Nancy's immigrant forebears had once lived, she urged us to take a stroll. This was her home territory. Nothing could happen to us. But our Chinese student driver stayed in the car, with the doors locked. We saw buildings with huge foreboding but artistic paintings on the walls. Inside, we were told, they were fortresses manned by drug pedlars. No, this was not the New York I'd known. But I loved it still though without the illusions of my youth, when I had emigrated in search of streets paved with gold. Those illusions, I thought sadly have been taken over by Chinese students to-day. Nothing I or other teachers say can dispel them. But there can be no youth without illusions, without the bliss of ignorance.

Going back to England was going home in the limited sense of seeing relatives - including a son, Paul - and old friends and old places. I had to face it, home was now Beijing. Here in London I was, if not a tourist at least an expat. In a barber shop, once, to my dismay, I was mistaken for an American and offered a crewcut. The relatives covered a wide range. There was the cousin who made a hobby of building the family tree. He had gone further than I in assimilation and concealing his Jewishness. He and his Jewish wife had been married in church. His surname, by the dropping of one letter, changed from unmistakably Jewish to old English. I couldn't complain, having once changed my own name from Crook to Cook to avoid my New York workmates' kidding. Edward felt he had to adopt his disguise for the sake of business dealings with Arabs in the Middle East. He

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lived in a grey stone centuries old manor farmhouse in the Midlands. There, en famille, he could safely spread the huge sheets of our paper tree with such telltale surnames as Cohen, Bernstein and Luxemburg (including my heroine Rosa) to say nothing of such Jewish Christian names as Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Rachel (my mother's), Hyman (my father's) and David (my own). Many of these biblical names, of course, have become non-sectarian of recent years. Edward talked of how, especially in the 19th century, declining landlord and bankrupt capitalist gentile families had salvaged their fortunes by marrying wealthy Jewish heiresses, so that the British aristocracy was "tainted" with Jewish blood. There was even a rumour, which Edward stressed was unsubstantiated, that Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Queen Victoria's consort, was the son of the "Court Jew", his mother's husband having been impotent. In return for such a juicy snippet, I told him the story of the German Jew buying a name at the time of the Jews' emancipation at the beginning of the 19th century. When he left home to make the momentous purchase his wife cautioned him not to be stingy and saddle his descendants with an ill-sounding name. He came back with the name "Schweissloch", meaning a pore. His wife cursed him until he retorted: "You should know much I had to pay for that one letter "W" - without which the name would have meant another aperture in the lower part of the body.

Another cousin, on my mother's side, was different. Her son, a talented musician and a doctor, wore his skull cap "yarmalka" day and night. Solly, like his father, had been a non-believer, but after completing his studies somehow went to do his internship in Israel. He came back what even my orthodox father would have called "meshuggunne froom" - crazy religious. When we invited him to tea he would not touch so much as a biscuit for fear it might be cooked with lard. His zeal infected his sisters, one of whom worked in an Israeli bank, the other, in a Jewish school and later married an Israeli fundamentalist. The father, Jack, a staunch Labourite, trade unionist and ex-army sergeant, thought his son's new found faith a "lot of bloody nonsense". Solly's mother preserved a benevolent but ineffectual neutrality. At times the fur would fly. But the family were good-natured, warm-hearted people and I visited them for old time's sake and for the sake of Isabel's anthropological interest.

After we had touched base in Britain Paul took us to West Berlin, where he had once briefly lived and studied the language. I had no compunctions about going to Germany, though many Jews cannot abide the

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thought of setting foot in the home of the holocaust. Nor did the Berlin Wall worry me. We passed through it once, joking the guards at "Check-pont Charlie" out of their stolidity and found East Berlin to have retained more old - world charm than the characterless glass and concrete west city. The Reichstag reminded me of Dimitrov, whose heroic conduct in facing his nazi accusers at his framed up trial in the '30s had inspired me when I was a student. The Perganum Museum was so skilfully laid out and the 2nd and 3rd century B.C. Greek city in Asia Minor had been so systematically looted that a visit to the museum was like a stroll through the streets of the ancient colony.

Switzerland lay on our route home, but more important for me was Greece. On the way back to China our plane landed at Athens and from there we took a week's side trip to Crete.

Again I have to ask myself what draws me to Greece? Certainly I am no scholarly Hellenist; and yet I was drawn, perhaps by nostalgia for my youth when I gained a smattering of Greek literature and legend; perhaps by recent reading of the fascinating books of Mary Renault. Whatever the cause, from the moment we landed at Iraklion after the 60 mile crossing from the mainland port of Piraeus I felt in a romantic mood. It was enhanced by the sight of young couples of holiday-makers suntanned, scantily-clad and wearing T-shirts inscribed "Crete is for lovers". Aphrodite was hard at work - or play. But Isabel resented the male chauvinism shown in the absence of Greek women from the cafes where we sipped our heady ouzo every evening. But the bronzed nymphs from the West - "the East begins at Greece" - looked as though they could take care of themselves and avoid the fate of Ariadne, deserted by Theseus after rescuing him from the minotaur and his maze.

We visited the maze itself and had no trouble getting in and out, thanks to the guide-book, which attributes the legend to the way the complex structure of the palace at Knossos, first built 4,000 years ago, would have struck a simple countryman of those times. The museum murals of "Bull Sports", with acrobats, some of them women doing handstands on the bull's back, delighted one with their grace, daring and humour even while recalling that they were the fore-runners of the barbarous bull-fights of Spain.

Tipped off by a blond young Norwegian backpacker in a cafe we left the crowded coast and bussed 3,000 feet above sea level to the central Plateau of Lassithi, dotted with countless white-sailed windmills. On a four-

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hour walk down to the sea again we left the beaten track to discover the sleepy, tourist-free village of Krassi, which boasts "the biggest plane tree in Crete". Under its spreading branches we sat at a table and sipped strong, sweet black coffee, one pleasant heritage from the Turkish invasion of the 17th century. The cafe proprietor spoke English and like several Cretans we met on our travels had lived in Boston. We told him we had a son there to whom we would recommend his coffee. That won his heart and when we left he refused payment. I dared not insist for fear of offending him. As we walked on we wondered. Was his refusal just a gesture of the Chinese type, not to be taken at face value, or was it genuine Grecian generosity? Isabel theorized that I was so scruffily dressed that he thought I must be a millionaire who could afford not to bother about appearances and that the free coffee was to build goodwill for future business.

I did in fact look more scruffy than usual not having shaved during our days up on the Lassithi Plateau. So when we reached Iraklion, prior to sailing back to Piræus, I hunted for a barber shop, my shaving tackle being stowed in the bottom of my bag checked at the port. It took some time to find a barber's due to my ignorance of Greek, but at last I found one and in I went. The tariff being listed in French I indicated that I wanted a shave, nothing else. Impossible the barber declared. I must have the whole works: haircut, shampoo, shave, everything short of the barber's pole. Pointing to my bald pate I indicated that a haircut was superfluous. The hair-dresser would not yield, so I walked out. Then thinking it would help to find another shop, I started copying down the Greek spelling of the word for hairdresser. The barber rushed out, sat me down in the chair, vigorously repeating the word "O.K." and in no time gave me a fine, close shave - nothing else. I was satisfied and surprised - until I realised that seeing me write down the name of the shop he feared I was going to report him to the Tourist Police.

There are times and places where I have had reservations about the police - but not the Tourist Police of Greece. The country derives much of its income from tourists, particularly from the budget tourists who form the overwhelming majority. And the farsighted Greek authorities evidently calculate that these amorous youngsters will grow up, marry, reproduce and return, without backpacks but with fatter wallets. So there is no class prejudice, ageism or sexism in their concern for tourists. They are not to be ripped off. When we consulted the Tourist Police about a reasonable place to stay in Iraklion, the officer on duty in the office gave us a map of the

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district and marked half a dozen places. In the rooms we found notices in English and French, as well as Greek, stating what facilities one was entitled to, what furniture the room contained, the charge for room and meals - all the information that the ignorant tourist needed for the protection of his pocket-book. This, I thought, is what we need in China, where so often the tourist is the rule and where hotels for the rich shoot up and budget tourists get short shrift. All the same, for us it was a joy to get back there. After all, we were not tourists. Beijing was home.

Or was it? Isn't home where one belongs, is at ease, accepted? Did I really feel more accepted in China than in my birthplace, where I had recently felt like a tourist?

Two months after our return I and Isabel and Sandra, a close friend and also a Canadian teacher, cycled one Sunday to the Western Hills with five graduate students. We planned to have a picnic at Ba Da Chu - the Eight Scenic Spots, where eight old temples straggle up the hillside to a ridge commanding a fine view for many miles around. We had often gone there before the cultural revolution; in fact I recall carrying Carl on my shoulders part way up the hill when he was small and I was young. But now, we had heard, the road was no longer open to foreigners without a pass, though the place was only an hour's ride by bike. So we procured a letter of introduction from the English Department bearing an official seal, which is of the utmost importance in China. Reaching a T-shaped fork in the road near the foot of the hill, we saw one of those nasty notices: FOREIGNERS NOT ALLOWED BEYOND THIS POINT WITHOUT A SPECIAL PASS. We dismounted and confidently showed our letter of introduction to the young PLA soldier at the check point. He seemed doubtful and after some discussion made a phone call. No, it wasn't good enough. We could not proceed. There was nothing for it but to turn back. It was one of those glorious Beijing autumn days with the countryside bathed in bright yellow sunlight and we were not going to give up our picnic plan. Once out of sight of the sentry we cut down a bumpy path across the fields, where of course there were no offensive signs and soon reached the entrance to the park. There one of the students went to the wicket and bought tickets for all of us, without question. We walked and talked and picnicked as students and teachers do; then we turned back down the hill to cycle home. But inside the entrance to the park we were stopped and escorted to a police post in a courtyard. We three foreign

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teachers were addressed politely, asked for our identification papers and ushered into a simply-furnished waiting room. The students were taken elsewhere for questioning. A phone call was put through to the university, which took longer than usual because it was Sunday and offices were closed; then we were told we might go. We said we would wait for our companions. We waited and waited and finally, went uninvited, to another room in the courtyard where our students were being asked to write self-criticisms. They said they had done nothing wrong. There was nothing for them to criticise. Deadlock. This lasted a couple of hours until dusk, while more phone calls were made and more efforts to persuade us three foreign teachers to leave alone. We refused. We had seen cattle-prods hanging on the wall. What place had cattle prods in a people's police station in China - or anywhere else? Their use on humans - even on cattle - would be protested in many countries. But here, in my China.. I was and still am horrified at the thought. Finally, after some agreement had been reached about sending in some sort of self-criticism, the students were released and we cycled home, with darkness falling over the fields.

Two things stuck in my gullet. Why should this scenic spot, which we had been free to visit years before, now be closed to us? The official reason was: security. That I brushed aside as nonsense. Ba Da Chu was not, could not be a military area. Any Chinese could go to the ticket office, pay his ten fen and go in. Only foreigners were excluded unless they had permits, which were issued as a rule to Japanese Buddhists visiting the temples. Were they less of a security risk than we or other foreigners? Or than any disaffected Chinese among whom any intelligent foreign spy would seek assistance? Obviously there were vestiges of gang of four anti-foreignism at work, reflecting Jiang Qing's well-known remark: "Not all foreigners are spies". But vestigial anti-foreignism was only a camouflage. The real reason, I suspected and later confirmed was that high ranking officials had fancy villas in the hills. I asked our knowledgeable son Carl, why admit ordinary Chinese citizens and exclude only foreigners? He smiled and replied: "Foreigners, at least Westerners, would be disgusted and indignant at such flagrant privilege. Ordinary Chinese people, with a long tradition of feudal privilege behind them, would expect it and be resigned to it." I deferred to his deeper knowledge of Chinese society. Once, I had carried him up those hills on my shoulders. Now he could enlighten me.

Next day we saw the university president. He was in rather a spot, for it would do the university no

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good to be on bad terms with local Security. So he had to take the matter seriously; and while being courteous and correct with Isabel, Sandra and me, he insisted that the students write a self-criticism. We feared that this would go into their records and affect their future. Isabel and I felt that we had nothing at stake and wanted to take as much of the blame as possible on our own shoulders - though we felt that nobody had done anything wrong except those responsible for putting up the NO FOREIGNERS sign, and of course ultimately those privileged persons who took public places as their private preserve. So we two, as the senior foreigners involved, wrote a diversionary letter of self-criticism with our tongues in our cheeks. It ran:

November 10, 1982

Security Bureau
Beijing
Dear Comrades,

On Sunday, November 7, with a Canadian colleague and five students, we cycled to Ba Da Chu. We had heard that this place was not open to foreigners without a pass, but we took only a simple letter of introduction from the English Department of our Institute, such as had been accepted when two of our other Canadian experts had visited Ba Da Chu with one of the same students two years earlier. When we reached the check point the sentry told us, after consulting with his superiors on the telephone, that this letter was not enough. So we turned back and went to the park along another road on which there was no check point. We realized that in doing this we were acting contrary to the spirit of the regulations concerning places not open to foreigners without a special pass. We thus committed a breach of discipline for which we apologize.

More serious than this is the fact that we were responsible for influencing our Canadian colleague to do the same and for involving the five Chinese students who went along with us. When they found out that we, who are old comrades and Advisers to the Institute, did not take the matter seriously, they followed our example.

We consider that we two senior comrades are, in fact, responsible for the breach of regulations, not our young companions who trusted our judgment and followed our example. We ourselves and, we are sure, they as well will learn a lesson from this matter.

Sincerely,
David Crook Isabel Crook (signed)

That was the end of the affair. The five students were not penalised. Two of them became, for a time, teachers at the Institute, all of them eventually went abroad for further study; which is to say, their records were untamished.

I myself had other dealings with Security both before and after this event. In 1979 I had been asked by the People's Daily, just before National Day (October 1) for my opinion, as one who had been in the country a

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long time, of what I thought of things in China. I chose to focus on the treatment of foreigners by Security, writing:

"What do I, a foreigner who came to work in New China 32 years ago, think of things in Socialist China to-day? I think as I have thought for decades, that Socialist China is the hope of the people of the world.

At the same time, along with many foreign friends and comrades working in China to-day, I feel there is blatant obstruction of the Chinese Communist Party's policy for the treatment of foreign personnel and that as a result our faith is being subjected to great strain.

..this week my wife, Isabel, and I together with our Chinese colleagues and students, saw a film in the Institute auditorium. When it ended an announcement was made: "Chinese comrades please stay in the hall. There is to be a meeting of the whole Institute." ...That is, foreign comrades were being politely told that they were not part of the whole Institute. Isabel indignantly said aloud: "I don't agree with this sort of thing" and students nearby said "Nor do we. You just stay."...

On March 8, 1973, Comrade Zhou En-lai said to us and other foreign personnel in the Great Hall of the People: Whatever the Chinese masses are told, you should be told...

Within weeks these instructions of the Premier were being obstructed by the gang of four. But the gang were overthrown three years ago and his words are still being disregarded.

Admission to many meetings of political and social significance, open to the Chinese masses, is barred to their foreign colleagues and comrades. It is based on nationality. And many foreigners working in China are saying that their Chinese friends are discouraged or prevented from associating with them at all freely; that in violation of the Chinese constitution mail from foreigners to Chinese is being opened or otherwise interfered with; that normal friendly intercourse between Chinese and foreigners is frowned upon.

The usual justification is "Security"...

If we cycle to the Western Hills on a Sunday we are no longer allowed to take the road past the old airfield, as we were 25 years ago. Why not? "Security". Yet Comrade Fang Yi long ago pointed out that satellite photos can show a man smoking under a tree. Don't they show the old airfield, then, and every aircraft on it...?

Such restrictions cause inconvenience to friendly people working in China or visiting it, but not to foreign intelligence services. Things hidden from friends are known to enemies...

"We have friends all over the world." That happily is still true. But these days friendship is subjected to bureaucratic strains and to frequent breach of the principle of proletarian internationalism as enunciated by those foreigners Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and exemplified by Norman Bethune.

What should we foreign workers in China do? Pack up and go home, as an exasperated young foreign friend of China told me a few hours ago she was going to do? That is not the answer. I think we should go on working as well as we can and try to make a small contribution to the enormous task of modernising China. And while in this way showing our friendship we should protest unfriendly anti-internationalist treatment - the exclusivism which Premier Zhou, on behalf of Chairman Mao, denounced...."

A few years after both these incidents - it must have been 1985 - Isabel and I had yet another contact with Security. I had been writing once more on the subject of signposts warning foreigners that they were "not allowed

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beyond this point without a special pass" - even though the point was often not the approach to a military area. There was one such place ten minutes walk from our campus: a beautiful old temple which, judging by the comings and goings of the occupants, housed nothing more militaristic than a kindergarten; though we did somehow get the impression it was for the children of army personnel, presumably senior officers. One day Isabel, whose eyes are sharper than mine, spotted an unobtrusive notice on the gatepost: "Entrance strictly forbidden to all except authorised personnel". The toddlers were evidently authorised. This amused us, for without the notice we would never have dreamt that the old temple housed anything more secret than a nursery. When we asked a well-informed and highly connected Chinese colleague about it we learned that there was some sort of intelligence unit there. The notice served no other purpose than to draw attention to it. This reminded me of the old Chinese story about the legendary notice: "There is no silver buried at this spot." A certain man stole 300 ounces of silver from his neighbour and buried it in the ground. Fearing discovery he posted a sign above the spot stating: Ci di wu yin 300 liang 300 ounces of silver are not buried at this spot. Naturally the owner dug up and reclaimed his stolen property.

The "No foreigners" notices always annoyed us. They were usually in three languages: Chinese, Russian (dating from the days of the indestructible friendship with the Soviet Union) and English. They rankled especially when we went to visit our old friends Sid Engst and Joan Hinton who worked on an agricultural research station a couple of hours bike ride from our campus. Sid and Joan received a constant stream of foreign friends. They themselves were old and trusted comrades and their cattle were above suspicion, being lineal descendants of a herd of Holsteins with a glorious revolutionary history having formerly been raised at Yan'an. After being subjected to bureaucratic procedures in applying for a pass and then being hassled at the check point, and the Ba Da Chu incident being now, hopefully, forgotten, I wrote a polite protest to Security, pointing out that these notices and procedures did more harm than good to China's foreign relations. Shortly afterwards, around the time of the lunar new year or Spring Festival, Security sent us an official communication - an invitation to dinner! It turned out to be an elegant and convivial affair. At the round table, besides ourselves were three Security officials, one of them a woman; a member of the Foreign Experts Bureau especially concerned with us Old Foreign Experts (that is,

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those who had worked in the Liberated Areas or helped the C.C.P. before liberation); and an interpreter, a former student of ours. Contrary to Chinese etiquette at table we talked of other things than food. I was thanked for my concern about China's treatment of foreign personnel and then came a surprising announcement: the offensive signposts were to be removed. Not of course at once. It would take some little time to "educate" the junior police personnel and the local army units. At the moment, we were told, 60% of the area of Greater Beijing was closed to foreigners without passes. By April 1, which was to say in a couple of months, the closed area would be reduced to 9%. This news called for more toasts in Maotai and we finally parted with vigorous handshakes. By April 1 the pledge was fulfilled and we once more cycle and hike without documentation to our old haunts in the Western Hills.

This cautionary tale, with its unhappy start and happy ending, arose from the question in my mind, was China really home? Perhaps its bitter-sweet nature suggests that it really is - and that the words of the old song need revising to "Home, bitter-sweet home". For what home, for all its sweetness, is without its element of bitterness? That might help explain both why, for all my years out of England, and for all my years in China, my frustrations and growing doubts as to whether "Socialist China is the hope of the people of the world" I feel committed to China but remain an Englishman.

An anti-Zionist Jew in Israel (1986)

In 1986 I went with Isabel on a fortnight's visit to Israel. Why Israel, with which China had no diplomatic relation?

I had become an atheist some 60 years before and had ended my flirtation with Zionism about the same time. In fact during recent years I had attended P.L.O. meetings in Beijing protesting Israeli expansionism and destruction of Arab refugee camps. I had told my Arab acquaintances at the Friendship Hotel, who organised these meetings, that I was an "anti-Begin Jew". And during the Cultural Revolution had spoken and demonstrated against the Israeli expansionist government. Yet in 1986, at the age of 76, the idea of visiting Israel appealed to me. Isabel has often said, approvingly, that I wanted to make our sons, when they were children, "aware of their

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Jewish heritage" and that was why I read them Bible stories. That was not the case. I regarded both the Jewish and the Greek as vital sources of Western culture, read them stories from both and gave both a materialist interpretation. Temperamentally I incline to the pagans rather than the moralistic monotheists. But I was interested in both literatures and so are our sons. All of them enjoy the imaginative reconstructions of ancient Greek history and legends of Mary Renault, as do Isabel and I. And having read the Greek poets, dramatists, historians and philosophers at college I responded to Greece almost mystically when on two home leaves Isabel and I broke our journeys back from London to Beijing to visit that country. Now, to me, a visit to Israel seemed especially appealing, though for political reasons I at first felt guilty about it. So I never applied for permission from the university Foreign Affairs' office, thinking it might put them on them on the spot.

The previous summer I attended an international educational conference at Taiyuan, Shanxi. At a workshop on the teaching of history a young European scholar presented an unusually interesting paper in the course of which he mentioned that his country had about five million people and seven universities. "What is your country?" one of the several Chinese scholars present enquired. "Israel" was the reply. None of the Chinese scholars raised an eyebrow. After the workshop I made a point of getting to know the historian and found him congenial, personally and in his approach to the teaching of history. He had been born in Holland and like other Israeli visitors to China had two passports and had travelled on the non-Israeli one. I told him I was born a Jew and was interested in his adopted country. "Come and visit us," he said. You can speak to the students of our Chinese Department at Hebrew University in Jerusalem."

About the same time two other incidents occurred in connection with Israel. I re-established contact with a cousin in England whom I had admired in my youth but with whom I had been out of touch for half century. She wrote that she had two sons living in Israel, one a professor of history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the other an archaeologist who had been living on a kibbutz since the '50s. She assured me they would be happy to know Isabel and me. What clinched the decision to go was an invitation from Suleiman, an Egyptian friend in Cairo. He was a left-winger but came from a Coptic Christian family. We had exchanged Christmas cards since I met him in England years before. Now that Isabel and I had given up teaching and were no longer bound by the

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university timetable we decided to accept, and fly home by way of Cairo and, if possible, Israel.

A religious person might have seen in this series of coincidences the hand of god. I merely thought it would be an interesting sequel to my teaching of world history, in which I lectured on Israel (from Abraham to Zionism in two class periods!). Isabel was willing, though she has in recent years become a less enthusiastic globe-trotter than I. We went.

I was worried about accepting the invitation of our Egyptian friend. He was a patriot. So should I tell him I was a Jew? I consulted the British friend who had introduced us and she wrote back, of course you should tell him. I did and discovered that his aunt was married to a Jew. He and his sister gave us a wonderful time, seeing the pyramids at night with "son et lumière", which I was vulgarian enough to enjoy. Apart from that, one of my most striking memories is this. As we were driving around, whenever Suleiman parked his little car, a long-gowned Arab would emerge from the shadows and offer to watch and clean it. When we returned he would again emerge from the shadows, where he had been resting, and start demonstratively dusting. Suleiman would give him some baksheesh. "I'll bet he's never done a thing to the car till now," I'd say. "He's probably been sleeping." "Of course he has," smiled Suleiman. "Then why tip him?" "Egypt is a poor country and I have a decent salary". He was an engineer. "Baksheesh is not for services rendered. It's a way of redistributing income".

Before leaving China we had met an Israeli official of the United Nations. He told us that a journey down the Sinai Peninsula would be a wonderful experience and that on the way we would be able to stop at St. Catherine's the oldest Christian monastery in the world. From there we could climb the mountain at the top of which god had personally handed Moses the 10 Commandments. Then we could go on to Eilat, at the southern tip of Israel, and I as a Jew would be allowed to enter the promised Land even though accompanied by my non-Jewish wife. I was not sure how our air tickets, issued by the official Chinese airline and routed direct to London from Cairo, would be adjusted; probably the deity (in whom I did not believe) would look after his chosen people. The idea was irresistible and we squeezed onto a crowded public bus leaving the Cairo terminal at dawn. The Israeli-built military road was first class but the desert looked barren and bleak and I wondered how my ancestors, even on a diet of manna from heaven had survived it for 40 years. Well, I thought to myself, we Jews - some of

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us - are survivors, or I wouldn't be around now. This impression was strengthened by the awesome view from the top of Mount Sinai. Range upon range of rugged rocky mountains as far as the eye could see. Enough to put the fear of god even into the worshippers of the golden calf.

We stumbled back by the light of the moon to our monastic cell at St Catherine's and next morning after being shown the sights of the monastery, including a lineal descendant of the Burning Bush, we pushed on.

At the border the young Israeli guards were larking about, surprisingly untense. I filled out the form and for the first time in my adult life wrote proudly that my father's first name was Hyman. After cursory questioning, to ensure that our bags had never been entrusted to anyone else (who might have planted bombs in them!), we were in. Neither I, as an atheist Jew, nor Isabel, an atheist Christian, experienced any mystical thrill. We did not kneel and kiss the soil of the Holy Land. But we enjoyed the moonlight bus ride past the Dead Sea to Jerusalem. At the bus station there we met with what struck me as a typically Jewish welcome. We asked the way to the hotel where the University had booked us a room of a young rifle toting soldier. He was most obliging but did his best to persuade us not to take a taxi. It was only two stages by bus and the stop was only a few hundred yards away. On our parting he whipped out a card. "What's this," I asked. "My uncle's restaurant. First class gefullte fish, lutkes, borscht, lokshen soup everything you want." These were all dishes my Grandmother had made in Stoke Newington. I thanked him but as soon as we dodged out of sight made for a taxi-stand. Those bags, even without bombs, were just too heavy. The hotel was luxurious and next morning we were treated to that gastronomic mirade the Israeli breakfast, a Jewish smorgasbord with as much as you like of everything from pickled herring to smoked salmon and cream cheese as well as grapefruit and Corn Flakes. Manna had nothing on this, I thought. Those poor Hebrews never had it so good.

Next day we moved to the Faculty Club of the University, whose Chinese Department, though small, impressed us. During a question and answer session following one of our talks - in which we presented China in as favourable a light as we could - one young man asked: "How do you account for the degeneration of Marxism-Leninism in China?" I said that the question was loaded and did my best to unload it. It was not easy. The questioner turned out to be from a family of immigrant Soviet Jews and he seemed still to hanker after happy days

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in the Young Pioneers. Another significant question, which I myself asked at the home of my cousin the professor of history, was: "Do you have many Arab friends?" It was his wife who answered, after a pause for thought: "I think we did have some Arabs for tea once, a few years ago".

The archaeologist cousin on the kibbutz proved more congenial. He was a warm, learned and dedicated man. He lectured at two universities but never opened either of his pay packets; he handed them over to the kibbutz and did his stint of dish-washing, horsegrooming and other non-archaeological tasks. Unfortunately only a small percentage of Israelis belong to a kibbutz and a still smaller percentage of members are so selfless. I felt proud to have him as a cousin and thought if there more like him the land might flow with more milk and honey and relations with the Arabs might be more peaceful.

We met Arabs through our American Quaker friend, Graham Leonard, who had taught in Beijing. He was a pedagogue and an Islamist but he knew the Bible as well as the Koran and as he drove us round the Sea of Galilee could identify every stretch of land, from the scene of the Sermon on the Mount to that where the Gadarene Swine dashed into the sea. And after enlightening us on many such matters treated us to lunch at the restaurant of the Loaves and Fishes.

I had to admit to myself that this New Testament history and legend which I had first read in my twenties at Columbia captivated me. But it did not move me as much as the Museum of the Holocaust, especially that section which showed that not all its victims had gone like lambs to the slaughter; some had fought, as in the hopeless but heroic fight of the warriors of the Warsaw Ghetto. That filled me with pride. So did our trip to Masada, which I had not even heard of until just a few years before. Masada is a massive rock west of the Dead Sea. In the first or second century B.C. it had been first a fortress then a palace of Herod. In 66 A.D. it was seized by Jewish Zealots, who drove out the garrison and held the fortress during their resistance to the Roman occupiers of the colony of Palestine. The Zealots fought off repeated Roman attempts to recapture the strategic position. It took the invaders seven years and a long siege by the crack 10th Legion to defeat the thousand Jewish men, women and children. In the end, the Romans having built a ramp to the summit, the doom of the Jewish Zealots was inevitable, and rather than fall into the hands of the heathen enemy they killed

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themselves. This, roughly, is the story as told by the Jewish historian Josephus, who had first fought the Romans but later was captured and cultivated by them. In his book, The Jewish War, Josephus records the exhortation of the Zealots' leader Eleazer, calling on them all to kill themselves and each other rather than fall into the hands of the heathen enemy. His speech has been printed as a leaflet and is handed out to tourists. I found it inspiring. Here it is in part:

"...long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone else but only God ... now the time has come that bids us prove our determination by our deeds... we must not choose slavery now...For we were the first of all to revolt, and shall be the last to break off the struggle... we can die nobly and as free men. In our case it is evident that daybreak will end our resistance, but we are free to choose an honourable death with our loved ones...

Let us pay the penalty not to our bitterest enemies, the Romans, but to God - by our own hands... Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery... Let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious winding sheet. But first let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in flames... One thing only let us spare - our store of food; it will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose death rather than slavery..."

Not all Eleazer's listeners responded at first. Many hesitated and he had to resort to further eloquence and arguments. But finally he prevailed and at last the Zealots "cut him short and full of uncontrollable enthusiasm made haste to do the deed...In the end not a man failed to carry out his terrible resolve." The dead numbered nine hundred and sixty, women and children included. Only two women and five little children survived. Thus spake Josephus.

I believed the account unquestioningly and was moved, though the thought occurred to me that this heroic tale might be used to inspire Israeli soldiers of modern times to deeds I would condemn. Still, I had mixed feelings about Masada. The mighty rock, towering above the Dead Sea, the lowest body of water on earth, was impressive. So was the seven years resistance of the Zealots. But I was repelled by its form - suicide. I would have preferred them to die in combat with the enemy, like the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto. I had similar feelings about the Wailing Wall, which the militant Israelis of to-day have re-named The Western Wall. I prefer the new name but realise that it too, like the Masada story, suits the interests of the expansionists. Our whole stay in Israel was for me full of complex thoughts and feelings.

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The adjustment of our air tickets for the journey to London proved simple. Who would handle a Chinese ticket in a country the Chinese did not recognise? The professional neutrals of the Swiss air line, of course. The efficient young Swiss woman in the office conversed in fluent Hebrew with her Jewish colleagues as she scrutinized our tickets and made measurements on a map, comparing the distance to London from both Cairo and Tel Aviv. "No problem" she said, and issued us tickets.

Back in London I told a Jewish friend, Jack Shapiro, how our visit to Masada and Eleazer's speech as recorded by Josephus had moved me. "Mass suicide" bellowed Jack. "That's a lot of bloody nonsense. It never happened. It couldn't. Suicide is absolutely forbidden by Jewish law and custom". (I was told years later by an orthodox Jew that exceptions to this rule are spelled out in the Talmud.) "Josephus is the sole source of the suicide story," said Jack, "and he was nothing but a Quisling. He was captured by the Romans and sold out. He spun the whole yarn to whitewash them. Masada ended not in mass suicide but in mass murder." Masada still moves me for all my atheism and former concealment of my Jewish origin.

Tibet

In the summer of 1987 Isabel and I spent our holidays in Tibet. Why Tibet?

Ever since I was boy I had gone along with the Lost Horizon-Shangrila legend, which still has currency in the West, especially in Britain. My fascination had been nourished at Cheltenham by a sensational guest lecture, the explorer McGovern, who had gone to Lhasa disguised as a beggar in the 1920s. Later it was fed by Isabel, with her love of mountains and minority nationalities. So in 1987 we went, thinking it must be now or never, Isabel then being close on 72 and I, 77. We decided to go by rail and road, not air, partly to see more of the country and visit student-teacher friends en route in Xining and Golmud in Qinghai; partly to adapt gradually to the altitude. As a further precaution, for some months in advance, I went on my NO NO BBC diet - no nuts, oil, butter, booze, cake. And of course we read a stack of books, the most rational of which proved to be Tom Grunfeld's The Making of Modern Tibet. Here is what I wrote after our return:

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Letter From Lhasa

Our bus had just passed the 17,000 foot Tanggula Pass on the road from Golmud in Western Qinghai Province to Lhasa. The next stretch of road was under repair. Another hub-deep detour. The driver cursed. He was responsible for keeping his vehicle in good condition. He pleaded with the Han leader of the road repair gang, made up of Hans, Tibetans, women and men. "I'll drive slowly and carefully over the new surface." After much haggling a bargain was struck. "O.K., but you must take a passenger to the next town." The passenger to the driver's surprise turned out to be a nut-brown, wrinkled, middle-aged Tibetan. He didn't even try to find a proper seat on the jam-packed bus but squatted impassively on the metal step inside the door. A mile on, a boulder blocked the way. "Get out and move that out of the way," barked the driver, as if ordering a serf. The Tibetan did as he was told. Before he could get back on the bus it had started again. But the driver had to stick to his bargain, for the sake of future favours, so he slowed down for the Tibetan to clamber back on.

The episode threw light on local race relations. The Han road-gang boss had good relations with his mixed crew. The Han driver, whose old home was 1,000 miles east, was an aristocrat of the road who despised the local 'barbarians.' He'd lived in Lhasa 10 years, he told me later. The pay was good. (There was no doubt a bit to be picked up on the side as well.) "Trouble is, the sun's so strong up here you get sunburnt." He didn't say "like a Tibetan," but that was what he meant. In a word, Hans and Tibetans get along well when they work together, but when they don't, the age-old Han sense of superiority to the "barbarians" - which Mao warned against in the early '50s - has not been rooted out. Policy and top leaders are against it and there has been a steady improvement since Hu Yao-bang and Wan Li reported on their visit to Tibet in 1980. But a gigantic job remains to be done in educating the Han people, including middle-level officials.

Western Visitors Love Tibetans, Hate Hans

Most of the Western visitors, beautiful young back-packers and comfortably off lamaists in monkish robes, are madly in love with all Tibetans, from the beggars to the Dalai. The Tibetans are indeed a lovable people - friendly, outgoing, smiling, warm (they love to touch you), more approachable and ready to smile than most of the Hans, who would be happier back home - even those who selflessly volunteered to serve in Tibet 10 or 20 years ago. And, conversely these same Westerners hate the Hans. Yet without the Hans and the material progress they have brought to Tibet, especially in transport and communications, they would hardly be able to visit their Shangri La. But they ignore this and focus on Han bureaucracy and travel service incompetence and lack of serve-the-people spirit. These Han haters talk of 'cultural genocide'. One might expect them to consider, if a culture is being killed (which it is not), what sort of culture existed in old Tibet, where runaway serfs and slaves were subjected, if caught, to amputation of hands and feet, gouging out of eyes, cutting off of knee-caps, hamstringing, being thrown into pits of scorpions. The Western Han-haters (as distinct from the Tibetans themselves) forget or ignore all this. They idealise everything Tibetan and all Tibetans.

One of them was a 40-year-old Californian nun, with shaven head and flowing robes. She had graduated from college in social work in the '60s, she told us, had been a liberal supporter of Kennedy, went in for "love-ins", took LSD. Somehow she had discovered that she could get much the same elation and content from Buddhism, so she kicked the habit and became a nun. Now she wandered about Asia (we met her first at a monastery but found her next-door-but-one in our hotel a few days later) lecturing on Buddhism for some American-sponsored organization

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with 40 branches. She was blessed with that peace of mind which passes all understanding, bolstered with stories of communist atrocities. There has been some improvement in Tibet, she said, since 1980; but the restoration of the destroyed monasteries was simply to attract tourists and to improve China's international image. We found a young Swiss monk more congenial. "Even for this simple life," he said, "you have to have an independent income. My parents support me." He clambered on to his tractor-taxi, headed for another monastery.

No Cultural Genocide

Our stay in Tibet (3 weeks) was short but it was long enough to convince us that there is no "cultural genocide." There is freedom of religion and freedom of superstition, too. (How does one draw the line?) We visited monasteries at Shigatse, the home base of the Panchen Lama, 200 kilometers southwest of Lhasa and at Gyantse, midway between. There Youngusband's troops in 1904 mowed down with machine-guns Tibetan monks armed with slings and muzzle-loading muskets. (Despite this many Tibetans preferred to be addressed in English rather than Chinese.) In the Jokung (Da Zhao Si) temple in Lhasa, devotees make the rounds replenishing the butter lamps (often from large tins, on sale in the market, marked "Norwegian edible fat"). The odour of sanctity in Tibet is that of rancid butter.

At the approaches to the temple, people flop down and make full-length prostrations for hundreds of yards at a stretch. Inside they poke their heads into the receptacles beneath the bookcases, so that the teachings of the holy scriptures will pass painlessly into their brains and bodies. The tri-lingual (Tibetan, Han and English) receptionist in our little hotel explained that it was wrong to swat flies. (Who knows, they might be re-incarnations of holy people or close relatives?) Packs of dogs, like holy cows in India, multiply unmolested; they sleep all day and bark all night. Buddhism, of course, has something to offer in human relations, being born out of rejection of the Hindu caste system. And religion and philosophy with their attendant superstition are an integral part of culture and ethnicity. In any case, you can't suppress religion, as Mao Ze-dong stressed. You must educate people and let it run its course. How long will it last, I asked an enlightened Tibetan, a century? Longer, he thought.

Some aspects of Tibetan culture are a delight and their preservation will enrich the culture of China. The architecture of modern dwellings is of classic grace - long blocks of three and four-story buildings, with large, tapering, deep-set windows decked with window boxes. The interior decorating of the four homes we visited (of well-to-do farmers, artists and aristocrats) all had carpeted divans placed at right-angles, with a table in the nook, allowing for cosy chats. Each room served as a living room by day and a bedroom by night. The wooden cabinets topped with elegant tea-cups of china or metal were painted with designs in brilliant, clashing colours.

Nature heightens the beauty of it all: the clear, blue unpolluted skies, the varied landscape, the jagged bare mountains, the green valleys, the rushing rivers. Every prospect pleases. But Man? Let's face it, Tibetan society is materially backward, superstition ridden, fatalistic. Few Han officials learn the language (but Han traders do: they have a material incentive). Yet backward societies do have something to teach materially advanced ones. Teachers must learn how to learn from their pupils.

Meanwhile, Tibetans are today learning to use some of the modern gadgets that the Hans acquired only yesterday. They quote curio prices on pocket calculators in the Barkhor market around Jokung Temple which we found crowded with worshippers. The Barkhor is a maze of flagstoned lanes, opening out every now and then into miniature market places. There you can buy hard-boiled eggs, rancid butter, yak meat (and yakburgers!), gaudy striped cloth shoulder-bags, crafted leatherwork, lethal knives, old coins of recent vintage, Tibetan carpets made in Tianjin 1,500 miles away on the east coast. Old men twirl prayer wheels as they make the

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circuit of the temple, mumbling incantations, chatting with cronies and doing the family shopping. "Sturdy beggars" sit in rows of 4 or 5, chanting and collecting cash. Others sidle up to you whispering, "change money," (offering 160 yuan of regular currency for 100 of the Foreign Exchange Certificates issued to tourists, which are redeemable in foreign currency and can be used to buy imported durables.) Young women in traditional dress, with layers of long skirts, peddle brooches and necklaces of unidentifiable precious stones. On the broad new avenues which a few years ago were either mud or dust, but are now well-paved, the motorized water-sprinkler warns of its approach by blaring a recording of Schiller's Ode to Joy (from Beethoven's 9th Symphony). The Tibetan type hotels, such as the one we stayed in for 10 days, like Elizabethan inns are built round courtyards, where the back packers swap transport and communications news about the road to Nepal and hang out their laundry. Our room was a corner one with two windows, through one of which we could see the Potala.

The architecture of the Potala is on a par with that of the Pyramids or European castles and cathedrals. So is that of the monasteries. Despite the efforts of Zhou En-lai there was destruction after the Dalai's flight in 1959 and during the cultural revolution. The Han-haters don't mention that the Red Guard vandals included Tibetan ex-serfs who nearly destroyed these Tibetan symbols of their oppression. Even today, we felt, there are more vestiges of ultra-leftism in Tibet than we have met in our travels in other parts of China. Some of the ex-serfs and slaves and their offspring are now officials suspicious of some of the current reforms.

As a postscript to this letter I added:

Looking back on our visit to Tibet I think that the wild anti-Han views that we heard expressed by some Western tourists were partly a conscious or unconscious response to propaganda issuing from the Dalai Lama and his backers. But it is true that ordinary Han people and cadres (not all) think themselves superior, and some tend to be arrogant. Still, the PLA kept a low profile while we were there. One saw them mainly transporting goods in trucks on the highways. The main task at this stage of history, I think, is to educate the ordinary people, to teach them to respect and learn from each other, no matter who is more advanced and who more backward.

Some tourists talk of "cultural genocide" - yet all around them the Tibetan language is spoken, Tibetan Buddhism is practised and Tibetan traditional clothes are worn. As to Tibetan independence, even if it were attained how long could it last in this era of neo-colonialism, with former colonial powers such as U.K. and France getting out politically but getting back economically - or ceding place to U.S.?

Why have I dealt at length with our short visit to Tibet? Not simply because it was the high point of our travels, because Tibet remains a land of romance; nor because it happens, since we went there, to have attracted more world-wide political attention than ever. But because it involves thoughts and feelings and memories which have run through my life since my childhood memories of 75 years ago, to do with racial roots and race discrimination.

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Why for that matter did I have the urge when no longer young to visit a dozen countries within a dozen years of my release from gaol? Was it to psychologically break the bounds of my prison cell? To do my duty as a propagandist which started with my becoming a communist in the early thirties? Was it intellectual curiosity, pleasure seeking? Nostalgia and the frustrations of an expatriate? Probably a mixture of motives. Whatever they are they are with me still. And health and Isabel permitting (after all she will have to put up with accompanying an aged spouse on his travels) the wanderlust will urge me abroad until I finally R.I.P.