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## **CHAPTER 16**

### **New Thoughts in Old Age (1980s)**

#### **Ethnicity and Identity**

"What does it mean to be a Jew when you're an atheist, when your language is English, your culture American?" I asked our friend Annette who manages to be actively Jewish, Marxist and American. "Well, it's like belonging to a family," she replied. "You don't necessarily like all the family members, but you're linked to them, you feel a special interest in them or concern for them." Later, discussing the question with Joan and other Jewish friends I came to the conclusion that what kept people like us Jewish was - anti-Semites and anti-Semitism. We had no wish to be special - certainly not to be the chosen people of a god in whom we did not believe. It was anti-Semites and anti-Semitism, ranging from the extreme of Hitler and the Holocaust to the subtle snobbery of the British upper class, the "Hymie" allusions of the in many ways admirable Jesse Jackson, the racism to be found even in the working class - these things and these people would not let us forget that we were Jews. Nor does English literature. As shown in the book The Alien in their Midst, British writers from Geoffrey Chaucer to C.P.Snow - with the honourable exceptions of Browning and Orwell - have truckled to the stereotype of Jews as misers, lechers, panders and power hunters. It was a blow to me to read so many derogatory quotes from so many writers I had loved so long. Still, in teaching, I have stuck to my defence of Shakespeare, for he makes a strong case for Shylock; and of Dickens, whose saintly Riah in Our Mutual Friend offsets the villainous Fagin in Oliver Twist.

Looking back on my acceptance of the bus boy job in the borscht belt in 1935, one thing surprises me. It must have suggested to perceptive people that I was Jewish. That was no disadvantage in the borscht belt. But throughout my four years at Columbia I had done my best, I think successfully, to conceal my Jewishness even from my closest friends. Both my surname and appearance made this possible. (Though I had some anxious moments in the swimming-pool locker-room, hiding my circumcised penis.) Why did I dissemble? The most

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

obvious and simple answer is anti-Semitism. Its existence in the States is denied by many liberal-minded Americans, out of ignorance or insensitivity. Nevertheless it was there. According to David Wyman, an American professor of Judaic studies and the grandson of two Protestant ministers:

American anti-Semitism...had climbed to very high levels in the late 1930s...During the decade before Pearl Harbor more than a hundred anti-Semitic organizations had pumped hate propaganda throughout American society...

In the fur business, run almost entirely by Jews, I made no attempt to hide my Jewishness. I couldn't have done if I'd tried. But at Columbia I could and did, and continued to do so on and off in later years. My behaviour was the result of personal experience in Britain, especially at Cheltenham. Even to-day I feel somewhat insecure, more so in Britain than in the United States, with people whom I do not know well. Nowadays my policy is neither to hide nor flaunt the fact that I was born a Jew. If in the course of conversation, the fact is relevant, I mention it, often to the listener's surprise. And I always maintain my lifelong opposition to anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Yet, irrationally, I cannot suppress my pride in the fact that of the four men who have had the most profound effect on the advance of modern thought in the West, three were Jews: Marx, himself a bit of an anti-Semite, Freud and Einstein. (The fourth man is Darwin). Yet when my Chinese students say, as so many of them do, that the Jews are exceptionally clever, I protest that the statement is unscientific (like the statement that all Jews are rich). The Jews, I say, resemble the Chinese in having a traditional respect for learning and a history of suffering from social discrimination and oppression. Such people always and everywhere work and study harder than others simply in order to survive. So Jews and Chinese are not *naturally* clever, they are forced to be clever.

Certainly I never forgot my Jewishness, even when I hid it. And while I have felt a pride, however secret and irrational, in the fact that Marx, Freud and Einstein were Jews, along with that pride I have felt shame, anger and revulsion at the brutality of Israeli soldiers against Arabs, which not even the suffering of the Holocaust can justify.

But Marx, Freud and Einstein were not the role models my parents held up to me. Disraeli, Rothschild,

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

Reading (the Rufus Isaacs who rose from cabin-boy to become Lord Chief Justice and Viceroy of India), Kid Lewis, (né Levy, the champion boxer of the 1920s) - these were my childhood models. In recent years I have felt special admiration for Leo Treppe, the Polish Jew who became leader of the Red Orchestra, the Soviet Union's anti-nazi intelligence network in occupied Europe during World War II. And those other Polish Jews who against overwhelming odds fought the nazis to the death in the sewers of Warsaw. I loved them all the more because they did not die like sheep. And as I have become more politically questioning in my old age I have taken pride in being related to Rosa Luxemburg and have pinned a quotation from her above my desk under the picture of Zhou En-lai It reads: "Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element." There was a time when I would have brushed those ideas aside as "bourgeois democracy". Now I feel China might learn from them.

In general there is no anti-Semitism to speak of in China, perhaps because there are so few Jews. The medieval Jewish community in Kaifeng and elsewhere has been assimilated. In the Middle Ages, there were Jewish communities in a dozen Chinese cities.<sup>1</sup> They came along the Silk Route with the Muslims or from Cochin in southern India. But in time Jews became officials, even generals, built synagogues that looked like Chinese temples, grew pigtails, bound their daughters' feet and ate pork. Nowadays one cannot tell their descendants from Han Chinese still less from the Hui (Chinese Muslims).

Later Jewish immigrants such as the pre-Liberation Jewish community of Tianjin (to which I might have belonged had I stayed in the fur business), like the Shanghai refugees from Nazism, left China before 1949. Among the post-Liberation "Foreign Experts", especially among the Anglophones, a high proportion have been Jewish leftists, but the total number remains small among China's millions. Some of these have been far more ethnically conscious than I. When our friend Vera Schwarcz told me in 1979 that she fasted on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, I was amazed. "How could you?" I asked. "You're a Marxist, aren't you?" In her book Long Road Home Vera recalls the incident and acknowledges that she had "few answers". What is her long road home, I wonder. A reversion from Marxism to Judaism? Perhaps the two isms are not mutually exclusive.

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

Vera quotes Elie Wiesel:

"Know where you come from, said the sages of Israel. It all depends on the inner attitude of the one who turns towards the point of origin. If it is just out of pure intellectual curiosity, the quest turns you into an ornamental statue."

My recent interest in my own ethnic origins started with intellectual curiosity. But the quest has not turned me into an ornamental statue. There is feeling mixed with intellectual curiosity. Perhaps the two are inseparable. But the intellectual aspect is easier to grasp, the feeling hard to define.

Certainly books and films have intensified my feelings. One book stands out: John Hersey's The Wall, a novel based on meticulous research, about the annihilation of the Jews in Warsaw. The title is taken from the wall which the nazis forced their victims to build round the ghetto to facilitate their own extermination. This horror story moved me profoundly. Hersey, another of whose books I had taught my students, happened to be in Beijing when I was halfway through The Wall and through a Chinese friend we invited the author to our home. Opening the door to him I was taken aback and blurted out: "Oh, I was mistaken. I thought nobody but a Jew could have written The Wall." It was an irrational remark, for Jews cannot invariably be spotted by their appearance. There are some blue-eyed blonds among us. But the fact was Hersey's parents were Christian missionaries in China. In The Wall he goes with such convincing detail into the complexities of the different social, political and religious sects and groupings inside the Warsaw ghetto, that my false assumption was pardonable. "How did you do it?" I now asked. "Research" was the answer. (But there must have been deep feeling too.) It was all the more remarkable when one considers the variety of topics he has written about in other books: the effects of the A-bomb on Hiroshima, the war in Western Europe, the life of missionaries in China. He left China soon after visiting us, before I had finished The Wall. When I did finish it I wrote to him, at Yale, telling him that the characters and incidents he described had become part of my life and now I missed them. They left a void. He wrote back saying that such letters from a reader warmed an author's heart. They had touched this reader's heart all the more because my grandmother's childhood home, Kalisch, was just over a hundred miles from Warsaw, where Jews from many such nearby towns were rounded up before being sent to the gas ovens. I missed by only two

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

generations being turned into a cake of soap.

Another book shocked me with an account of crimes committed not by the nazis, of whom one expects them, but by people who are generally thought of as civilized, enlightened, humane, democratic, liberal. This book is The Abandonment of the Jews by David Wyman. He establishes with irrefutable evidence that the Allies, supposedly standing for democracy against nazism, knew as early as 1942 what was going on in the death camps and could have done much to stop it by bombing the railways transporting the victims and destroying the gas ovens and crematoria. For "strategic considerations" strongly tinged with anti-Semitism they did not do so; nor, for political reasons, did they admit a fraction of the refugees which their own immigration laws allowed. This was murder with different methods from those of the nazis, but it was murder none-the-less.

I already knew a little of the background of this treachery from the film "Ship of the Damned". It is the story of the voyage of a luxury liner, just before the outbreak of World War II, whose passengers are all Jews. Hitler has allowed them as a propaganda gimmick, to leave Germany for Cuba, which, under Batista's dictatorship, refuses them permission to land. So do the governments of other countries, including U.S.A. under Roosevelt. In the end the ship is ordered back to Germany. One character in the film struck me especially - an assimilated German Jew more German than the Germans. He loves Goethe and Schiller, Bach and Beethoven and constantly boasts of German culture as the greatest in the world. Finally, his friend a dwarf, who despite his deformity is the epitome of humanity, exasperated by the 100% German's boasting says: "Of all the fools on this ship, you are the biggest fool of all." Perhaps, without realising it, I sensed that this barb was also aimed at me, with my love of British culture.

Another film which moved me is "Escape from Sobibor", a death camp, in which Jews and Soviet-Russian P.O.Ws. were allies in militant struggle against nazism. Their alliance gladdened me. Lenin had described the old Russian empire as "a prison-house of nations". That must have been ended once and for all by the Bolshevik Revolution - so I naively thought for many years after becoming a communist. The existence of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was something I could hardly believe - until I finally lost faith in Stalin. In 1946 or 1947, before we came to China, Isabel and I heard a speech by the Scottish-Jewish mathematician-

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

philosopher Professor Hyman Levy. He had headed a British Communist Party delegation to the Soviet Union, where he investigated the treatment of Jews. I had long admired this man, but as I listened to his report of anti-Semitism in the land of Lenin and Stalin I thought he must be blinded by Jewish prejudice. Now I know he was not. Forty years later the film about Sobibor re-assured me. That was how races and people should be under socialism, allies in the struggle against racism. Stalin had prevented this.

Then there was "Shoah", the definitive documentary of the Holocaust. I found it all the more horrifying and effective because of the scientific restraint with which it tells its tragic tale and gives the lie to those who try to play down or even deny the occurrence of the Holocaust.

Recalling these films and books I think of the times that I have been asked: "If you could live your life again what would you do differently?" Well, I wish I had kept up my reading of Chinese after my release from prison and had struggled to become bi-lingual like our sons. But, especially in these last few years I would include in my answer, I wish I had not hidden that I am a Jew. Such actions and feelings as mine are common among middle-class British (as distinct from American) Jews - among whom one may include Karl Marx, who spent the greater part of his working life in England, and who was never comfortable with his Jewish antecedents. The eminent British-Jewish historian Lewis Namier wrote "A man, to attain full moral stature and intellectual poise, to enjoy life and be socially creative, has to be at ease; this is seldom given to Jews". (Quoted in the New York Review of Books, June 14, 1990). Then why, looking back, do I regret my concealment? Out of shame at my spinelessness? And how did I finally come out of hiding? Because of growing realization of and respect for the achievements of the Jewish people despite oppression throughout the ages? Out of admiration for their struggles, from the Maccabees to the warriors of the Warsaw sewers? Out of a feeling of kinship with the Hebrew toast - "l'hayim" - "to life"? All of these.

Now that I have dwelt on my Judaism I must once more make clear that I have not reverted to religion. Not long ago I happened to meet a religious British Jewish visitor to Beijing. We found each other congenial and on parting exchanged gifts. I gave him an ornamental Chinese Muslim cap, something like a Jewish yarmulka. He gave me a leather-bound Jewish prayerbook in Hebrew and English. It brought back memories of the days of

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

my youth when I went to synagogue with my father and lustily sang in Hebrew the psalms of my namesake, David. But now I don't know what to do with the book, except use it as a paper-weight. A Chinese saying goes: "The leaf falls to its roots". But though my roots are racial, they are not religious. My heritage is cultural, not genetic. I feel that I am English rather than Jewish. Yet now I think that in hiding my Jewishness I was both cowardly and foolish.

Here in China during the Triple Anti (San Fan) movement of 1952 I plucked up courage and came clean. But I said I had feared that some of the senior Chinese professors when abroad had been infected by anti-Semitism. A Chinese teacher, however, told me I should be proud of my Jewish ancestry. That counsel helped me come to terms with my Jewishness and from then on I did not hide it. In fact, since coming into the open I have felt that to my colleagues not only Chinese but Western - even the British! - my Jewishness makes little or no difference. Indeed one, a Scot, whom I found especially congenial, surprised me with the news that the maiden name of his wife was Levy. Others, with conspicuously Jewish names or appearance, or openly observing Jewish practices, have seemed to suffer no discrimination. Finally, half a century after leaving Columbia I renewed contact with the college - and discovered that the name of the Dean was Greenberg and the alumni records and college publications he sent me were replete with Jewish names. Have things changed since I was an undergraduate in the early '30s? Or was I super-sensitive? Have I been a fool as well as a coward, subjecting myself to unnecessary suffering and shame. Maybe after all there has been some progress as well as barbaric cruelty since Shylock said "Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe".

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

## **Women's Liberation**

I was the son of a beautiful, forceful and ambitious mother and a mild, unambitious and unsuccessful father, whose financial failure undermined his self-confidence. So despite being the eldest son of a Jewish family, I did not grow up with the idea that men are superior to women. Then, at 32, I married Isabel, who differed from my mother in most ways but perhaps resembled her in some. It is a delicate matter to write of one's wife. So here I shall say only that Isabel, to whom I have been happily married for nearly 50 years, is neither ambitious nor domineering. On the contrary she is still, to my mind, influenced by her Christian upbringing to the point of being modest and retiring to a fault. But like my mother she has courage and character. (Jack Belden said when I was courting her in 1941: "So much character scares the hell out of me") Besides she is an extremely youthful septuagenarian and I often find it hard to stay her pace.

These being the two most important women in my life I have found it easy to accept, in theory, that women are equal to men if not their superiors. But theory, of course, does not always match practice. In goal I noted that at last I was washing my own clothes. So in my case as in others, whether a man really believes in equality of the sexes must be judged by women. Still, I can recall no time in my life when I thought men superior to women.

In practice I do not claim to have been far in advance of my time. Women's Liberation has advanced fast in the last few decades and I have tried to keep up with it, nothing more. Now I feel uncomfortable when I meet young fathers who were in the delivery room when their children were born. I certainly was not. When our sons were born in the late '40s and early '50s, even in the West the father was rarely present. In China such a thing was unheard of and would probably have been thought obscene. Still, I regret my absence and feel I might have been a better husband if I had been present; that I'd have shouldered more of the burden of bringing up our three sons. Isabel has taken on more of that than I, despite carrying on her teaching and taking far less than the permissible maternity leave.

On a less sublime, if not entirely ridiculous level, when we entertain - which we do often - Isabel bears



**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

the brunt. She insists that one of the two of us must stay with the guests; and she'll be up and away to the kitchen to fetch and carry before I can get to my feet. My enforced passivity makes me feel a bit of an M.C.P. (male chauvinist pig). Still, I feel superior to a Western friend who once pontificated: "Women will never be fully liberated until the kitchen is electrified". Presumably, even then, they would be in the kitchen, but only turning switches.

In the last few years Isabel's attitude to Women's Liberation has changed. At one time she opposed singling it out as an end in itself, maintaining that women's problems would be solved as society established socialism. So there was no need for a separate women's movement. Now she recognizes that there is, and has become a leading light of the campus Women's Forum and in setting up a new course in Women's studies. I support this but am only a rank and file student.

In the past Isabel was happy, or at least willing, to play second fiddle, especially in public appearances. When a speech or a lecture was called for she would try to leave it to me; for she, being inclined towards perfectionism, found the task an emotional strain. I, setting lower standards, would take it on without much ado. But when she could not escape, I often found her contribution more solid and deep than mine would have been. And when we see the same film or read the same book, which we do most of the time, she is more sensitive and alert to an author's male chauvinism.

For such reasons over recent years I have gradually been forced to relinquish any assumption of superiority, especially in the field of politics. This assumption stemmed from the fact that when we first met, nearly 50 years ago, I was a Communist and Isabel had still not shed the influence of her religious upbringing.

My awareness of women's problems has been heightened by living in China, where thousands of years of feudalism have made them all the greater and more pressing. The very first law drafted after the setting up of the People's Republic in 1949 was the Marriage Law. It aimed at righting the wrongs of centuries of oppression and discrimination. In those early days Isabel and I, being treated as comrades first, foreigners second, took part in discussing the draft law and put forward our suggestions for its improvement - along with millions of Chinese. But as time passed I realised more and more clearly that passing a law is the beginning not the end of dealing with

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

a social problem; that the Marriage Law, enlightened as it was, was nothing more than a weapon available to those who dared seize it and wield it. The fight for equality continues, with setbacks and defeats as well as victories.

My growing awareness of this has been heightened by books, films and plays. A few years ago I saw a play called Joyful Events - Red and White. The red referred to marriages, the white to funerals. In it a young woman is widowed soon after marriage and her in-laws fight furiously to prevent her from marrying again. Widow re-marriage was a tabu in old China and "Arches of Chastity" were erected to the memory of those who stayed chaste until death. This virtue could be aspired to only among the well-off. Among the poor, especially the peasantry, a woman could hardly survive without a mate. The play made clear, that if a widow married again her in-laws lost the services of a lifelong, unpaid servant.

Films, such as "A Woman of Good Family", deal with a different problem. Among the peasants, the vast majority of the Chinese people for centuries, man and wife formed a team, he to delve and she to spin. But marriage could be an expensive business which the poorest could often ill afford. And at times a woman, in her late teens or early twenties, might be forced by her parents to marry a little boy, even a bed-wetting baby. If the nursemaid wife were to fall in love with a man of her own age and have illicit relations with him, stern law and tradition punished the lovers, with cruel death or banishment.

I have read many books and films on the problems of women and women's liberation in western society in the last ten years, notably Marilyn French's The Women's Room, Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook and Jane Somers, Margaret Drabble's The Radiant Way and others. Alice Walker's The Color Purple moved me especially. Black men, I learnt, resented it for "washing the Blacks' dirty linen in public; they had enough scorn to cope with without that". But, as a Chinese woman colleague pointed out, "sexism came before racism and black women have added burdens including incest foisted on them; they bear the brunt of white oppression; Alice Walker is right in bringing these things out into the open."

Life looms larger than literature. I have been struck by the fact that, especially since my release from prison in 1973, most of our closest friends, Isabel's and mine, have been women. And in the course of our

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

friendship with Chinese women, former students and present colleagues, I have learnt something of their problems, especially those of older unmarried women. After 30 they are 'old maids', the better educated the more unmarriageable; divorcees even more so, no matter how blameless the wife and how guilty the husband. The divorced woman, in a society which traditionally regarded her as her husband's property, is "secondhand goods". The man's "peccadilloes" can be overlooked. We have more than one young woman friend suffering from this inequality. In one case the marriage had hardly been consummated before it fell apart, entirely because of the man's misconduct. After the divorce the woman fell in love with a man who would have liked to marry her, but his parents objected strongly to his marrying a divorcee and he lacked the courage to resist them, backed up as they were by public opinion. In the end the young woman married a westerner - a way out increasingly sought by Chinese women who have been divorced or are considered old maids. Emancipated young women, unwilling to enter into marriage with a man chosen for them by their parents, have asked us whether it is possible to lead a happy life without marrying. Such a thing is so rare and considered so abnormal in conventional Chinese society that an unmarried person is not eligible for a university flat but has to share a room. Among our close women friends in the West are two who, of their own volition, have become unmarried mothers. They have their difficulties, but they are not ostracised as they would be in China. I myself, a decade or two ago, might have thought them reckless or unwise. Now I empathize.

Learning of such cases among friends we love and admire, has helped me in recent years to understand and support women's liberation.

But I dare not claim to be free from any assumption of male superiority. Wrong feeling lingers on long after thought has been set right. This was driven home to me during our family trip to Ahba on the border of Tibet in 1976. It was Isabel, not I, who trekked there nearly 40 years before and had now returned, with her husband and family. Our visit was grounds for celebration, with traditional Tibetan songs and folk dances. The festivities were accompanied by the blowing of six foot long horns whose deep tones resounded along the valleys. And of course there had to be speeches and responses. That was where I was put to the test - and failed. On these occasions Isabel, not I was the guest of honour; I was just part of her entourage. And contrary to custom in this

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

patriarchal society, her name was always mentioned first. To my surprise and shame I found this a little hard to take. For forty years I had quoted approvingly Lenin's saying that under communism those who had once been kitchen maids must play their part in running society. When Isabel and I wrote our books on land reform in the Liberated Areas and later when we discussed the new Marriage Law in the early 1950's I spoke and thought of myself as a model supporter of equality of sexes. But in 1976 I discovered that in my feeling, as distinct from my thinking, there lurked assumptions of male superiority. Why was Isabel's name mentioned before mine?

For me - and perhaps for all my fellows - men's liberation is as long and hard a struggle as women's and inseparable from it.

## **Gay Liberation**

Support for women's liberation led me towards gay liberation. But that was initially an intellectual and impersonal process. It was not, for me, the heart of the matter. That became clear when I inadvertently learnt that a young man, whom I had known and loved since he was born, was gay. The knowledge came at first as a blow, combined with a feeling of affront. But this feeling came into conflict with affection and, with the young man's help and Isabel's, it finally changed from acceptance to support for his homosexuality.

Although in recent years I have grown to support gay liberation, the homosexual sex act - especially among men - remains distasteful to me, despite my evident attractiveness to homosexuals in my youth. Still, now as then I have no trouble maintaining friendly relations with homosexuals, of whose numbers I grow increasingly aware.

Yet I have not fully outgrown the common custom of using the word bugger as a term of abuse. When I catch myself doing so in the presence of a homosexual friend I could bite my tongue off.

Since my release from prison in 1973, through some personal friendships and with the growing movement for gay liberation in the West, I have come to believe that some 10 and 20% of the human race are disposed towards homosexuality; and that homosexuals include a high proportion of extremely sensitive and

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

talented people, to say nothing of once in a few centuries producing a Sappho or a Michelangelo. So gradually I have sloughed off the conventional contempt and mockery of gays once prevalent in the society into which I was born.

My change of mind, as in many matters, has been helped by reading and seeing films. One remarkable book, which deserves to be better known, is The Milkman's on His Way by David Rees, a touching account of a youth's first painful and ultimately joyful realisation of his homosexuality. Of several films I would single out one with an off-putting and misleading title, The Kiss of the Spiderwoman. It is set in an unnamed Latin American country. The two chief characters, one a political prisoner, the other a homosexual, are confined in one cell. At first each finds the other incomprehensible, the gay knowing nothing of revolutionary politics and the politico regarding the gay as contemptible and disgusting. Gradually they come to understand and respect each other, largely through the sympathetic concern and help of the homosexual. In fact on his release he gives his life in an unsuccessful attempt to save that of his new found friend. Both parts are superbly played and this, combined with the story, brought me for the first time in my life to feel that two such contrasting characters could be equally admirable human beings.

A more personal hangover than my linguistic lapses into use of the word bugger, concerns lesbians. Whenever I find a sexually attractive woman to be a lesbian my instinctive reaction is "what a pity". Not that, at my advanced age, I have designs on her. Perhaps out of a feeling of male solidarity, I feel that she is a loss to my fellow men. What does that imply? That in my subconscious I still regard every attractive woman as a sex-object?

That may be part of my Western heritage. I know of no reason for there not being a similar proportion of homosexuals in my adoptive homeland, China, where homosexuality is taboo, not talked or written about by most people. Where discovered it is often regarded as at best a disease, at worst a crime. Yet there are clear indications of homosexuality in the classic 18th century novel The Dream of the Red Chamber, and in earlier Chinese literature. Indeed, for centuries Chinese emperors were bi-sexual. But since the People's Republic was established in 1949 attitudes have changed. I recall being told many years ago, probably in the '50s, that P.L.A.

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

soldiers caught in the act were shot. I have no idea whether this was true, but certainly among the people of all classes that I have known in the past 40-odd years homosexuality has not been discussed unless I or other Westerners have brought up the subject. And when we do, all but the most sophisticated of our Chinese friends are embarrassed and tongue-tied. In the mid '80s the American poet Allen Ginsberg visited our university. His poem Howl was known to some teachers and graduate students of our English Department and at their request Ginsberg recited it in the university auditorium, to loud applause. Though the poet did not flaunt his homosexuality word of it got round and some of the less sophisticated graduates came to us and spoke of it with disgust. In earlier years I might have sympathised with them. Now I took it on myself to give them a lecture in understanding and tolerance. I still consider it my duty, as the occasion arises, to repeat the lesson.

In recent years there has been a trend towards understanding and tolerance in China, especially among intellectuals. This is evidenced by the reading of such books as Paper Marriage by the Taiwanese writer Chen Ruo-xi and articles in Mainland magazines which tend to be objective though not conspicuously sympathetic.

I feel that the growth of my own understanding and sympathy for both gay liberation and women's liberation is part of my growing up - at the age of 80.

### **"Thought Liberation"**

Another liberation important for me has been the liberation of my thinking. The Chinese phrase "thought liberation" became current around 1979, with the beginning of the reforms initiated by Deng Xiao-ping. It is logically linked - by way of contrast - with another catch-phrase, "ossified thinking", which characterised the obstruction of the reforms by those who clung to outworn tradition and dogmatism. And it went along with what the Western media referred to as "de-Maoification".

In 1973, when I was released from gaol, our sons, with a mixture of amazement and pity heard me say that my imprisonment had its positive side. I suppose I was then something of a "whateverist" - one of those who held that whatever Mao said or did was right. My abandonment of that attitude was a gradual process. I recall no

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

sudden flash of enlightenment, no irreligious vision. But little by little my support for the cultural revolution, which my own imprisonment did not immediately undermine, was diminished as I heard and read more and more of the crimes and cruelty committed in its name. Mao's failure to defend Zhou En-lai against the gang of four, even while Zhou defended Mao against them; his failure to attend Zhou's funeral or speak out on that occasion - all this raised questions in my mind. Along with most Chinese intellectuals I admired Zhou, for his integrity and incorruptibility, his saving China from chaos, his holding the country together at the cost of his own life, his modesty and unselfishness. So when our son Michael asked me, not long after Zhou's death, what I would like for my birthday, I asked him for a pair of scrolls in his own calligraphy, of a couplet originally applied to the Chinese statesman of ancient times, Zhuge Liang, nowadays to Zhou En-lai. It reads: "Bend your back to the task until your dying day." The scrolls still hang on the north wall of our living room; on the west wall is a poster picture of Mao Ze-dong. Is this an unprincipled contradiction? I think not. I admire certain qualities in both men: Mao for his genius as a revolutionary leader, without whom China's liberation, the victory over the Guomindang and the Japanese and the weakening of feudalism in the countryside would, to say the least, have been delayed; Zhou, I admire for his uprightness, freedom from personal prejudice in defence of justice, his broadness of mind, support of science, art and culture. He doubtless had his faults. As Lenin said: 'No man is perfect. The man who has made no mistakes has yet to be born.' Discussing this axiom a Chinese colleague acknowledged its truth, then added "But if anyone was perfect it was Zhou En-lai"! Such illogical admiration is widespread. I myself believed that Mao was the greater genius. But gradually I came to acknowledge that with his greatness went great faults. I went along with the growing realization that Mao was a man not a god.

Pondering these matters over the years and learning more and more of unjust imprisonments, beatings, tortures, killings during the cultural revolution led me to scepticism. I recalled that the motto of Marx was de omnibus dubitandum "everything is open to doubt".

So I gained the courage to question Mao's judgment. I had long before done so on one point: his opposition to birth control. I felt that lowering China's birth-rate would help raise her living standards. Now I felt that in turning a blind eye to the gang of four's denigration of intellectuals, without whose contributions the

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

revolution would grind to a halt, Mao made a gross blunder. At the same time he singled out the bourgeoisie (including "bourgeois intellectuals" - whom Zhou En-lai defended) as the main enemy. Surely Mao should instead have led the onslaught against feudalism, which for millennia had kept the masses in subjection, in ignorance and superstition.

Lenin's exposure of the use and abuse of "bourgeois democracy" had influenced me ever since I was a student. Even then I knew that for all its defects and limitations bourgeois democracy was far in advance of feudalism. Now I felt more and more that Chinese society even after the revolution was still strongly tainted with feudalism and that a bit of democracy would do it a world of good.

At the same time I began to feel that my conviction that Marxist philosophy was superior to any other had led me to look down on non-Marxists and to make me unwilling to learn from them. I had felt that China under Mao had all the answers. My lazy loyalty to him, to China, to dogmatic pseudo-Marxism had been leading me towards "ossified thinking".

Reading played a big part in saving me from this.

For years we had copies of George Orwell's 1984 and Animal Farm on our shelves, but left them unread, until in the year 1984 I screwed up my courage to the reading point. The book left me in a state of depression. Forty years earlier, in Rangoon, I had read Orwell's Burmese Days, but that dealt with the writer's policeman days in the '20s and I read it for local colour. Then in the '70s on the recommendation of a New Zealand colleague I read the essay Politics and the English Language. Agreeing wholeheartedly with Orwell's advice on writing while questioning his politics, I had the piece copied and circulated to the students in my class - with the political parts omitted! I did this on the grounds that such heretical views would divert attention from my objective, which was to improve the students' writing. Later still, as preparation for the writing of this autobiography, I read Homage to Catalonia to refresh my memories of my months in Barcelona in 1937, when I was assigned to gather intelligence on the P.O.U.M. and its clash with Republican and Communist Party forces. This work had led to my meeting and reporting on Orwell whom I then regarded as an enemy. Yet now, in the '80s I found his reporting of the Barcelona events tallied with my recollections, though they might differ in attitude and analysis.



**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

All my early reading of Orwell had left me with mixed feelings. I admired and envied his skill as a writer but was put off by vestiges of his Old Etonian mentality. So the emotional impact was minimal. With 1984 and Animal Farm it was devastating. The exposure of the misuse of language and distortion of history resounded in my mind and the lampooning of bestial bureaucrats and swindlers applied only too aptly to China, where such creatures also roamed and trampled. Orwell depicted them with irrefutable force and clarity. I felt all the more drawn to him after reading his essay on Anti-Semitism in Britain and his description - albeit bitterly exaggerated - of his boarding school days. Though I was a less sensitive soul I felt that we were in a way fellow sufferers. Should I then feel remorse for spying on him in Spain in the '30s? No, I had acted in good faith, risked my life and done no great harm to Orwell. Now, reading him nearly half a century later I was grateful to him for helping to emancipate my mind.

Other bitter reading experiences speeded my 'Thought Liberation' process. Solzhenitzin had been denounced by leftist friends for his reactionary medieval mysticism. Yet when despite them I read his Cancer Ward it struck me as a great work. It had the ring of truth in the light of my own experience. Another bitter pill, which deserves to be better known, was On Trial by Arthur London, who joined the Czech Communist movement at the age of 14, fought in the International Brigade and with the French maquis and after World War II became his country's Deputy Foreign Minister. Yet, on the instigation of Stalin's secret police chief Beria, he was framed up, imprisoned by the Czech police and subjected to physical and mental torture. He survived because of his relationship by marriage to a leading French Communist. My understanding and vision of socialism was and is that it should be the inheritor of the best of human achievement and raise civilization to a higher level. Yet Arthur London's factual account of barbarism perpetuated in the name of communism by a self-styled socialist state shows the lowest depths of dishonesty and man's inhumanity to man. It shook me all the more because of the 14 victims framed, all were former members of the International Brigade and 11 were Jews. No, I owed no loyalty to pseudo-socialist racists as unscrupulous and sadistic as the nazis. Reading The Trial was a painful step in my mental emancipation.

But my horror at The Trial in the 80's following my reading of Orwell in 1984 led to repudiation not of

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

communism but of its betrayers, perversers and distorters. Czecho-Slovakia was far away in Eastern Europe, a part of the world I had once admired but had never known. My chief concern was China

Like most Chinese I hate their country's traditional corruption, its Confucian hypocrisy and arrogance - contempt for inferiors and truckling to superiors, its sexism and racism - the Han's sense of superiority to the Minority nationalities.

This many-sided hatred had a history, which culminated in the tragic events of June 1989.

In 1973 I emerged from 5 years in prison defending the cultural revolution which had sent me there. The next five years of personal freedom led me step by step to Marx's motto de omnibus dubitandum - everything is open to doubt.

In the spring of 1979 Wei Jing-sheng, a young electrician, son of an official, was convicted of "selling state secrets to a foreigner". In the autumn he was sentenced to 15 years in prison. "State secrets" have never been precisely defined in China and these "secrets" had been published in the Reference News. Attendance at the "public" trial had been strictly selective, excluding the accused's family. The foreigners to whom the "secrets" were allegedly sold were never identified or charged. I had believed and often said that China was struggling hard to develop a legal system and that in the west this had taken centuries. Nevertheless the handling of Wei Jing-Sheng struck me as a clear case of "kill the chicken and let the monkey see", of making a victim of one in order to intimidate others. It deeply disturbed me. So did the abolition about this time of the "four big freedoms" advocated by Mao Ze-Dong and guaranteed in the Chinese constitution: The right to speak out freely, air grievances, hold big debates and write big character posters. I acknowledge that used irresponsibly these rights could do harm, for instance by slander, but I argued that this danger could be prevented by insistence on signed statements and laws of libel.

In 1987 the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yao-bang, resigned after what amounted to a no confidence vote (for not suppressing student demonstrations). The majority vote had been secured by packing the committee with elder statesmen of the Central Advisory Committee. These were not even members of the Political Bureau, which itself was not qualified, according to the Party Constitution, to depose a

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

General Secretary. That could be done only by a Plenary session of the Central Committee. Hu Yao-bang had a reputation for democracy and humanity. This was evidenced by his earlier report on serious breaches of CCP policy towards Minority Nationalities which he had issued after an investigative trip to Tibet. Isabel and I had spent our summer holidays in Tibet the very year of Hu Yao-bang's dismissal, and had observed the arrogant attitudes of many Hans, officials and others, towards Tibetans. For this and other reasons I was disturbed by Hu's ouster and also by reports of the severe crackdown on Tibetan demonstrators. I had long subscribed to the view that Tibet was as much a part of China as Wales and Scotland were of the United Kingdom, and I did not favour national independence for Tibet, fearing that if it were no longer a part of China it would soon be dominated by some other power. But I did feel Tibetans deserved respect for their culture - their superb architecture and interior decorating, their literature, their medicine, the very creation and maintenance of an indigenous civilization, however "backward", under the harshest natural conditions. Respect was in fact called for by China's policy towards Minority Nationalities. But policy and practice do not always correspond. In Tibet, as Hu Yao-bang had pointed out, it was more honoured in the breach than the observance.

So in April 1989 when thousands of students marched to Tian An Man square to mourn Hu Yao-bang's death I sympathised with them. At the same time I realized they might well be using Hu's death and the subsequent commemoration of the May 4 movement of 1919 to express their resentment of corruption in high places and their desire for more freedom and democracy. Isabel and I on one occasion took mineral water and plastic sheets to our students in the square. But we did not encourage their hunger strike and urged them to return to campus. On May 20, the day martial law was declared, we drafted the following letter, posted it at the main gate of the campus and sent it to the People's Daily, Official organ of the C.C.P.

We write as old friends of China who have been inspired by the revolutionary achievements of the Chinese people under the leadership of the C.C.P. ever since we started work in the Liberated Areas in 1947.

At this historic juncture we feel profound concern for the future of socialism in China. Above all we fervently hope that no attempt will be made by China's leaders to settle the present crisis by force. We believe the use of force would not bring about unity between the People's Government and the Chinese people but would widen the rift between them. We believe it would not establish stability but would create chaos. We believe that unity must rest on mutual respect, that stability can be based only on democracy, not on repression. We believe

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

that to avoid the tragedy of pitting the People's Government and the People's Army against the people there must be immediate and unequivocal recognition of the sincere patriotism of the ongoing broad mass movement of the students and the mass of the people who support them. Our forty years of teaching tell us that the patriotic students of today are no more gullible children than were today's senior leaders when they founded the C.C.P. and led the revolution six or seven decades ago.

We believe that recognition of these realities is essential for China's progress in political reform which is inseparable from economic reform, for the advance of socialism in China and for the restoration of her international prestige. Restraint, respect and democratic discussion not the threat and use of violence can bring about the resolution of the present crisis that we and all friends of China desire.

David Crook

Isabel Crook

May 20, 1989 Advisors to the Beijing Foreign Studies University

This put us in a position vis a vis the C.C.P. and the Chinese government which we had never been in before. On the morning of June 3 we left on a long-arranged holiday abroad. There we were horrified by the reports of violence that started only a few hours after our departure. I found it hard to believe them. For five months I was sick at heart. But Isabel and I refrained from making any public statement, though in years past we had gone on speaking tours in three continents doing propaganda for the achievements of New China. Now, if we had anything to say in public we would say it at home in Beijing, not abroad.

Before leaving we had planned to be back in good time for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's, but now we did not wish, by attendance at official functions, to make it appear that we approved of the killing in September of 1989. So we wrote from Canada to the foreign Affairs Section of the University:

It is now over three months since we left Beijing and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China is approaching. We will never forget that we had the honour of being present at the first National Day and though we shall not arrive home until after the 40th our love and respect for the Chinese people and our gratitude to them remain as strong as ever.....

Our letter and our absence reflected the contradiction in my mind - and in China's situation. There were reasons to mourn and to celebrate. China's achievements during the previous 40 years were immense. They might be summed up in one fact: expectation of life had been doubled. But Isabel and I felt that the deaths in June must

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN**  
**(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

also be remembered. So instead of banqueting in the Great Hall of the People overlooking Tiananmen Square, we fasted in Toronto 10,000 miles away. We did so without publicity, not as a political demonstration but as a personal act of mourning. For we had been teachers of Chinese students.

I cannot lightly shake off my commitment to this land where I have spent more than half my life. I try to solve the contradiction of condemning the lingering feudalism which impedes its advance by admiring its contributions to human progress. That dual approach is hard to handle. With the liberation of my thinking from idealization I have to pull up sharp from the brink of dissidence. What stops me from toppling over the edge? The people, especially former students who have become colleagues or gone far afield in China or abroad yet regardless of rank remain friends.

Shortly before leaving China on that tragic third of June, Isabel and I went with some colleagues to a village way off in the Western Hills. Over thirty years before we had gone there to plant peach and apricot, walnut and chestnut trees during the Great Leap Forward. Our companions were then young students; now they are professors. Ever since the '50s we had thought and talked of some day going back to the village to see the people and the trees. Now, by chance we were able to. In the past we had ridden there by the railway which goes on to Mongolia; now we drove in a minibus along a newly built motor road twisting and turning deep into the mountains, looking for old landmarks. At last we spotted the cluster of grey tiled roofs clinging to a hillside above the valley at the bottom of which lay the river and the railway lines. An 80 year-old man stood on a newly built bridge which now spanned the gully where once we had stood to eat breakfast at dawn before climbing the hills with our hoes. The old man remembered our stay in the village 30 years ago and pointed to a stand of trees we had planted. We clambered down the steps from the bridge to enter the narrow, winding cobbled village street. Children stopped playing and crowded round us. Then the old folk. One middle-aged woman recalled that our teachers had taught her to read and write, another that they had taught her to sing songs. An old man led me beyond a gnarled and twisted hollow tree at a turn in the street to show me where I had stayed. I could hardly recognize the place. Then he explained that the old houses round the courtyard had been torn down and rebuilt. The crowd around us grew until we were surrounded. Names were recalled. We were invited in to drink tea (in

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN  
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

the old days it had been hot water). Old men reminded us how they had once carried coal in baskets on their backs from the mine to the railway stop. I recalled how on our last day in the village the villagers had called in all the donkeys from the fields to carry our bedrolls down the valley to the railway stop (there was no station then) and the people had lined the street as we walked past, many of them and perhaps a few of us, weeping at our departure. Our few weeks in the village had been as memorable a time in their lives as in ours and now in this unexpected visit there was no constraint, no barrier, no sense of a gap between university teachers and village folk. Chinese peasants have dignity and self-possession.

On the drive home I reminded myself that in this land of a billion people corrupt careerists and bureaucrats were few; the salt of the earth in the villages were many. They and the students we had taught for four decades, now scattered over China and the four corners of the earth were the rationale of my seemingly contradictory commitment. The liberation of my thinking from blind loyalty, naive idealization and unrealistic expectations led not to dissidence but to reality, to recollection of those lines that Robeson sang in the Ballad for Americans: 'but especially the people, that's America for me'. Especially the people, that is China to me.

**HAMPSTEAD HEATH TO TIAN AN MEN  
(AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DAVID CROOK. CHINA)**

**Notes**

1. See Jews in Old China, Sidney Shapiro (Hippocrene, New York, 1984)