

My first thoughts about China as a possible subject for publication were quite ambitious but were ultimately reduced to realizable objectives by the restraints of historic events. In discussion with my son, Jonathan, a scholar of Chinese and Oriental history, I suggested that the most apposite historical approach to China would be to follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo. The route would begin in Turkey, cross Iran into Afghanistan, and from there enter China through the Afghan corridor north of Pakistan. It was a romantic, adventurous proposal fraught with difficulties but not particularly original; it had been attempted by a party that, with persistent effort, managed to reach the Chinese border by this route but was not admitted to China. However, this approach to China became impractical after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan by Russia.

We next tried to organize a more direct route to China through diplomatic channels. Jonathan applied to the Chinese Embassy in Canada for permission to visit China. China was then under the rule of Mao Tse Tung and was not yet recognized by the United States. No reply was received, but after Mao's death Jonathan applied again, and following the establishment of diplomatic relations with the U.S., a third application was made in which he said that the purpose of the visit was to photograph the Chinese landscape and historic monuments. In April, 1979 he finally received a reply from the Xinhua news agency in Peking, saying that his group would be welcomed in

China for seven weeks in June. Because of a tight schedule resulting from academic obligations at the University of New Mexico, where Jonathan was a professor in the history department, he requested postponement of our visit until 1980, which was granted.

The agreement with the Xinhua news agency included guides, transportation and accommodations for which we would pay the costs. There were four of us--Jonathan and his wife, Zoe, my youngest son, Patrick, and myself. We flew to Peking by way of Tokyo on Japan Airlines and were met at the airport by two representatives of Xinhua, who after clearing our baggage through customs, drove us to the Peking Hotel. The next morning a representative of Xinhua came to our hotel to plan our itinerary, which was very complicated because of the many places Jonathan wanted to see, scattered all over China. A tour was finally worked out to include most of the important historic and cultural centers in central China. And we were introduced to Dang Xinhua, an educated young man, fluent in English, who was to be our guide during our stay.

My first experience with the Chinese occurred on a street near the hotel when I photographed two amused nurse maids with their charges and baby carriages. My activities immediately attracted a crowd, and since I was using the new Polaroid instant camera as well as a Nikon, everyone wanted his picture taken and would grab the picture as soon as it was ejected by the camera, before I could see it myself. A policeman soon appeared, who said, "Enough of this," and dispersed the crowd.

We stayed several days in Peking, visiting the Forbidden



City (Imperial Palace), The Temple of Heaven, Mao's tomb in the Great Square, and the Summer Palace. We went out early in the morning to see the bicycle traffic that filled the streets with people going to work and to watch the older men performing Taoist(?) exercises in slow rhythms, singly and in groups. And we visited the old section of Peking in which the way of life has been less affected by modern influences. Our first journey outside the city was to the Great Wall--a major tourist attraction north of Peking. To escape the crowds of sightseers, we walked along the wall for more than a mile and marvelled at its monumental construction. The wall could be seen stretching far away curving around and over the distant treeless hills, which were covered with a low vegetation like green velvet.

Our next destination was Taishan--the sacred mountain in Shandong province--and Confucius's temple, tomb and cemetery at Qufu, where more than seventy generations of Confucius's descendants, the Kong family, are buried. In a wooded area surrounded by a moat 200,000 members of the family are buried. Some of the graves are marked by tombstones, and carved, stone animals and statues of guardians mark the graves of the more notable members of the family. On the summit of Taishan a Buddhist temple complex is the goal of pilgrims, who climb the five thousand stone steps to abase themselves and watch the sun rise over the Yellow Sea. We made the ascent and were given rooms and a meal in the primitive hostel; at four in the morning we were awakened, provided with quilted coats to insulate us from the chilly morning air, and were conducted to

an overlook from which we witnessed the break of day.

Our project was to photograph the landscape and historic monuments of China, but we discovered that many of the temples and shrines had been vandalized or destroyed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. However, we found that the activities of the people in their everyday pursuits were as interesting and captivating as their cultural achievements. Consequently, we spent more time than we had originally planned walking about in the cities we visited, photographing street scenes, shops, markets and people at work. We spent several days this way in Xian, the first major city we had visited since leaving Peking, located in the Wei River valley of central China. The Loess highlands in the vicinity are the product of thousands of years accumulation of wind-deposited soil from the Gobi Desert. The deposits are so dense and thick that cave houses have been carved into them, some even with doors and windows, facaded entrances, and electric power.

From Xian we continued on west to Lanzhou on the Yellow River and into the Ganzu Corridor. Our transportation was a van similar to a station wagon with a large baggage compartment in the rear and with room for the four of us, Dang Xinhua (our driver) and, frequently, district representatives, who served as local guides. The Ganzu Corridor was the trade route west to Turkistan and Persia. It was protected by the Qilian Mountains to the south and the Great Wall on the north, which terminated in substantial fortifications at Jiayuguan. From



Jiayuguan the trade route followed a line of signal towers to Dunhuang, an oasis and rest stop and the site of the Mogao Grottoes, that had been sealed by Buddhist monks during a past period of invasions and only recently rediscovered. Warnings of invasion from the west could be sent by smoke signals from the signal towers to reach Jiayuguan and the ruling dynasty in a few hours.

Dunhuang had not escaped the ravages of the Red Guards, who had destroyed a Buddhist temple situated on a lake in a hidden alcove with sand dunes rising around it. We asked permission to photograph the figures of Buddha in the Mogao Grottoes, excavated in sandstone cliffs bordering a small stream, but were refused by the bureaucratic administrator, who said that flash light would damage the paintings, although we used only natural light; however, his true reason for refusal was to protect prior publication by the Chinese. After intervention by our guide, we were allowed to photograph in two of the grottoes. It was very frustrating, because of the great wealth and beauty of the displays.

Dunhuang was as far west as we got on this trip. Our next destination was Guanxian (northwest of Chengdu), famous for Dujiangyan Dam--a thousand-year-old irrigation system--and the Temple of the Two Kings, a place with a strong historical attraction for the Chinese themselves; while we were there we saw no Europeans or Americans--only Chinese tourists. From Guanxian we went to Chengdu in central Sichuan, a city commonly on the itinerary of western tours and known for its spicy Sichuan cuisine--the best food in China.



Chongqing was the headquarters for the communists under the leadership of Mao and Zhou Enlai, before the long march. Because of its location on the Yangtze River, Chongqing is the shipping, supply and distribution center for central China, and we went there for a boat trip down the river through the Yangtze Gorges. We had three days before the steamship was scheduled to depart, which we profitably spent exploring the inner city and photographing on the waterfront, where boats of all types--ferries large and small, sampans and cargo vessels--were constantly docking and departing. A recently constructed bridge that spanned the Yangtze attracted large numbers of Chinese spectators as well as us. I was photographing boys and girls leaning on the railing when it occurred to me to use the Polaroid camera and give the picture to one of my subjects. This was a mistake. A crowd quickly gathered, and I was importuned for pictures from all sides, but especially aggressively by two girls, who almost threateningly demanded to be photographed. In vain I tried to put them off, but finally I took one picture of them together and immediately pushed my way out of the crowd. My revenge was giving the two girls one picture to share between them.

The steamer made prolonged calls at several small towns along the river so that we were able to disembark, observe and photograph the activities of the inhabitants. We left the ship at Wuhan after three days on the river and drove to Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), a complex, mountainous region, which is a mecca for landscape painters and for Chinese pilgrims

in search of untrammelled scenery.

Before starting the climb I asked Dang if he could hire someone to carry my large camera and tripod so that I would be less encumbered for using my small camera. When I was introduced to my porter in the morning as we were starting off, I was taken aback because my helper was a small woman of undetermined age, and I wondered whether she would be able to carry all my equipment. I need not have been concerned: Accompanied by a very young daughter, she skipped up the mountain ahead of me like a mountain goat, and I had to slow her down so that I could use the larger camera. We hiked for three days on the mountain with groups of young students, who practiced their English and French on us. I photographed a pretty, unabashed girl, who willingly posed for me; and on a rock ridge, while burdened with camera and tripod, two girls reached down from a ledge above and lifted me up--as a manifestation of Chinese reverence for age. One night in Shanghai was followed by two days in Sushou--the Venice of China--built on a network of canals but without the equivalent of gondolas. The waterways, supplemented by streets for vehicular traffic and pedestrians, served for the transportation of household supplies and merchandize in sampans, both motorized and manually propelled.

We flew from Sushou to Guilin in a cargo plane, a makeshift arrangement with seats attached to the sides of the fuselage, so that the passengers faced one another across the central space in which our baggage was heaped up. Guilin, known for its spectacular landscape of isolated mountain peaks



standing on the plain as if by accident, without logical explanation, has long been a popular place for Chinese painters, whose works have led western collectors of Chinese art to believe that the extreme geological phenomena illustrated in their paintings were typically Chinese or that the artists had indulged in aesthetic exaggeration. Neither is the case. The limestone peaks, described in geological terms as \_\_\_\_\_ formation, were produced by erosion during a past pluvial period and are today, in the semi-tropical climate of Quilin, blanketed with vegetation. We were flown from Quilin to Canton and there visited the old deserted British section from which the Chinese were excluded in colonial times. We left China on July 27th, traveling by boat down the Pearl River to Hong Kong, and returning home after a week in Macau, a Portuguese colony on the mainland of China.

Our second trip to China took place in September and October of 1981 and included the frontier districts that we had not visited the year before, with the exception of Manchuria. Again, travel arrangements were made through the Xinhua News agency and our guide this time was Lui \_\_\_\_\_, an older, more cultured man, who had been the Xinhua representative in Scandanavia and had visited Iceland and Greenland. We wanted to see some part of the Chinese coast, which was most easily accessible on the Shondong peninsula; there we first visited Qingdao on the south side, followed by Yantai, a shipping port, and Penglai lighthouse and pavilion on the north side. When we inquired



about the private lives of Chinese workers--what their homes were like--we were taken to the house of a Chinese family, no doubt especially selected for its cultivated atmosphere, and were shown into all the rooms to see their cherished possessions and how they lived. And we were taken to a nursery|school in which I was first enchanted by Chinese children and sensed the loving care and gentle discipline that govern childhood education.

The next frontier was the plains of Inner Mongolia and the grasslands of the Yellow River basin. North of the Great Wall the houses of the farmers and herdsmen are built on the south, facing slopes of the low hills, with the windows and doors all on the south sides to take advantage of the southern sun--a primitive solar heating arrangement. Beyond the hill and the Buddhist and Muslim town of Hohot, the treeless plains stretch away to the horizon; this is the land of the Mongol herdsman, whose domestic animals are sheep and goats, Bactrian camels and smaller numbers of horses and cattle. The Mongols live in mud huts or "yurts," a tent-like frame of thin wood strips covered with skins or wool cloth. Horses are their principal means of transportation, whereas camels are the beasts of burden; they are all skilled horsemen. We witnessed a round-up of horses during which they demonstrated the Mongol way of catching a horse, which unlike with the New World lasso, is accomplished with a loop of rope or raw hide attached to the end of a long pole|that is dropped over the head of the pursued horse at full gallop.

Guangjuesi, "Monastery of Boundless Teaching, " is a Buddhist establishment consisting of many white-washed dormitories and temples situated in hilly country near Baotou on the Yellow River. Here we were permitted to photograph the altars, shrines, and temple interiors with complete freedom. An amused, wrinkle-faced, red-robed lama of indeterminate age submitted affably to our request to photograph him, posing before red temple doors.

Xinjiang province, the northwest frontier beyond Dunhuang in Ganzu, was high on the list of remote regions of China that we hoped to visit. We went there by train through the Ganzu Corridor by the same route we had taken to Dunhuang the year before. Since all travel arrangements were made by Xinhua, we were always provided with first class accommodations and train fares, and because most Chinese cannot afford first class tickets, there were usually no other passengers in our car with the exception of army officers, whose rank in the absence of insignia on their uniforms was indicated only by the ball point pens they carried in their breast pockets. On long-distance and over-night train trips dining cars were provided for the first class passengers. On one long train ride we and our guide were the only passengers, and the chef had so little to do that he made an effort to give us especially good meals. One day at breakfast he said that he had a fish he would bake for us. It was a river fish of some kind, and he outdid himself; it was the best meal we had in China.

We arrived in Urumqi by a combination of train and auto



transportation. The inhabitants of Urumqi and Turfan are considered minorities because they are ethnically of Turkic descent; the majority are Kazaks and Uygurs, who originally spoke Arabic and the language of Turkestan and were mostly Muslims. But Chinese cultural and economic influence was purposely introduced by the Chinese government for the assimilation of minorities and to encourage economic dependence on and unification within China.

On our travels by car we frequently stopped in villages in which a degree of entrepreneurship was evident in the activities of the villagers. We asked to visit agricultural and production communes and factories, an aspect of Chinese life that we had not seen on our first trip and a far cry from our original purpose in visiting China--to photograph the landscape and historic monuments. No objections were raised to this request with the result that we were taken to communes and state farms, textile mills, sugar refineries, heavy-industry factories, and steel mills. In one factory we were shown through the entire organization of the plant--from raw material to final product--and such ancillary operations as nursery schools for the children of the workers and the medical and pharmaceutical departments. In the pharmacy we saw modern medicines in one cabinet and a collection of herbs, dried insects, snakes, and toads in another.

We returned to Sichuan and climbed Emei Mountain to Qingyinke, the "Pure Sound Temple", on a stone-paved path with rest pavilions along its route. The path bridged a flowing brook in a rocky ravine on the way to the temple on the



mountain top. Except for the construction of the path and the pavilions, the country was wooded and wild, without evidence of human presence. In a similar mountainous area, at the end of a well-kept path, we visited the Taoist temple Qingchengshan-- "The Fifth Passage to Heaven."

The last destination was Yunnan, bordering Laos and Vietnam on the Mekong River. In Kunming, the principal city we visited, a heavy-machinery factory produced machines and steel belts for Yugoslavia, and here again we were taken to the nursery school for the children of the workers. And near Kunming we visited the house of a peasant, who belonged to the Guangwei agricultural production brigade. In the hills near Kunming Buddhist temples that had escaped the depredations of the Red Guards were an attraction for the devout and curious Chinese themselves. The Stone Forest, a labyrinth of gray limestone pinnacles, was a unique geological phenomenon that drew many Chinese visitors. Farthest south on the Chinese mainland, the village of Jinghong, a few miles from the Mekong River, where one looks across to Laos, the people are more Indo-Chinese than Chinese, in both dress and culture. This is the tropics, where the women sit on the ground in the market place, surrounded by their wares of tropical fruits and vegetables. They see few foreigners and turn away with shyness and embarrassment at the sight of a camera. There were also minority people at a Hani village nearby, to which we were ferried across a muddy stream on a rickety raft to be received by a group of women and children gathered to welcome us

or to stare. They watched us, suspiciously perhaps, as we wandered about photographing their pigs, dogs, and chickens, which all lived together in harmony.

Our second trip to China was drawing to a close. The places we had visited and peoples we had seen complemented our experiences of the first trip; yet, even combined, they were scarcely more than a superficial introduction to China. My impressions, however, were of the almost incomprehensible richness of Chinese culture and history, made concrete by the respect and admiration I felt for the Chinese people we had met. We flew to Canton and departed China from there, this time by train to Hong Kong.