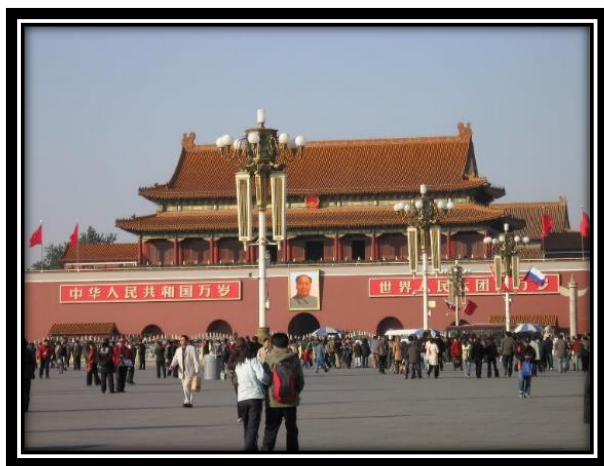


## 10 TIAN'ANMEN SQUARE

If I had to describe the Chinese in a few words, I would describe them as highly industrious, very social, and happy. Some of that may be from the infectious sense of optimism they have from the economic boom of the last years. Our guide talked with us about that, telling us that her parents are very satisfied now with their lives. "They were born poor and now have their own home, a car, and computers. They are retired and plan to travel each year," she said. "They are certain that all their prosperity is due to Chairman Mao Tse Tung. I argue with them all the time about that. My years under Chairman Mao were anything but pleasant and I feel that his policies thwarted some of the chances I might have had in life."

This was part of our guide's lecture as we drove by bus to Tian'anmen Square, largest city square in the world, able to hold 500,000 people, where Chairman Mao's image is prominently displayed and where he is buried in a large mausoleum. Every two hours there is a change of guard at the mausoleum.



"My father earned 47 yuan per month," continued our guide. "He had a secure job with the government for his lifetime. Before 1949 most of China was hungry and suffering. Between 1911 and 1940 there were lots of wars. Chairman Mao had the support of the poor people. He took the property of the rich and gave it to the poor. Once they had land, the peasants had a better living standard. But the cultural revolution was in its totality a disaster for China, moving China back 30 years. Maybe 60% of what Chairman Mao did was good. In his later years he was cruel to the people. When he got older and sick, his wife and three

compatriots, called the Gang of Four, ruled China and no one could get close to Chairman Mao to tell him how bad things were. Chairman Mao had many wives and concubines. The official third wife was an actress and very ambitious. Right now China produces more cement than any other country and uses 40% of the world's cement. Where does the government get the money to do all this building? About 50% of businesses are private. There is income tax. Also, companies pay a tax. Also, a lot of foreign

money comes in because labor is cheap here. China is a big customer of Boeing. The biggest expenses for the average Chinese person today are medical care, housing, and education for their children.”



We walked the huge square and were grateful for the sunshine because there was a brisk breeze, which was lifting elaborate kites in swirls and loops. Our guide told us that the Chinese national flag that we saw flying in so many places symbolizes all people working together under communist leadership.

As we came to the Drum Tower complex, we briefly watched purple balloons being released in the plaza there, part of a movie production. Our guide said there used to be a large drum and bell here to signal the hour. Myrtle was eyeing those

balloons so intently I could almost read her mind: “I want to hold one of those long strings of balloons.” So before her dainty feet could put this thought into action I firmly linked my arm through hers and hurried after our guide with an encouraging “C’mon, Mrytle, time for food!” That worked, as usual.





When we returned to the hotel, we found that our guide had thoughtfully prepared hors d'oeuvres for us to munch as we listened to her memories of the Cultural Revolution. There were fava bean nuts, yak jerky, Hawthorne fruit roll, a chocolate Twinkie-like sweet, and wine from France. This last item brought wide eyes and a huge smile to Myrtle's face. She even squealed just a bit as she planted a quick kiss on our guide's cheek while picking up a glass of Chablis. There was even a little raw lotus root in lemon, which in my opinion elevated any meal to gourmet status. I discovered in China that I

absolutely LOVED lotus root, prepared in any way, but especially raw with lemon or French-fried.

Myrtle was so interested in our guide's lecture about life under Chairman Mao's reign of power that she not only had absolutely nothing to say, but she wielded her pen frantically in between hurried sips of wine, scribbling down the whole lecture in shorthand, which is why I can write it verbatim for you right now, dear reader. My scribbled notes were not as complete as Myrtle's. So, the following little treatise

relates our guide's firsthand stories, courtesy of Myrtle's shorthand, about what it was like growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976.

"I was ten years old and in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Suddenly everything changed. There were many trucks in the street giving out leaflets. Our neighbor was arguing with the older children in the family. Young children are not qualified to be Red Guards. School was stopped. They asked the children to criticize their parents. Many teachers were replaced. One of my new teachers was a member of Kuomintang who had come back from Indonesia. He taught English but was now called a foreign spy. Any family with foreign links was in trouble.

The small children just copied the letters in the newspaper, wrote on big pieces of newspaper and hung around the classroom. Neighbors became Red Guards and traveled around China. Railways were a mess because the Red Guards 'owned' the trains and used them to travel all over, sort of living in them. It seemed the country was crazy. All Red Guards tried to go to Beijing to meet Chairman Mao in Tian'anmen Square. They returned home as heroes.

Manufacturing production stopped; fires started. Always there were certain people selected out to be criticized. My house was in a railway neighborhood and everyone there was required to attend criticism meetings at the railway station. Dunce hats were put on the heads of those who were criticized, and wooden blocks were secured around their necks. Their hands would be tied. They had to bend down. Important people sitting on the station platform shouted the slogans, 'Down with . . .' They treated the criticized people cruelly.

Red Guards visited families, closed the door, smashed things, ladies screaming. Two shoes hung around a woman's neck indicated she was a prostitute. Then Red Guards made her walk through the neighborhood, humiliating her. During holiday times I visited my grandparents in Xian. I saw people with half-shaved heads, those from the ruling classes, being driven out of Xian. They looked very sad waiting for their trains. My husband's whole family was driven out of Xian. A lot of the persecuted committed suicide.

I joined the propaganda team learning how to think, how to perform, how to dance the right way, the Loyalty Dance. The whole nation had to learn the Loyalty Dance. Opera and old films were not allowed. Only eight model operas directed by Mao's wife were allowed. The Cultural Revolution lasted ten years but the first three were chaos. There was much destruction. Then Mao sent an army into schools and universities and factories as administrators and leaders.

In 1969 Mao said all children must go to camps in the countryside to get reeducation from famers, workers, and soldiers. In big cities they were supposed to go to really remote areas. Most of my classmates went to the countryside close to Xian. My aunt lived in Northwest China and wanted me to go there to be her daughter. It took me five days and nights to travel by train to reach my aunt. I stayed there two months, then went to a farm camp with all the other youth.

We were driven up the mountain and had to stay in tents, 24 girls or boys to a tent. It was very cold, wintertime. We collected wood to keep the tent warm. After April, the earth started to thaw, so we had to dig an underground house. I got nearsighted because I had to work so many days in the dark underground. We actually did no farming at all because it was not a farming area, only grasslands. Then

we were told we had to build a reservoir. We had a few workers who gave us instructions and helped us with the dynamite.

I stayed there for two years, only went back to my aunt's house a few times because it was so far and so hard. We worked six days a week. We went into the valley to pick the wildflowers. Some of the people who became Red Guards experienced regret later. I now so much appreciate what I have because my life was so hard then.

Education is the key. Universities stopped in 1966 and started up again in 1973. Eventually most of the youth who were sent to the mountains went back to their cities. In 1974, I graduated from high school. History and English were forbidden. Then education started to recover. In 1977 regular testing for university education started again. University graduates had to agree they would come back to the farm to work after graduation. I was accepted for university education and allowed to study foreign languages in Shanghai, and that changed my fate.

They allowed me to go back to Xian and get a job. They gave me a job in the foreign affairs office to receive foreign delegations. I worked there for two years until 1980. Mao died in 1976. After Mao died, things changed. Some high-ranking officials decided to take military action in 1977 and China started to gradually change, especially under Deng Xiaoping, who visited America and decided to make an Open-door policy for China.

Then there was very fast change, and it happened in about ten years. Leaders now are 'sort of' elected. Last year the tax on farmers' land was eliminated so farmers can make a better living. Another big decision was free education in rural areas. China is still about 50 years behind the US. Being a party member is important if you want to be a politician. But for economies China is changing to a market economy. Corruption is very bad and still is in mid-level politics. 4000 crooked politicians stole lots of money and escaped to the U.S. because the U.S. does not have an extradition agreement at this time. The common people really hate this. Mid-level managers buy their positions. It is hard to change this system.

The red scarf for children signifies Young Pioneer. Chairman Mao wanted workers and parents to be the leading class, not intellectuals. Chiang Kai-shek took the title of Premier. He was supposed to be a follower of Sun Yat Sen to set up a republic of China. He fought with Mao. The Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek ruled the country.

The Communist Party of China was set up in 1926. In 1911 the last emperor dynasty had ended. The Long March started in 1934, took about 5 years, started with 800,000 people, ended with 200,000. In 1937 the Japanese invaded China, then came the war with Japan. The Kuomintang mostly fought the Japanese because the Japanese were supported by U.S. money and weapons. The war lasted eight years. Then there were three years of domestic war between the Kuomintang and Mao. In 1948 Mao won because he had the support of the poor people. The war ended in 1949 with Chairman Mao firmly in power. He made the official capital Beijing. This was a turning point in Chinese history.

Mao's 1958-1962 Great Leap Forward led to an erratic fertility rate and the Great Chinese Famine from 1959-1961 when millions died. China's population in the 1970s was more than 800 million. In 1971 the Communist Party raised the age for first marriages, imposed a minimum birth interval and a limit of 2-3 children per family. This led to the one-child policy in 1980. The birth rate dipped below the

replacement level in 1991. Now in the last ten years everything is changing again toward a market economy.”

When the lecture was finished, Myrtle started forward to talk with our guide, and I tried to distract her because I was sure she was going to get into an argument with the guide about how the Chinese people can allow their government to dictate such personal parts of their lives as the number of children they can have. But Myrtle surprised me. She only discussed the economy of China, telling the guide that she thinks China will do very well under a market economy because they have so many people and so many natural resources. The guide agreed. And Myrtle’s prediction, dear reader, has certainly come to pass.

To be continued . . .