

CHINA



Land of the Cavorting Dragons

In 1995 Robert asked me to join him on a trip to China. He certainly didn't have to ask twice as I have always wanted to visit the Orient and 'taste the life' of that mysterious land. I had nearly gone with Enzo Plazzotta, my sculpting guru, but he had cancelled the trip on account of his health. Having nearly made the journey once made this surprise invitation *a dream come true*.

My sculpture has allowed us to visit most of Europe, from Norway in the North to Spain in the South, Greece in the East, and America in the West. Trips to destinations as far apart as the United States, Morocco and Chile have enabled me to 'taste the life' of many countries, but most of them had European connotations. China was going to be something quite unique.



My 'Flying Horse'

What was the 'flavour of life' in China? I longed to know it all, the people, the food, the smell and, of course, the art. Now, thanks to Robert's generosity, I was going to have an opportunity to and I couldn't wait for the journey to start. I had visited the Jade Emperor Exhibition held in London at the Royal Academy and it was there that I first saw the *Flying Horse*. I was so captivated by the sculpture that I made a copy and had it cast in bronze. I see it every day and it always gives me immense pleasure because it is a marvellous concept and a truly magical symbol. I also sculpted a five-foot long version and had three copies cast by Roy, one of which ended up on top of Robert's stables at his home in Aspen, from where it leaps into space, just as we were about to do. All this had left me very keen to experience China for myself.

What was going to make the trip even more interesting was travelling with Robert as he knew the country so well. Over the past years he has visited China many times working in the Natural Gas fields as an adviser to the Chinese Government. It was on one of these trips, soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, that he had been inspired to start collecting contemporary Chinese paintings. This had led to his arranging an exhibition at Harkness House in New York, which sparked off a wave of American interest, and subsequently led several artists to become well known in the States.

Robert bought some of the works from that Exhibition to form the core of the most important collection of contemporary Chinese paintings in existence. The purpose of his trip was to record on film interviews with the artists represented in his collection, preserving for posterity their memories and feelings about the paintings and the reasoning behind their chosen subject matter. This was very important as the paintings were done at a crucial turning point in China's history, the end of the Cultural Revolution, and the opening of her doors to the West after 700 years of closure!

I joined Robert at Ramiilaj to erect some sculptures on the wooded slopes around his house in the mountains. Here all is glorious space and distant mountains under a vast blue sky. What a contrast this was going to be to the crowded cities we were going to visit in China!

We arrived in Beijing late at night and fell into our beds high up in the new super-deluxe Palace Hotel on Goldfish Lane. I couldn't wait to look out of my bedroom window in the morning and see *China*. Imagine my disappointment when I awoke to see a Western city complete with smog!

At breakfast things improved a little as the waiters were Chinese, although they didn't look at all like what I had expected because they didn't look like the Chinese I had seen in London, or New York. I was totally unprepared for how handsome the men were and how beautiful the girls, much more so than the average European. They also looked much healthier, not overweight, and I really warmed to their open smiling faces.

Over breakfast I met Robert's curator, Jon Burris, who was also the photographer, interviewer, video-operator and the producer of the CD-Rom Robert was planning. Jon quickly told us the schedule he had mapped out, and what he had already achieved in the past week. If we managed to do all he had planned, we were obviously in for a very busy time!

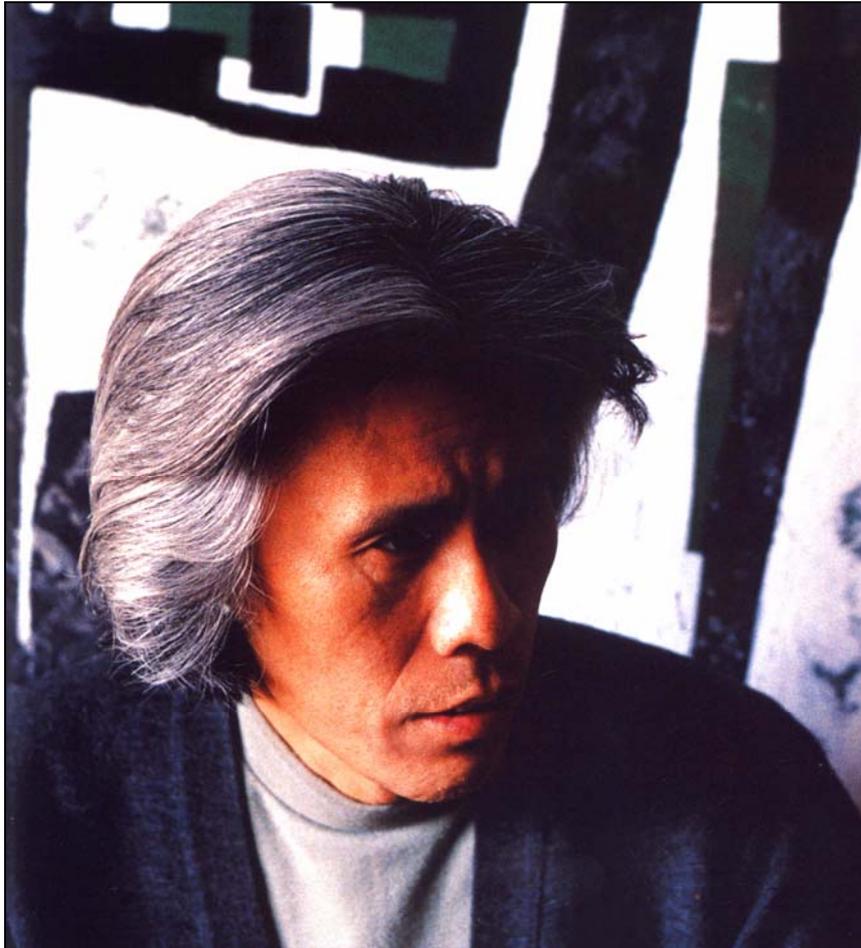
Waiting for us outside the dining room was Jane Yang, our pretty petite Chinese interpreter. As the days passed I got to know this remarkable girl very well and came to admire her immensely. We piled into a big black car that was waiting for us at the entrance of the hotel, and took off for our first interview.

Wang Huai Qing is one of Robert's oldest friends. He lived in a concrete block of flats with his wife and daughter Tin Tin. After hooting our way through swarms of bicycles we arrived near Wang's home to find the street blocked with people eating at a mobile cookhouse hidden in steam and black smoke that billowed up from the brown coal burning in the stove. Some people were eating their noodles seated at tables set up on the pavement, while others just squatted in the road shovelling away with chopsticks.

Everyone was talking, but as we walked by they would stop eating, wave and call out "Knee How!" I was to see this scene time and time again because the Chinese work throughout the day and night for such long hours they can't afford to have set eating periods as we do in the West. Instead there is one long continuous supply of food, the customers eating between jobs grabbing a bite as they pass by a stall. I was beginning to get the *real flavour* of China.

We reached Wang's apartment block, climbed the grim concrete stairs to the 4th floor and knocked on his door. We were greeted with gales of laughter and welcome hugs as we spilled into the tiny two-room flat, one of which he used as a studio. Matisse had lived in a similar studio in Paris with a wife and child for ten years at the start of his painting career.

Wang is a marvellous-looking man with dead straight thick silver-black hair that hangs down below his ears. His helmet of hair frames a thin elegant face with very expressive eyes and a charming smile. He is a quite remarkably handsome man who moved with grace.



Wang Huai Qing

Wang's oil paintings are abstract and based on Mandarin furniture. Their fascination lies in the way they make the eye travel along the lines that lead from one area to another, taking you on a journey as you become aware of new patterns and structures continually forming.



'Autumn', Wang Huai Qing

He also showed us a book of his watercolour sketches that had a marvellous freedom, sense of colour and composition that were painted with the traditional Chinese brushes. I saw nothing to touch this man's talent for brushwork in any of the other artists' studios we subsequently visited. His subject was often his teenage daughter, Tin Tin.

Chairs were pulled from out of corners and brought from other rooms. Tea arrived and the interpreting started. The video camera was set up, voice recorder turned on and lamps held high to light the picture under discussion. Robert asked questions, which Jane translated into Chinese, and long Chinese answers followed that she translated back into English.

More laughter, then serious, followed by more laughter and animated conversation. A sincere and humble man, sure of his own ability. He was the type of person one would love to have as a friend and spend time with. After a couple of hours the interview came to a natural end. Everyone was exhausted and lunch was needed, so down into the street we all tumbled and around the corner to a local restaurant.

So began my first *gourmet taste* of China. Dish after dish came to the dumbwaiter that revolved in the middle of the table from which we picked at with our chopsticks until we were all fit to burst. We had a bottle of beer each to drink with the succulent food and then green tea to finish. What a meal!

It was the first of many such to come. At least once every day for the rest of the trip, we would have a similar repast. Sometimes with artists, sometimes with generals and sometimes just the four of us. Some meals were better than others, but we always ended up eating far too much and staggering from the dining room when it was all over. But it was that first Chinese lunch in Beijing with us all laughing and the sun pouring in through the open windows, that I shall always remember.

Fond farewells in the street and off we went to visit the amazing Summer Palace Park where the willow trees hang out over the water just like on Chinese blue porcelain plates. The last Empress of China had built the park with money intended for refurbishing the Navy. To keep the admirals happy she built a stone boat in the lake. The sun shone on us as we walked the tree-lined causeways that criss-crossed the lakes, leading from one royal tearoom to another. It was the perfect end to my first day in Beijing.

On our journey we were to visit four art academies and the first was here in Beijing. We set out next morning in the big black car for the Academy, again pushing through hordes of bicyclists. We arrived and started to search for the studio of our next artist, eventually finding him behind a locked door in a large studio jammed to the ceiling with paintings. Luo was a tiny ancient walnut of a man, wearing a cloth cap, one of the *old brigade*.

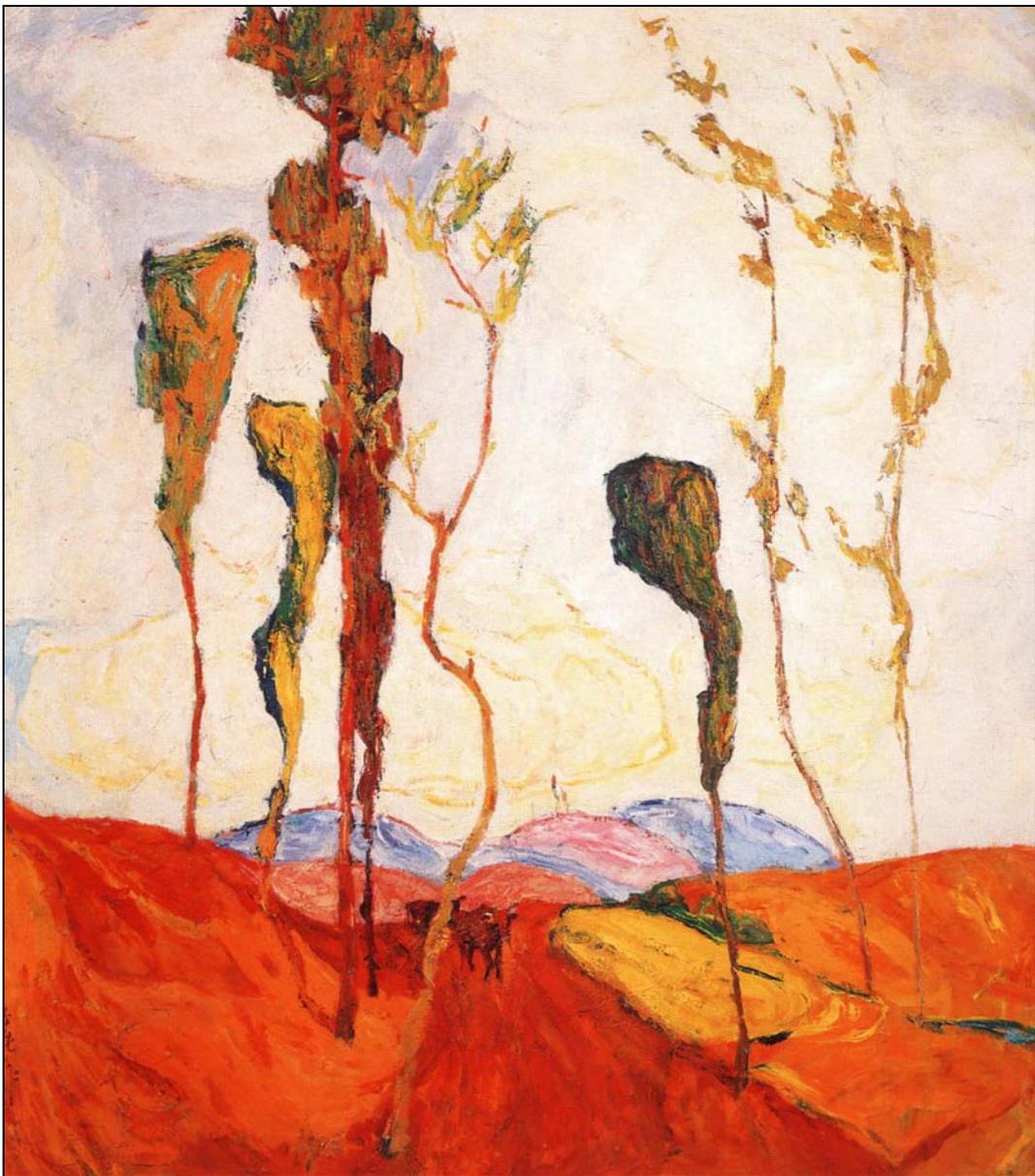


Luo Erchun

His oil paintings were mainly of the countryside around his birthplace. I found them very appealing and full of strong vibrant colour, bare ochre landscapes, tall trees, and peasants in colourful dress, all of which made me think of Gauguin's early painting done in Brittany before going to Tahiti.

It was here that I started to see what an enormous influence the French Impressionist movement has had on contemporary Chinese artists. During the interview we found out that the old man had lived and worked in Paris and he actually brought out a painting he had done of Montmartre!

As the interview was proceeding I was free to look around and a painting caught my eye on a top shelf. On asking if we could have a look at it, the old man pulled it down explaining that it was not yet finished, as he wanted to add some figures. The subject was of the landscape near his home. Robert liked it as much as I did and bought it when it was finished. It is one of my favourite paintings in his collection and titled 'The Hill'.



'The Hill', Luo Erchun

Over the next two weeks we met nearly 20 artists, and in every one of them I felt I could see a strong Western influence: Corot, Renoir, and so on across the whole spectrum of French Impressionism. Unfortunately a lot of the work being done today has become very commercial because the artists are painting what the Hong Kong and Taiwan galleries demand. They are doing it very well, but the painting has lost some of the originality of the earlier work. I am afraid the younger artists are copying modern American and British artists.

After leaving the old man we went to see one of the younger professors in the Academy. His paintings were all like those of Bacon! When we went down to the students' show room most of the paintings looked as though they had been influenced by Western art magazines.

The power of the paintings that Robert has in his collection has come from the freedom felt by the artists on the collapse of the Cultural Revolution and their release from communist tyranny. Robert's collection represents the flowering of the freedom that flooded across the country so his paintings are 'a moment in time', and possibly one of the most important moments not only in the history of China, but also the political future of the entire world.

Before leaving the Academy we went to see the sculpture studio. Oh dear, what a disappointment, but I suppose not in the least surprising. I admit the clay sculptures were technically of a very high standard, but, I ask you, do we still want double-life-size statues of politicians? They were everywhere, sitting, standing, all with arms outstretched. Not a good sign!

Robert had to attend a meeting with the Minister of Culture in the afternoon and as he did not need an interpreter, he asked Jane if she would take me to see the Forbidden City that housed the famous Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

The construction of the Forbidden City started in 1420, the eighteenth year of the reign of Emperor Yong Le. The grounds cover over two million square feet and it is surrounded by a 150-foot wide moat and walls some 30 foot high.

The black car dropped us at the main gate and Jane went to buy entrance tickets. The ticket kiosk was on the opposite side of a very large square so I had time to study the forbidding entrance of the Forbidden City, the Five Phoenix Tower. Two blank walls flank the entrance portals, leaving the fourth side open onto a vast square. The towering walls are sheer and painted a dried blood-red. Three enormous double wooden gates pierce the wall, all painted in red Chinese lacquer and studded with gold knobs. They are imposing, awe-inspiring and forbidding, as I am sure they are intended to be.

We used the right-hand gate as only the Emperor was allowed to pass through the central gate. This arrangement sets the pattern for everything in the Forbidden City, as right the way through the immense complex from the front gate to the back one, a central marble path runs for the Emperor's sole use. We passed through the gated tunnel out into the first of the football-field courtyards and saw the Hall of Supreme Harmony.

Cut the Palace plan in half and each side is a perfect match of the other. Everything is symmetrical throughout the complex until you get to the Emperor's garden.

Standing in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony are a pair of the largest bronze Chinese lion-dogs you have ever seen and in the Emperor's day white incense smoke puffed out of their nostrils. On the terrace above the lion-dogs are two other bronzes, a tortoise and a crane, both symbols of longevity

and they also used to puff out smoke from their nostrils.

Before getting to the garden you pass through eight gold and red buildings each with a fabulous-sounding name: Hall of the Golden Throne; Hall of Middle Harmony; Hall of Preserving Harmony; Palace of Heavenly Purity; Hall of Mental Cultivation; Palace of Gathering Excellence; and Palace of Earthly Tranquillity, the last being the wedding chamber!

At the entrance of Peace and Longevity there is an immense wall, at least a 100 foot long and ten foot high, on which are depicted nine dragons in multi-coloured bricks. It is the one place that colour has been used on an outside wall, all else being painted dusty dry blood red, or made of white marble.

At the front of the Hall of Preserving Harmony is a staircase that ascends from the courtyard. Running down the middle of this staircase is a gigantic slab of marble, 50 foot long and 10 foot wide, which weighs over 200 tons! On it are carved hundreds and hundreds of dragons cavorting in swirling clouds. It is the most complex carving I have ever seen.

The marble slab was mined many miles south of Beijing in the mountain quarry that provided the stone to build the Forbidden City. To transport the massive blocks the Chinese built a flat road along which they dug wells every half-mile. In the freezing winter they drew water from the wells and poured it over the road so the stone slabs could be slid along the ice on flat-bottomed boats pulled by hundreds of coolies. Imagine moving 200-tons in this way!

The Halls all have thrones in the middle of them, but the one that appealed to me most had a very large polished gold ball hanging over it suspended by a thin thread, which supposedly would snap if the Emperor passed an unjust verdict, thus assuring Cosmic Justice! One Emperor did come to a sticky end and was hanged from the corner of a roof. As a reminder to his successors that nothing was certain in life, even for an Emperor, on the corner of every roof there is a terracotta tile depicting the executed Emperor sitting on a chicken. Jane was unable to explain to me the significance of the chicken!

It was also believed that these little figures kept away lightning strikes, which have always been a danger as all the Palaces are built of wood so many of the buildings in the past have caught fire. One such fire took place in 1422 while Admiral Zheng He was at sea with a vast fleet of junks. The fire was taken as a sign of the gods' anger so when the ships that had survived arrived home they were burnt along with all the logs and navigational charts. Some now claim that in 1421 the fleet circumnavigated the world, 71 years before Columbus discovered the Americas! Marco Polo set sail in 1293 with a large Chinese fleet bound for Persia, a voyage that took two years, so this is not as impossible as at first it sounds!

At last we arrived at the Imperial Garden, which can only be described as a big disappointment. It is a collection of ugly-shaped rocks that represent mountains, one of them being 20 foot high, which the Emperor climbed once a year as part of a religious ceremony. Looking at the map that Jane had kindly given me I could see that off to the left there was a whole group of buildings surrounded by beautiful gardens and trees, so the Emperor did have a better place to go for a stroll after dinner than the Imperial Rock Garden!

I fell out of the back gate into the real world, absolutely exhausted. It is impossible to describe the magnificent grandeur of the Forbidden City. One could say that it is a true symbol of China, past and present, representing as it does the necessity of very firm rule from the top! China has always been ruled in this way and its very existence probably depends on this type of social order.

My visit explained more to me about China's political system than anything I had read. Whatever the form the Government takes in China, the man in charge has to be all-powerful and supported by a system that assures this state of affairs remains intact. It is how the country evolved with the rule of Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, who abolished the feudal system, and by the time of his death in 210 BC, had established the Central State. Later a top general said to us, "It has always been this way."

While touring the Forbidden City, Jane told me a little about her past, which was the first of many talks that we had over the next few days and enabled me to piece together the extraordinary story of this stunning 30-year-old girl.

Born in Beijing, the youngest daughter of a family of five, consisting of an older brother and a sister two years her senior, she told me that her parents had spoiled her, being the baby of the family. When the Cultural Revolution happened her father was sent away for re-education in the country, followed by her mother and brother. Then she and her elder sister were sent to a village in the country, so at the age of 12 she was made to work in the paddy fields planting out rice shoots. She said that working all day with bare feet in the muddy water caused her feet to become unbearably painful.

As soon as she became of age she was drafted into the army and by 20 she was a captain in charge of 100 girl machine-gunners and grenade-throwers, which was a lot better than planting rice! All this time she had kept in touch with her boyfriend, although it was dangerous, being strictly forbidden. She had met him at kindergarten when they were both aged three and were paired off together on their first crocodile walk and been made to hold hands!

At the end of the Cultural Revolution she went to university and soon afterwards she married her childhood sweetheart whose father by then had been made an ambassador to the United States! Her husband won a scholarship to Harvard to study business, so the two of them set off for Boston. Jane told me that Harvard was the toughest period of her life, much harder than planting rice or throwing grenades!

When she arrived in the States she spoke no English and as their living allowance was only \$5 a week and her husband had to work long hours studying, she became the breadwinner for the couple. She was able to do this by taking three jobs a day! House cleaner before breakfast, factory worker in the morning, and baby sitter in the evening. She studied English in the afternoon and, when her speech had improved sufficiently, she enrolled and obtained a degree. It is the kind of story that one should remember every time one complains about the supposed hardships of one's own life.

After all she suffered she counts herself one of the fortunate ones, a survivor of the Cultural Revolution. She is one of the most beautiful and charming people I have ever had the pleasure to meet.

One rainy afternoon I took myself off to the Temple of Heaven! Building had commenced in 1420, the same year as the Forbidden City, so Beijing must have been having the same kind of building boom that Shanghai is now suffering.

However, the Temple of Heaven that I visited was built in 1890; the original one having been burnt down, the terracotta chickens having failed to prevent a lightning strike! The Temple was where the Emperor prayed for good rice harvests and is set in an enormous park of over 500 acres. The main buildings are aligned on a north-south axis, some being circular and others

square, the symbol for Heaven being a circle and Earth being a square. Here also the temples have marvellous names such as Globular Altar, Hall of the Firmament, and my favourite, Hall for Fast Ceremonies. Between the circular and square buildings is a broad 1,000-foot long terrace. The Emperor used to walk down the three-foot wide central marble path, which perhaps led to the old belief that there is *a long way to go between Earth and Heaven!*

One of the temples is surrounded by a circular Echo wall, 180 foot long, just like the whispering gallery of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. The insides of all the buildings are painted in garish colours. This also applies to the Imperial Palace, but here at the Temple of Heaven the decor is taken to the extreme. I do hope Heaven doesn't use Chinese Temple interior decorators!

While waiting outside the gates to be collected by Jane and Jon, I watched the citizens of Beijing go by on their bicycles. It is an incredible sight as the combinations of riders and passengers are so varied. On the one hand mothers with children hidden under plastic hoods, while on the other, tricycles carrying everything from 20-foot long reinforcing rods to eight-foot high piles of folded-up cardboard boxes. However, 1st Prize went to a tricycle that was carrying a three-seater sofa with a man sitting on top reading a newspaper!

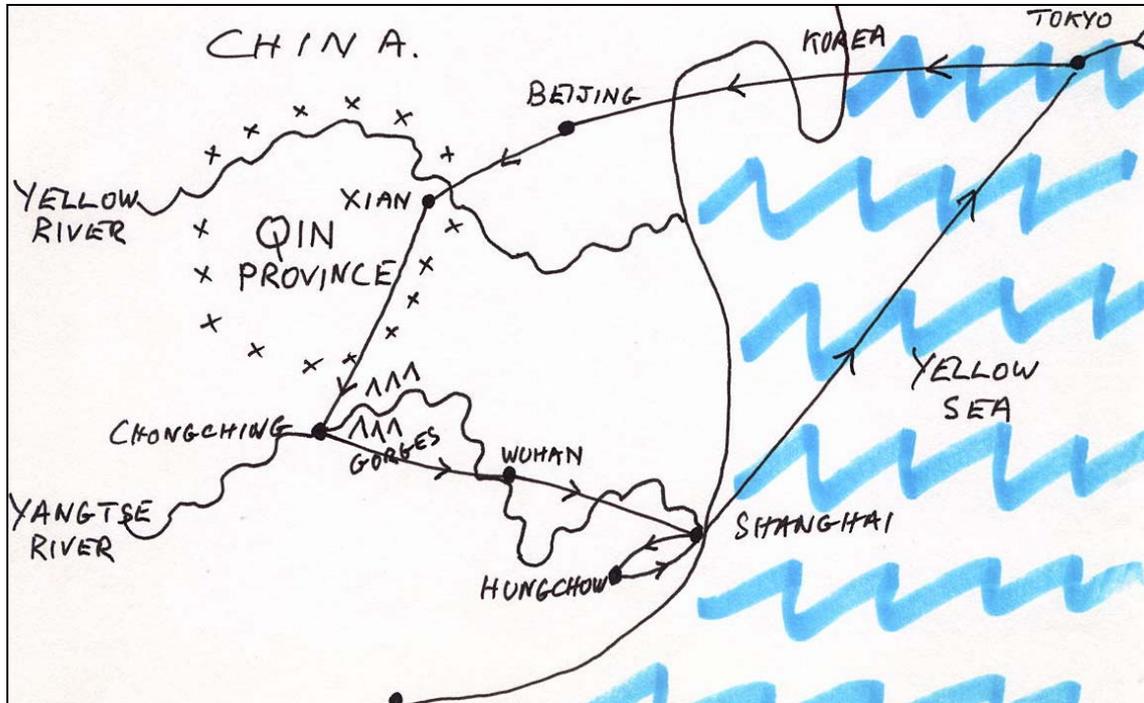
One of the artists we interviewed had his studio in a pre-Boxer rebellion one-storey house, whose covered entrance was off a muddy side street. The entrance was still painted with *Long Live Chairman Mao!* Big wooden double doors opened into a courtyard, around which were some 15 to 20 rooms each housing a family. In the centre of the courtyard there was a bizarre sight, a brand-new tin shed leaning against a very ancient tree. We passed through the yard to the far corner, past the communal lavatory that you definitely didn't want to visit, into a second smaller courtyard. This was also surrounded by rooms all about 15 foot long and 10 foot wide, each occupied by a family.

We hauled the 8 by 6 foot canvas out of the studio into the sunshine so Jon could film and Robert interview the artist. Surrounded by all this mass of humanity, huddled together in a slum, while looking at an enormous figurative painting (a modern allegorical piece in the vein of Botticelli's *Four Seasons*), struck me as being one of the weirdest scenes that I have ever witnessed.

Against one of the walls was a 2 by 3 foot rectangular box made from loose bricks stacked three high and filled with soil in which, struggling to survive, grew four tiny bean plants. It was the household's vegetable garden! It would have made a poignant painting about the tenacity of life and the struggle to survive that existed in the surrounding buildings and throughout China.

On our last night in Beijing, Robert gave a dinner party for all of the artists who had been interviewed, that is, all except one. The old boy in his canvas cap who had lived in Paris and painted like Gauguin, declined to come. It was amazing to think of how the lives of these people had changed since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Some of the artists were now rich men who owned flats in town, villas in the country and drove BMWs. I wondered if they really understood just how much they owed Robert for organising and financing the exhibition in New York only a few years before. I had a feeling that all but one, Wang Huai Qing, had probably forgotten. Artists should never forget the debt they owe to their patrons who provide the lifeblood to their art.

Our next stop was Xian, the ancient capital of Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor and founder of China, 2,000 years ago. The first appointment was at the Art Academy some way out of town. Something had gone wrong on the new dual highway ring road, as one of the underpasses we had to go through had been flooded, causing us to have to back up against the oncoming traffic!



Mud map of our journey around China

The Art School's compound was an enormous Russian-style concrete building that was falling apart at the seams. We climbed the ubiquitous smelly stairway, passed the students' dormitories that contained shelves of bunks four high, to the director's office. His secretary asked us to wait while he signalled his boss to let him know we had arrived, which he did by placing a sheet of paper in the window. When the director arrived we trooped back across the compound to a three-storey high block of studio-apartments where the teachers lived in dusty ill-lit concrete coffins. I could not imagine a more terrible place in which to search for inspiration.

During the interview I went for a walk in the sunshine utterly depressed by the whole place. What awful problems these artists faced, and how spoilt we are in the West, especially myself. I felt quite guilty.

We returned to town for lunch at a plush restaurant for an official meal given by the generals in charge of the army hospital. In the reception area various live delicacies were displayed, just as they are in Europe, only instead of being able to choose a trout or lobster, here it was a snake!

Dish after dish of elegantly-prepared food kept arriving at the table, some formed into twisted dragons. Plates of various meats, including snake and snakeskin sliced up like belt keepers. I tried everything so as not to hurt anybody's feelings and I must say it was all delicious, even the chewy snake skin, which was very spicy! Rice wine and Chinese beer soon had us all in a merry mood and the morning's gloom was forgotten.

After saying goodbye to the generals, we set off to explore the art market street of the old Xian. Chinese calligraphy brushes hung in skilfully arranged rows, but there was not a single Chinese ink-brush painting in sight. It was not until the very last day of our visit as we were heading for the airport that I found a Chinese brush painting. We had stopped at a narrow smelly run-down street bazaar, full of minute stalls. Here I saw an artist painting in ink on paper using a brush and a long fingernail as a nib! He was doing a beautiful drawing of a chump of bamboo stems with a panda sitting under them.

The evening before we departed from Xian we went to the equivalent of a Parisian dinner-stage show for tourists, the theme of which was the Court of the First Emperor. Coloured lights and brilliant costumes, combined with lots of loud Chinese music and waving of long silk scarves in unison by pretty smiling girls, while courtiers paraded with their concubines carrying enormous umbrellas and decorated banners. It was fun because it was so garish.

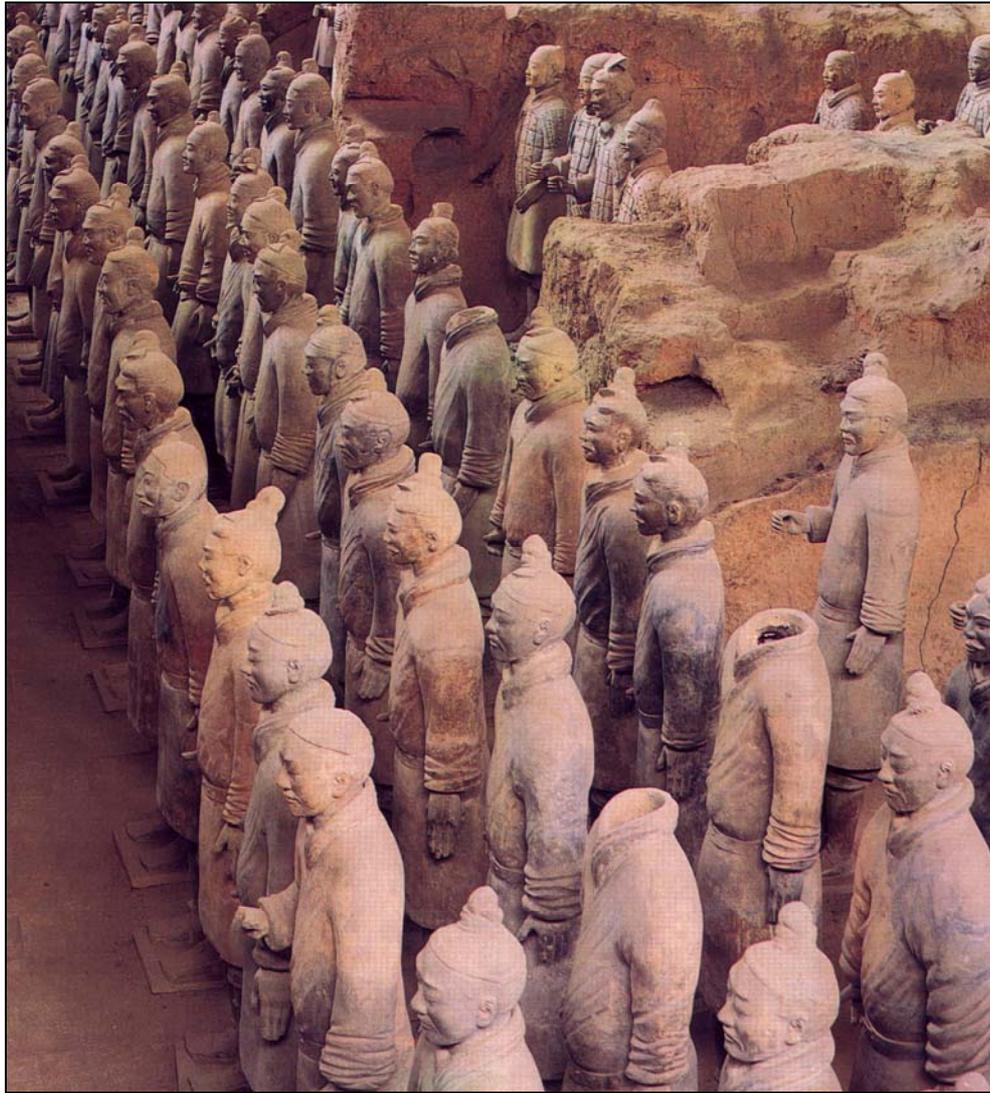
The following morning we set off to see the famous Warriors. We drove miles through open countryside, past mud houses clustered into villages, every inch of land cultivated. The soil of the vast plain that stretches away on either side of the road is the famous loess. It is composed of very fine grains of fawn-coloured clay silt laid down over hundreds of thousands of years, partly by the flooding Yellow River, but mainly from the west wind. The houses are made out of clay bricks quarried from the loess so everything is one colour. The peasants sometimes build their houses in the disused quarries to protect them from the wind and this gives a rather comical look to the villages, as all you can see are the roofs of the houses.

We arrived at the site of the Warrior Tombs. Rows of buses, thousands of tourists and hundreds of shops, all selling the same souvenirs! We walked through this mammoth bazaar towards the gigantic 200-foot wide, 700-foot long aeroplane hangar that covered the first and largest of the pits where the terracotta army was buried 2,200 years ago.

We passed through the entrance doors and stood on the viewing platform to look down 20 foot on 6,000 larger than life-size soldiers lined up in 11 columns, four abreast, each headed by a chariot pulled by a team of four horses. In front of the columns there was an unbroken line of guard soldiers, three deep, which reached right across the hangar. We walked around the perimeter looking down into the pits at what must be without doubt one of the most amazing sights in the world.

So far over 7,000 soldiers have been found, each with a different facial expression and costume. In a side museum we saw how they had been made and Henry Ford would have been proud of the production line. Gangs are depicted puddling the clay with their feet before passing it on to the men handling the moulds. When the sculptors finished the costumes and heads, a gang in charge of firing would take over. The artists would then paint the finished terracotta soldiers. The scale of the operation was overwhelming.

A farmer digging a well in a field had accidentally discovered the soldiers in 1974. When they had been found all the soldiers had been squashed and broken by the collapsed roof of tree trunks that had covered them when they had been buried. Over the years the archaeologists have stuck all the bits together again like Humpty Dumpty, so what we were looking at now was what the Emperor would have seen before he ordered them to be buried. The only difference is that then they had all been painted with bright colours!



6,000 life-size warriors



The warriors were painted with different uniforms

We then went on to the second pit. This is a more recent discovery and a much grander old-Chinese-style building has been erected above them. Again soldiers, horses, chariots and bowmen with bronze arrows. Next came the third museum, which housed the Command Headquarters. Here were rows of generals, all wearing big General Kitchener moustaches, gazing out at the enemy over the army of the First Emperor Qin Shihuang.

A small side museum houses some magnificent half life-size bronzes. These were discovered in a pit nearer to the Emperor's own tomb that is yet to be excavated. Two vehicles, one a chariot and the other a covered carriage for sleeping, both drawn by four horses and every detail correct. The spokes on the wheels are precise, even the hubs have bronze silk tassels hanging from them, an example of the lost-wax process used by master craftsmen. Age has given these works of art the most beautiful greeny brown patination. It is believed that these two vehicles belonged to the Emperor, and represented those used by him while on manoeuvres.



Half life-size bronze Emperor's Chariot

To get out of the third museum you of course have to pass through the souvenir shop where we found brand-new terracotta warriors for sale. When pressurised by a salesgirl I jokingly said that we were not interested in plain terracotta ones, only those painted in the original colours.

"No problem, you can have them painted!" Up came the manager and with a twinkle in his eye Robert said, "Yes, we would love to visit the factory." In a wink a car appeared and off we went to the warrior factory!

Talk about primitive. How they ever got a figure out of their moulds, let alone fired them, was a miracle. I am sure the Emperor had things much better organised 2,000 years ago, but then he had ordered a job lot of 7,000!

The factory was set in the heart of some wheat fields where the peasants were harvesting the wheat with sickles and binding the stalks up into sheaves. Across the road a man was threshing the harvest with a stave, and another

winnowing the chaff from the grain by throwing it up, so the chaff floated away on the wind. Further down the road we saw the grain spread out to dry on a concrete road where an old man with bare feet was shuffling up and down keeping the grain constantly turning to dry evenly. These were the same peasants who had made the warriors two thousand years ago and they were still harvesting the wheat in the same way.

On the way home we stopped to see the Emperor's tumulus, Mount Li, which covers the same ground area as the Great Pyramid. So far they have only discovered the life-size army he had buried to protect him in the afterlife. However, it is believed that under this vast mountain of soil lie the gold effigies of the Emperor and his family, set in a relief map of his empire where the great rivers of China flow with mercury. It is going to take a lot of digging to find out if this is really true!



Qin Shihuang
First Emperor of China and founder of the Qin Dynasty

With much effort we escaped from the souvenir vendors although I couldn't resist buying a soapstone rhinoceros for Jean Clottes, seeing as how he had just found an incredible 35,000-year-old rock painting of those animals in the Chauvet cave. The only thing that Robert wished to buy was a little bamboo *red chair* that the stallholder was sitting on! Getting the chair back to

Aspen caused many a raised eyebrow amongst the porters at our hotels and at various airports, as Robert insisted that he could not be parted from the Emperor's *red chair*.

At the Tomb of the Warriors I had bought a book on this amazing man who endowed himself with the title 'Shihuang-di', which means, 'First Emperor'. The First Emperor of China and the Founder of the Qin Dynasty only ruled for 15 years! In that short time he conquered and then completely changed China for ever by establishing the course the country has followed for the last 2,000 years, succeeding where Charlemagne failed in Europe.

How did all this come about? Let me give you a very quick run through Chinese history, as I understand it, from Zhou (1600–1027 BC) to Confucius (550–479 BC) to Qin Shihuang who died in 210 BC.

At the time of the Zhou Dynasty the strength of the city-state, which had developed out of a patriarchal clan society, was a direct line of authority down from the ruler. This, together with ancestor worship, emphasised the themes of historical identity and continuity. A period of some 500 years followed when the city-states grew in strength and then of course began to war amongst themselves. By the time Confucius arrived on the scene, the country was in a state of anarchy.

Confucius preached a return to the strict political and social order that had supported the foundation of the Zhou Dynasty five centuries earlier. In his view it was essential that men should play their role according to their place in a society of strict definition and authority. He was an agnostic and when asked about death he replied, "Not yet understanding life, how can I understand death?" He preached the need for social and governmental structure.

Other philosophies followed, eventually leading to Legalism. The basic premise of Legalist thought is that through organisation, commitment and consolidation the strength of the state can be preserved. The Ruler should have the ability to handle men, so that they are controlled without them knowing how they are manipulated. The only way of maintaining the essential order was through a system of rewards and punishments. Under the Legalist theory all people were forced into productive labour.

The harsh realism of the Legalists contrasted with the idealism of Confucius but such an approach proved to be the only solution to unify a disintegrating empire. Legalism provided Qin Shihuang with the theoretical machinery that enabled him to establish a centralised state and abolish the feudal city-states system.

The same doctrine was taught in the West by Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince: The end justifies the means, provided the end is good, where good means effective*.

So how did Qin Shihuang achieve all this in 15 years? He was born the son of the King of the Province of Qin, the most western state of China, in which lies the source of the Yellow River. The six warring states to the east thought the people of Qin were barbarians and had left them alone to concentrate on killing each other, thereby allowing the State of Qin time to become very strong.

Qin's mother was the King's concubine, but had previously been the concubine of Lu Buwei, the Prime Minister. The King died when Qin was only 13 so the Prime Minister Lu became de facto Regent through his intimate relationship with his ex-concubine, until Qin discovered about the affair and ordered Prime Minister Lu to commit suicide!

Qin Shihuang was now in sole charge aged 21. Over the next 15 years, and with the absolute enforcement of Legalism, he achieved final victory and unification of the country, thus creating the empire.

What kind of man was he? He was obsessed by a constant search for the 'elixir of immortality'. His extraordinary burial and its impressive guardian army must be seen as reflections of his fear of death and yearning for perpetual life, to which end he employed 300 astrologers to watch the stars constantly!

Everyone feared him. At one time 460 members of his staff ran away and when they were captured he sentenced them to be buried alive as a warning to the whole empire!

He was once thwarted by a great gale in an attempt to visit a temple on a mountain. He was so cross he had 3,000 slaves cut down every tree and then paint the entire mountain red, the colour of convicts!

He instigated the greatest Cultural Purge in the history of China, known as the *Burning of the Books*, in which all the works of Confucius were destroyed. Anyone caught with a book within 30 days of the decree was sent as a slave to build the Great Wall. The millions who died on the construction of the Wall were buried in it. The only books saved were those on medicine and agriculture that were rewritten in a standardised and simplified Chinese script introduced by Emperor Qin.

In 212 BC he began to build a great Palace at Xian, across the river from present day city. He had been carrying out a palace building programme for some time, as his astrologers had told him that he should never let anyone know where he was sleeping. So far he already had 270 palaces! This new one was to be the biggest yet. A labour force of 700,000 men sentenced to penal servitude and punished by castration, began to build the Apang Palace and the Emperor's tomb at Mount Li, which the terracotta army still guards.

Inside Mount Li there are meant to be replicas of the Yellow River and the Yangtze in quicksilver. When the Emperor died, after his internment, the gates in the walls around the tomb were sealed and the 300,000 artisans on the site were slain, so that the secrets of the tomb would be lost for ever.

Behind this outward display of power and caprice was a man of extraordinary vision and achievement. Aware that unity could only be sustained through law and regulations, Qin standardised all aspects of government and society. Artists followed the Emperor's wishes as directed by his officials, so that everything was done to a set standard. This applied to the architecture, bronzes, calligraphy and paintings. Even the clothes worn by the people had to be uniform, from their hats to their shoes. There was no room for individuality within the society.

Emperor Qin Shihuang established the Central State, abolished feudalism, brought peace to the country, gave the peasants land, standardised the script, built roads, and constructed the Great Wall to protect the country from the barbarians, and all in just 15 years, a quite remarkable feat.

By the end the country was exhausted and bankrupted by taxes. When at last Qin lay at rest under Mount Li, guarded by his army, the whole system disintegrated, but the legacy remained because a pattern had been set that could never be reversed. It seemed to me that there are echoes of the First Emperor's Rule in present-day China, and I suspect that they will always be heard. Qin Shihuang's genes run in the blood of the country's rulers, and it is probably necessary for the good of the people. All those smiling happy faces out in the streets seem to say just that.

Returning to our visit to the city of Xian, our next port of call was the Museum of *The Forest of Steles*, which is a gigantic library of over 3,000 slabs of paving stone covered in beautifully-carved Chinese calligraphy from the Han and Tang Dynasties. In the 15th and 16th centuries all the ancient Steles were collected from hundreds of miles around to save them from being vandalised, and were housed in a series of elegant one-storey buildings that make up the library. Each Stele is about eight foot tall and three foot across. They record the sayings of Confucius and many other ancient philosophers. A few are engraved with portraits of people or mountain scenes. In the ancient days these Steles were set up all around the country so the peasants could make paper rubbings and take them home to hang in their homes.

During Mao's Cultural Revolution, Chou Enlai ordered all the buildings that housed national treasures to be sealed, and the penalty for damaging them was death, which is why, thank goodness, treasures like the Steles were saved from the ravages of the Red Guard.

We then went to see Pan-p'o, the 6,000-year-old Neolithic settlement just outside the walls of the city, the oldest yet discovered in China. It had only recently been excavated and had been protected under an aeroplane hangar. The inhabitants of Pan-p'o lived in round wattle-and-daub huts, each with a reed roof and plastered clay floor that had a hearth in the centre. I was fascinated because Margie and I had just seen similar huts near San Pedro d'Atacama in the desert mountains of Chile that had only been vacated this century! The excavations on top of Camelot near Agecroft in England show that the houses built 5,000 years ago used exactly the same floor plan, as do the underground Neolithic houses in the Orkney Islands. The nomads on the Steppes of Russia still live in Yurts with the same circular design.

Next on the list was the new Museum of Antiquities, which is a spectacular modern building, constructed in the old Chinese style. It was such a pleasure to see that the Chinese have given up the awful concrete of Russia and gone back to their ancient architecture. The roof had the graceful line of those of the Forbidden City, including a 'terracotta chicken' on the corners!

The exhibits inside started from around 4,000 BC. From there we were slowly taken through the centuries of Chinese art, and what treasures they are! The T'ang exhibits, my favourite, were quite exquisite. Dancing figures, magnificently glazed horses and camels. I love T'ang dromedaries, as the dazzling Silk Road coloured glazes seem to fit that particular animal so well.

In the evening we visited 'Cooking Street', which was just that. Lit with colourful paper lanterns, this 15-foot wide, half-mile-long street is lined on either side with wall-to-wall kitchens with steam billowing out of the open shop fronts. Crowds of diners walked up and down the street buying morsels of food here and there. They would usually eat it right away as they continued their stroll. The little tables set up in the middle of the street seemed to be reserved for old-age customers, providing them with a place to gamble at cards or smoke a cigarette while their food was prepared.

On our way back to the hotel, feeling very hungry after inhaling such delicious spicy smells from all the kitchens, we passed along a tree-lined street that catered for the city's 'billiard players'. There were dozens of tables set up on the pavement under the trees lit by bright paper lanterns dancing in the branches above the green baize. The watching crowds were all giving advice and shouting with delight when a player missed a shot. Everyone was having fun and after a long fascinating day it made us all feel very happy.

As the sun went down on our last evening in Xian, we walked on the city wall, which is forty foot high and seven and a half miles round. The top of the wall is far above the rooftops of the old town and reached by a stone ramp beside each of the four city gates. The wall is about 30 foot wide and dead straight on all four sides. Evenly spaced along the outer edge there are guardhouses, while on the inside, looking out over the city, are little stone pavilions for lovers and old-age pensioners. No, we didn't go the whole way round, it was a missed opportunity, but we were running out of time as Robert had invited three generals to dinner!

The dinner was very formal and held in a private dining room of a new hotel. Ten of us sat around a large circular table so the conversation was difficult even before taking into consideration the fact that the three generals didn't speak any English, not a word! All our small-talk had to pass through Jane and Robert's Chinese friend, Dr Nancy, who had organised the dinner. While we were eating we could talk about the food, but between courses there were several pregnant pauses. Towards the end of the meal Nancy stepped in and started telling jokes, which turned out to be Chinese versions of what we call *shaggy dog* stories. Nancy's jokes cheered the generals no end and were greeted with gales of laughter. It was then that I discovered another *Chinese taste*; they love a silly joke and laugh with their whole bodies. Eventually Nancy was running dry and asked if we knew any jokes?

Having had enough hot rice wine and a large bottle of beer, I asked if they knew the story of the baby boy who was born with a *silver screw in his navel*? Jane boldly translated this question and then told me, "No, and they would be happy to hear it." I was now committed and immediately felt less intoxicated!

Once upon a time on midsummer's night, a baby was born with a silver screw in his navel. The mother was very worried about this and went to see the local Wizard to ask if it was a problem. The Wizard examined the baby and assured the woman that the boy would grow into a fine young man and lead a perfectly normal life IF she followed one Rule, 'the boy should never sleep naked under a full moon', so she must always make sure the window is closed on that particular night as the sheet of glass would protect him.

While Jane translated the story for the generals, I gulped rice wine to boost my courage! What if they didn't laugh?

On the night of the full moon the mother took special care to make sure her little boy was covered by a sheet when he fell asleep and that his bedroom window was firmly closed, even in the summer when the nights were very hot. The boy steadily grew and turned into a fine young man just as the Wizard had predicted. When the time came for him to leave home and go to university his mother warned him to watch for the full moon and to take exceptional care to follow the Golden Rule. The young man worked very hard at his studies and did well in the exams. He was the perfect student, diligent and well mannered, with a harmonious personality. One day he would make a fine army general!

More translating followed with Jane giving me a very odd look while she did so. I could see she was thinking that if it was possible, both of us should vanish in a puff of smoke. I took another sip of Dutch/Chinese Courage!

It so happened that his 21st birthday fell on the night of the full moon and his fellow male students gave him a party to celebrate the event. As sometimes happens on such occasions the reveller overdid the rice wine, so when he arrived home he was intoxicated. Being midsummer and hot, on reaching his room he threw off his clothes and crashed onto his bed, naked, and immediately fell into a deep sleep, having failed to notice that his window was still open from the previous night and the full moon had just appeared above the horizon!

By this time Jane's voice was definitely getting shaky!

Slowly the moon rose into the sky. When it was at its zenith a little door opened and a tiny man stepped out, sat down on a moonbeam and slid down, through the open window, landing on the bed beside the naked student. In his hand he held a silver screwdriver. The boy was sleeping on his back so it was very easy for the little man to remove the silver screw from his navel. He then climbed back on the moonbeam and ascended up to the moon, stepped inside and shut the little door.

Having reached this point I was really wondering if it had been very wise to begin telling a Shaggy Dog story to three high ranking Chinese generals!

The young man woke to a beautifully sunny day, yawned, stretched, and then looked out of the window. Suddenly he realised that it had been open over the full-moon night and that he was naked! He looked down at his navel and saw the silver screw was gone! He could hear his mother voice saying, "Remember the Rule." Gently he moved his legs and head. Nothing happened! He sat up and put his feet on the floor. Nothing happened! Had his mother been worrying unnecessarily for years? Obviously it was all a silly tale made up by the Wizard, so he sprang out of bed, and his bottom fell off.

Fortunately Robert, Jon and Nancy all laughed! However, Jane still had to translate the last part of the story, so the generals remained stony faced. Jane began and thank goodness at the end the generals roared with laughter. I don't think I have ever been more relieved. It was a good time to leave!

Was it a bad omen that we left the sun behind in Xian? We flew south and arriving in Chungking in the late evening after an easy two-hour flight. The city lies on the junction of two mighty rivers, the Yangtze and Huo Ho, above the famous Yangtze Gorges.

The airport is some way out of the city and we needed two taxis to take all our gear, including the little *red chair*, into the hotel. After much pulling and pushing by drivers vying for our custom, which led to a policeman intervening, the taxis were loaded and we set off.

Jane and Robert disappeared ahead of Jon and me, causing our driver to drive like crazy to try and catch up! Traffic ranged from the oldest trucks you have ever seen, to coolies on foot trotting along with their bamboo poles across their backs bent by panniers full of vegetables. There seemed to be no rules for overtaking other road users, so it was a bit like being back in Naples!

The Chinese are meant to drive on the right-hand side of the road, but this is not a rule that has to be followed, or so it seemed, as bicycles, buses and cars were spread across the road, all going in opposing directions.

I now realised how completely dependent we were on Jane. If anything had happened, and we passed a few accidents, Jon and I would be in a difficult position. Our driver spoke not a word of English and we had no idea where we were going, apart from the name of the hotel.

The traffic got thicker as we approached the city and the roads got more rutted. At one place we had to stop altogether before gingerly crossing a ditch at an angle to avoid scraping the bottom out of the taxi. It was as bad as the original drive into my farm in the Ninety Mile Desert!

We passed through a depressing area where we counted 14 massive blocks of high-rise apartments under construction before arriving at an enormous bridge that spanned one of the largest rivers in the world, the Yangtze. We were to get to know this bridge very well over the next couple of days, as it seemed that all the places we wished to visit were on the opposite side of the river from our hotel. As it was always blocked solid with traffic, the quickest way over was on foot, which was fun as it enabled us to look down

into the whirlpools spiralling in the gravy thick yellow water 500 foot below.

We arrived at the Holiday Inn Hotel to find that Robert and Jane had also had a hair-raising trip. Obviously this was going to be a very different experience to the one we had at Xian, something that was confirmed by the grim view from the bedroom windows that showed a sprawling industrial city.

Next morning we set off to visit the Art Academy. Leaving our luggage in our rooms meant we could squeeze into the hotel's black car. The traffic was solid across the bridge and nearly all the way out to the Academy. Porters with their loaded bamboo poles were trotting about all over the place like busy ants, darting around, heads down, with deadly intent.

We arrived at the Art Academy and were taken to Luo Zhongli's studio. Luo is about 35 years old, which means that he was in his mid-twenties at the end of the Cultural Revolution, and therefore had been a student during that critical time. Two of his paintings, *Silk Worms* and *Father*, had formed a focal point of Robert's New York Harkness House Exhibition. These two paintings were a very important part of his collection so he was keen to obtain the original sketches that Luo had done, which meant that this interview was crucial to the planned CD-Rom he was making.



Detail of 'Silk Worms' by Luo Zhongli

The interview lasted all day and included a delicious lunch prepared by the art students that continued for well over an hour. While negotiations continued after lunch I took myself off to walk around the Academy and came across the sculpture studios and found inside the largest standing clay statue I have ever seen, at least 25 foot high, another politician!

In China the main source of heat during the winter and for cooking throughout the year, is the brown coal briquette. Robert and I took a walk through the old town and came across one of the backyard factories where the briquettes were produced. Right amongst all the houses a great heap of powdered brown coal was being fed by men with shovels into a machine that thumped away while pumping out sardine-tin-sized blocks. Coolies then loaded these into the panniers at either end of their poles and trotted off to deliver them to the houses and cooking shops. Everywhere we walked in the old town we came across ovens out in the streets, the filthy smoke curling up into the low sulphur-polluted clouds that hung above. We constantly had to blow our noses and our handkerchiefs soon turned black while our mouths were always full of grit. Our hearts bled for the poor people who had to breathe this filthy air all of their lives.

Walking through the old part of town was fascinating. Perched on the side of a steep hill the tiny streets wander back and forth. Very quickly we had absolutely no idea where we were, having no sun to give us a clue about which direction was south. We strolled on surrounded by the past, it seemed as though nothing had changed for centuries.

We stepped out of a tiny zigzag street and found ourselves in a thriving marketplace full of bustling customers and bargaining vendors. The tables were loaded down with tons of vegetables, fresh fruit, meat and eggs. We bought a banana each and nearly stopped the traffic as a crowd of smiling happy people watched us eat them. I had not one moment of anxiety during our entire walk through this astonishingly crowded slum area. We were sorry to leave and head back to the hotel, but nature was calling and there was no way we were going to ruin the morning by entering one of the public lavatories we occasionally came upon as the smell from the doorways was enough to turn our stomachs.

One day we crossed the river in the cable car. The thick wire stretched across the river that flowed some 300 foot below us. Looking down into the swirling yellow water pockmarked with whirlpools, I thought it was best not to ask if there had ever been an accident. If it did happen, and you could escape after hitting the water, you would be sucked under by the whirlpools. When the time came I was very happy to come home by taxi!

When we got off the cable car we walked to the top of the hundreds of broad steps that descend all the way down to the water edge. The river was at its lowest level when we were there, so the bottom of the steps led out onto sandy flats. The river was 300 yards wide but the back flow along the bank provided a safe haven for the boats that ranged from great steel ferries all the way down to old wooden junks. Narrow plank gangways reached from the water's edge up to the boat decks which bent alarmingly when the coolies ran up them with their bamboo poles loaded down with heavy panniers.

At one spot on the beach a group of coolies were milling around bargaining for jobs. Suddenly a girl rushed to the water's edge and started to wade out into the river until a man ran after her and hauled her back. Wailing and shouting, the girl fought with her rescuer until a knot of people carried her away from the water's edge. We had obviously witnessed a desperate moment of utter despair. The scene had a deep effect on us all. Under the smiling happy exterior of these people lay the fact that life is a very cheap commodity in China and, when existence became unbearable, death in the swirling yellow whirlpools was the only alternative and a happy release.

As we laboriously climbed the steep steps away from this sad scene on the banks of the muddy river, we could still hear the wailing of the poor girl. Suddenly we were jolted out of our own thoughts by a continuous harsh grunting sound coming up behind us, and just in time, we leapt aside to let a fully-loaded coolie run by. The pole across the man's shoulders was bowed to breaking point so the load must have weighed at least 100 pounds! The muscles over his shoulders and up his back stood out in tight knots. His feet were bare and his calves looked like wire hawsers. I thought of the 300,000 labourers who had built Qin Shihuang's tomb and who had then been interned with the Emperor when it was finished!

I was not sorry to leave Chungking, the birthplace of China's push for Free Enterprise. The smell of the Art Academy, our walk through the old town, and the scene on the banks of the Yangtze, had all been exceptional experiences. The abject poverty bravely hidden under the people's smiling faces filled me with admiration for the Chinese people and left me feeling utterly humbled.

We needed a *fix* and it was about to come. Our flight to Shanghai made a stop at Wuhan. We were told that this city had the reputation of being one of the toughest places in China, and if wise, you did not mess with the Wuhanese!

The city is in the centre of the rice-growing area of China, where they can grow up to three crops a year. It lies in a vast wet plain that is surrounded by mountains and is probably the first place rice was cultivated 8,000 years ago. The Yangtze flows out of its famous 'gorge' into this plain, wanders through it, filling lakes as it floods, before flowing east to the sea. Water lay everywhere and when we landed it was raining.

Buses arrived to take off those disembarking in Wuhan. The officials then announced that as we had an hour-long layover while the plane was cleaned, they would like us all to leave. There was quite a bit of mumbling amongst us Europeans as to whether it was necessary to have to get out in the pouring rain as we were 'In Transit'. We were so slow in moving that the last bus left without us, and as there seemed to be no other transport available, the officials decided that we had better stay where we were.

An hour later the whole scene was repeated when the passengers, which included a new bunch of Wuhan citizens, climbed back on board. As it was still pouring, they were all rather cross and very wet. Then the count started and the authorities found that the number of passengers didn't tally with the Boarding Passes. Another count and, 'Yes', we had one too many passengers! By this stage the Wuhanese were in an uproar. People were standing on their seats yelling and waving their fists at the hostesses. Some officials arrived from the terminal wearing proper uniforms and restored order with threats of arrest. Another count proved that we were still one extra, so everyone had to produce their tickets.

It turned out that one of the Chungking passengers had lost his Boarding Pass. The whole episode had taken an hour, but it had been as good as a play and our spirits were lifted. Suddenly the mood changed as all the passengers decided that it had been a great joke and started clapping and cheering!

Driving into Shanghai was like forcing one's way through an ants' nest. This was Naples at its worst from the traffic point of view. It was also my first sight of the Construction Revolution. Everywhere was covered with bamboo scaffolding! We stopped at the hotel to leave some of our luggage, as from here

we were going to travel by train to Hangchow, our next Art Academy.

The railway is still run by the State, unlike the airlines that have been privatised. This was soon obvious to us passengers as some very sour-faced ladies in uniforms were in charge of the waiting rooms and 'restrictions were definitely in place'. We were briskly told to sit down and not move.

Eventually we were allowed onto the platform. Moments later we were ordered into the train and eventually set off at the official speed of 30 mph. It was going to be a long trip! The train was dirty and the hostesses matched the decor. We had hoped for a meal, but green tea made from uncut leaves was all that was offered. It was going to be a very long trip indeed! We rolled through very boring flat countryside that was soon obliterated by inky blackness.

After a totally uneventful five-hour trip we arrived at Hangchow and with a little hassle found a taxi that took us to a hotel, which had previously been used only by Communist Party officials. It was marvellous! The dining room was old China with musicians playing on authentic instruments. Thank goodness we had not been able to eat on the train as Robert ordered food that proved to be out of this world. Things were definitely looking up.

After dinner we went to the bar for a nightcap. Robert, Jon and I settled down to a Famous Grouse on the Rocks to watch a band of four very pretty Philippine girls singing Beatles songs. After one look Jane asked to be excused. It had been a long day with a fabulous end and pretty soon three very happy male travellers tumbled off to bed, eager for their next adventure.

We woke to a beautiful day. It had rained heavily in the night but now the sunlight was glinting on the wet leaves of the trees. Robert and I had shared a room to try and keep costs down as the prices of hotel rooms and the food were astronomical, surpassing those of the best hotels in London and Paris! The view from our balcony was quite superb as we could see through the tree tops the famous West Lake and another smaller lake covered with water-lily pads. Between the lakes was a tiny island topped by a steep wooded hill. The island was joined to us by a bridge and to the other shore by a willow-edged causeway that led across to the main town. Boats were being sculled this way and that as their crews looked for tourists, Hungchow being a famous Chinese holiday resort. The saying goes, *In Heaven there is Paradise, on Earth there is Hungchow*. From our vantage point it certainly looked to be true.

The four of us piled into a taxi and headed across the causeway towards the Academy to meet our next artist. His studio was by far the best that we had seen so far with a floor-to-ceiling window that gave great light to a very large room. The interview started and as I was not needed I took myself off for a walk around the campus. The buildings were well cared for and there was not a sign of any decaying Russian concrete. Even the lavatories didn't smell!

A football ground bordered by a running track filled the central area in front of the building that housed the studios. I did a couple of laps of the field to make up for the lack of exercise the day before, and then set off to explore the Academy. The roadways that criss-crossed the campus were tree-lined and swept clean. It was lunchtime and students were returning from the canteen with their bowls of steaming rice and mugs of tea, to squat on their haunches in the sun outside their classrooms, chattering as they shovelled away at their rice bowls with chopsticks.

I passed one studio where a girl was kneeling by some black and white photographs that she had laid out on the ground. I said, "Knee How," and as she smiled up at me, I pointed at the photographs and signed to ask if I could look. They were shots of a female figure in clay. With much laughter and, with me using my best sign language, I learnt that she was the artist. She then beckoned me into the studio, which was about half the size of a tennis court.

There were several students in the room, boys and girls, all eating from their bowls of rice while talking. The room contained about 15 stands each with the same clay figure on it, as this was a life class. Since it was break time the dais was empty, but I could tell from the sculpture that the pose was Rodin's *Age of Bronze*. Many welcoming smiles said, "Please, have a look," so I did. It was very talented work and I was impressed and by the fact that the students had access to photographic facilities to record their progress. Next door to this studio was another similar one and all these stands also had the same clay figure on them, but this time Rodin's *Eve*!

I walked on through the campus, poking my head into sculpture studios wherever I saw an open door. I then came to a little sculpture garden of stone-carved figures, and I am delighted to say that they were very Chinese. One of them was a superb little dancing flute player wearing big baggy trousers. I was taking a photograph of this when two of the boy students walked up and started to talk to me in stumbling English. They asked me if I liked the sculpture. I said I did but what did they think? "Too Chinese!" Oh dear! There was one very good sign, I didn't come across a single statue of a politician!

I asked how long the course was and they answered, "Three years." I asked what they wished to do when they finished and they told me that they wanted to be sculptors. "Will you be able to make a living as a sculptor?" I enquired. "No, we will have to get another job as well," they replied with rather sad faces, and I knew how they must have felt. It amazes me that Creative Art is the greatest of all man's achievements, treasured beyond all else, the measure of every Civilisation, and yet nowadays supported by so few patrons and so little money. Thank God for the Few! The Hungchow Art Academy was the most impressive art school that I had ever visited in my life.

A little further down the road I came to the campus barbershop and couldn't resist the temptation! The chair was empty and the girl barber was squatting on the step twiddling her thumbs. I made signs and she nodded. I held up a note and she nodded again, so up I got in the chair and she gave me a Chinese haircut that still made people laugh three weeks later. I wandered back to the studio to find the interview was coming to a close. Robert and Jon didn't notice my haircut, but Jane screamed, "What have you done?" giggling, with her hand across her mouth, a very endearing Chinese gesture.

We set off for the restaurant that we had seen on the island when we crossed the causeway in the morning. Here, in an enormous room overlooking the water, we lunched on their speciality of West Lake glazed Golden Carp, freshly caught by the fishermen that very day, and cooked to order. I have never eaten anything as juicy in my life. It was quite superb and enormous. It was placed in the middle of the table and the four of us ploughed into it with our chopsticks. As Robert sucked the last morsel off the head bones, we gave in, and collapsed back in our chairs. What a meal!

Jane had to collect our plane tickets, which is a very complicated business in China, and requires the patience of Job. Sadly we were about to say goodbye to her as she was flying back to Beijing and not coming to Shanghai. I

was very sad to see her leave as she had become a good friend. She had done a marvellous job of organising our travel and interpreting (some of it beyond the call of duty!) making our trip easy and great fun. We were all going to miss her.

We were heading back to the hotel around the lake when our driver suddenly turned into a private drive. We had noticed some very attractive private houses situated on a strip of park that divided the road from the lake on our way out, and it was into one of these villas that we had now turned.

We came to a barred gate guarded by a soldier who, after a brief chat with our driver, allowed us to drive slowly past superbly-tended lawns and ponds spanned by little bridges. We stopped and admired the scene and took some photographs. It was a very peaceful place. It came as a shock when we learnt that once it had been Mao's holiday home, the man who had murdered millions of his fellow countrymen. I wondered if it was here that he had formulated the blueprint for the Cultural Revolution that had caused so much misery for our dear little Jane.

Our trip was coming to an end. The next morning we headed out to Hungchow Airport and as we knew from experience that only smelly salted fish would be served on the flight, we looked around for a café to have a light lunch. We found one near the car park and what should have been a simple meal slowly turned into a party with the waitresses. With not one word of English amongst the lot of them we ordered, by drawing pigs and fish and wine bottles on the paper tablecloth. Soon everyone in the restaurant was joining in the fun. *In Heaven there is Paradise, on Earth there is Hungchow.*

We arrived late that evening in Shanghai having slept off our unforgettable meal in the aeroplane. On landing we were suddenly thrown back into a mass of people and hurly-burly noise. It was late and as we had all eaten much too much for lunch we decided that after a steam bath and a few laps of the five-star luxury hotel's swimming pool, we would call it a day.

Next morning was bright and sunny. It was to be our last day in China. Looking out of the hotel bedroom window across the city, I could see nothing but high-rise buildings, all under construction. There was literally a forest of cranes. It reminded me of the giant termite nests in northern Australia. What an awful place it is going to be!

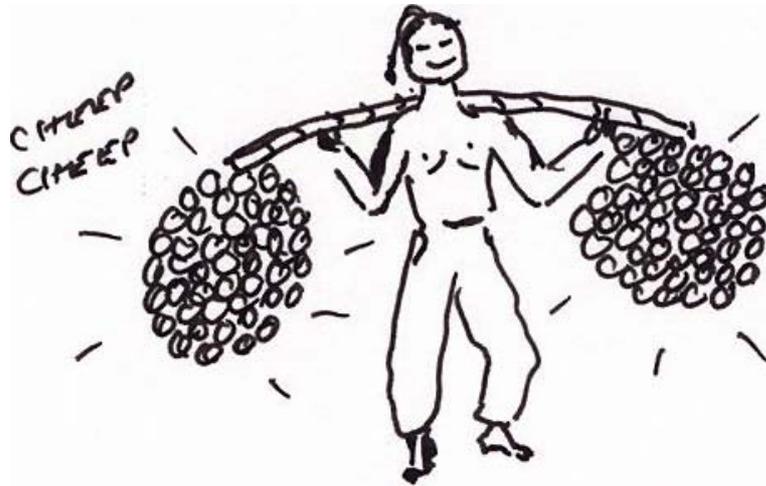
It was Sunday. Down below, the side road that ran along the main highway in front of the hotel had been turned into a pedestrian walkway and I could see couples dancing and hear snatches of music that floated up to my window. I looked down through my binoculars and saw the strangest of sights, couples being taught how to waltz! An instructor with a loud hailer was shouting "One Two Three, One Two Three," with everyone following his beat. Cassette players were blaring out Viennese tunes but each playing a different waltz, vying with the next group. Everyone was *dancing in the street*.

The three of us met downstairs having had a really good sleep. Robert suggested that we walked down to the Bund for a stroll along the waterfront of the Yangtze. I looked up Bund in the dictionary as it struck me as an odd word and found that it is Persian meaning 'embankment'. Shades of the Silk Road?

We set off down the street. Walking on the pavements of Shanghai is like swimming against a fast current of a raging river so is virtually impossible. However, it is the only way to go as the motor traffic is stationary. We tried a taxi but got out as the pedestrians were passing us!

After a while we took a break from the struggle of trying to progress and

went into a park where families had brought their children, all beautifully dressed, for a Sunday outing. It was splendid to see all the happy children with their parents.



Pinocchio and his crickets

At the entrance of the park we met a man selling crickets. He had a long coolie's bamboo across his shoulders and on either end were hundreds of tiny woven bamboo cages, the size of an orange, each holding a cricket. The noise was tremendous until he put the load down and all the crickets stopped singing and there was total silence. In China crickets symbolise good fortune so we bought several before the policeman moved our Pinocchio on because he and his crickets had completely blocked the pavement with a crowd of onlookers.

We walked on until we came to a small flowerbed crowded with dwarf orange marigolds, guarded by a policeman! Parents were showing their children the flowers and taking photographs of them standing in front of the bed. Every now and then the guard would blow his whistle as one of the children bent down to get a better look and had got alarmingly within picking distance! We gave our crickets to passing children and received lovely smiles in return.

At last we reached the water's edge of the mighty Yangtze. The Bund is an enormous levee and reminded me of the Rambla in Barcelona on a hot night as a broad paved walkway runs along the top. There were literally thousands of people of every age strolling along it, gangs of macho boys, coveys of giggling girls, mooning couples, and ancients with grandchildren. All possible combinations of humanity! On one side there were benches packed with people, while on the riverside every inch of the rail was being leant on.

The river was a mile wide and full of enormous container ships and oil tankers. We flowed along in the river of people like floating logs. A knot of happy teenagers in school uniforms with coloured scarves round their necks shouted "Hello" at us and then posed, with a lot of pushing and giggling, to be photographed by Jon. Everyone was smiling and being very friendly to us and each other in the sunshine.

"What's your name? My name is Peach Blossom. Where do you come from? Do you speak English? I speak English." Standing in front of us was a minuscule Chinese girl. Pitch black hair, pigtailed, a band across her brow, black-brown eyes, and a big grinning mouth that literally reached from ear to ear. "Hello," Robert answered, "I come from America and we have come to visit

China. Have you met an American before?" The little girl looked blank and said, "What's your name? My name is Peach Blossom. Where do you come from? I speak English? Do you speak English?" Robert patted her on the head and said goodbye at which we got a great wave and, "Goodbye America."

We left the Bund and started back towards the hotel. We stopped at a restaurant and were told that they could not feed us as it was five minutes past two and they closed at two. A little further down the street we came to a fast-food café and were served the worst meal possible. It was so bad we left it on the table but were thankful for the cold beer and a chance to sit for a moment.

Our walk back to the hotel was a repeat of the morning's struggle, but after a steam bath and a swim we all met again in the lobby for a cocktail, dressed in our finest. We set off in the hotel's *black car* for the Bund and the old Palace Hotel, a favourite old haunt of Robert's and where he had booked a table for a celebration dinner. The restaurant was on the second floor of this pre-war Victorian relic and as we had a table by the window we were able to look out on the river's nightlife. Across the water the lights of the giant Russian telecommunication needle blazed making it look like a nuclear rocket about to be launched. All green and sparkling and incredibly ugly! The great ships on the river were lit up with fairy lights from stem to stern and the tugs were pushing barges hither and thither on *the river that never sleeps*.

We were handed menus but as the choices were countless Robert took control for Jon and myself. We watched as he did a lot of finger pointing at the page which we had learnt always meant special surprises were on their way.

The first bottle of *Great Wall* wine arrived and we toasted the end of what had been a very successful trip and for me the journey of a lifetime. I then looked around the room that was brilliantly lit with neon lights. No romantic goings-on in here! The walls were a kind of sky blue and the tablecloths dazzling white. The waitresses were as efficient as nurses in a hospital and acted the same way. The room said, "This is a place for serious eating." It was lucky that we had had no lunch as course after course of some of the best food you can imagine started to arrive as though on a conveyer belt. Special crabs from somewhere and fish from somewhere else. Duck done this way, pork done that way. An hour later the banquet was over and we collapsed.

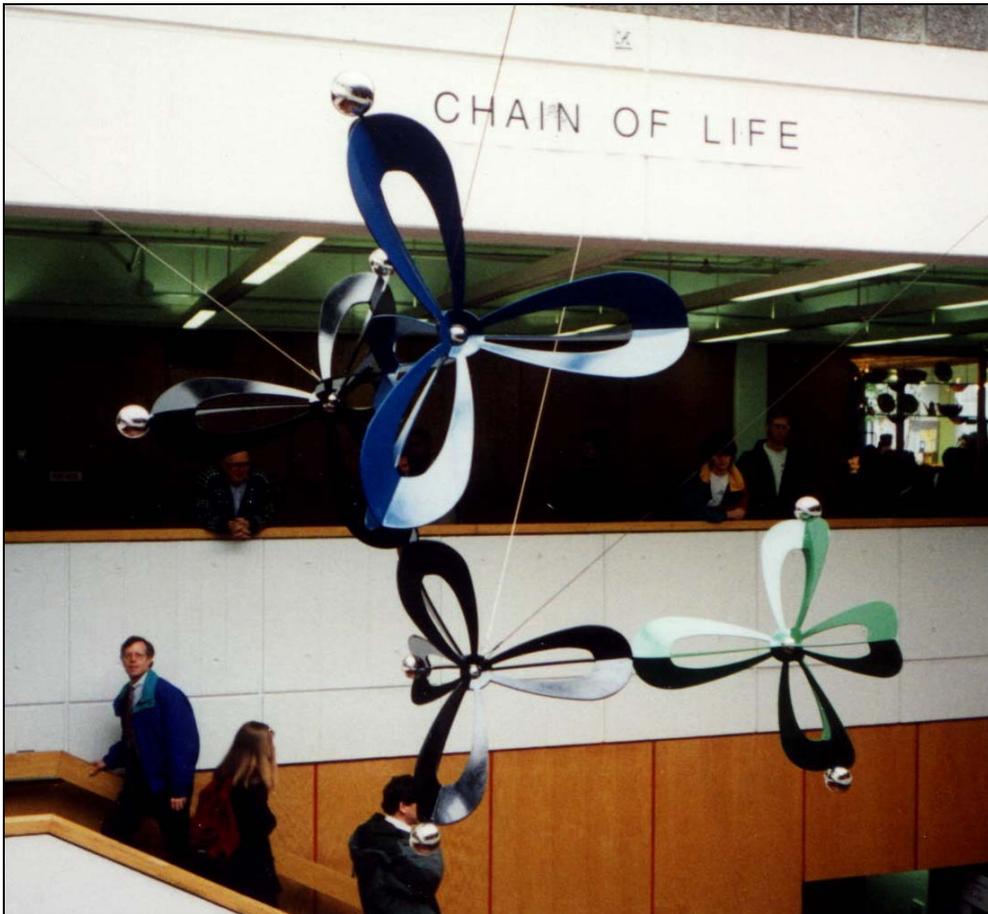
What an end to a really fantastic journey! I had certainly 'tasted the flavour of China'. I treasure my memories of meeting artists and experiencing the lifestyle, of visiting Xian, Beijing and Hungchow. As we settled into our aeroplane seats and headed for Tokyo I started to let the film of our trip run across my mind's screen. It was going to take a long time for it all to sink in.

China is a startling place. I shall have to leave 'future predictions' to those who know more about it than I ever shall. All that energy frightens me and the tragic scene we witnessed on the river bank with the near suicide by the girl coolie was still etched in my memory. But I also wonder if Legalism isn't going to be the only way the vast population can be coped with, and just maybe that is the way the whole world is heading!

In a few hours we were back at Ramiilaj, with a great welcome from Bandit. It was Heaven. No people and space, space, and more space. The rock bases for my sculptures had been delivered and the following day a giant crane arrived to lift them into place. It was another world where I was seeing my work being set in one of the most beautiful mountain landscapes that exists. I am sure Emperor Qin would have enjoyed Ramiilaj and walking the Coyote Trail, all achieved without the death of a single slave!



Robert, Bandit and JR at 'Coyote Power Point'



'Chain of Life' at Harvard

After setting the remaining sculptures, Robert and I flew to Boston to see *Chain of Life* that he and Damon had given the Chemistry Department of Harvard University. I had done the sculpture in conjunction with Professor Bob Williams of the Inorganic Chemistry Department of Oxford University. Dr Alan Long had showed us around some months before and asked me where I would like to site the sculpture. Well there was really only one place, right in the middle of the atrium of the New Science Building!

We also visited the Harvard Library and presented them with an edition of the *Bradshaw Paintings* book. The best thing about this was that we got to see an amazing granite ball carved by the Aztecs.



Aztec granite ball at Harvard Library

We then flew down to New York where Robert had a meeting with the Frick Curator of the Natural History Museum to see the new Dinosaur Exhibition. We were taken down into the vaults to see the fossil collection that is kept in a vast room full of rows and rows of steel cabinets. I was asked if there was anything special I would like to see. My guardian angel suggested I ask if there were any platypus fossils! The Curator said, "Yes, we have a very rare specimen from South America and it has teeth, something Australian ones don't have!"

So ended a month of travel to exotic places and it was of course impossible to thank Robert properly. To share the journey with Robert, Jon and Jane had been like going *Round the World in Eighty Days* with Phileas Fogg and Passepartout, but far better!