Prologue

How and why is it that we came to Kunming, the capital city of China's southwestern Yunnan province, far away from much better-known Beijing and Shanghai and others along the east coast?

Open on a scene in the middle of the Middle Kingdom of a married couple from Washington, DC riding in a handsome Cedric sedan with a translator and a driver fighting their way through impossibly heavy traffic in January in late 20th century. They are on their way to take the very last step in the laborious adoption process (good laborious, because only those really serious about adoption will complete it). The absolute finale will be to take back with them a little baby girl between ten and eleven months old. They first saw a picture of her while they were visiting their adoption agent in NYC, sitting in the famous restaurant he lives near. This famous restaurant is famous for its sign: large and above the plate glass windows, wrapped around the corner of Broadway and 112th St., with a deep blue background edged in white (the owners are Greek) and pink neon block capital letters -- **RESTAURANT** -- glowing at the very opening of every *Seinfeld* episode. Even though the couple saw only a small picture, it was love at first sight, and they could hardly wait to hold this infant from the other side of the world in their arms.

They have now flown into Changsha, the capital of Hunan province in the middle of China. The orphanage is in Yiyang, about two hours away -- would be two hours away, that is, were there much less traffic. Their very able driver, who has a little girl of his own, is trying to compensate for the delay by often using a non-existent right lane to pass long lines of trucks and other vehicles going nowhere. The journey to Yiyang goes right past the road that leads up to Music Mountain, where Mao was born and grew up; the traffic on that side road was also heavy during the Cultural Revolution, but that was decades ago and today no cars are to be seen making that left turn. (We visited another Mao site while staying in Changsha, a gazebo in a park where he first started discussions of Marxism. Much more interesting in Changsha, however, was Lady Xin Zhui, a well-preserved corpse from 163 BC, lying now in a tank of preserving liquid).

Scene the second: Arrival in Yiyang. First some paperwork, then to the orphanage, where the expectant parents are told it will take a little while before everything is ready: why don't you go out and get some lunch? They discover that sweet-and-sour pork in Hunan is infinitely better than in the states, not sweet and sweet-sour but a true culinary synthesis. It snowed the night before this January journey, a light snow but enough to cover the ground. Changsha does not get much snow in the winter, so this is a good omen the couple is told: "Your journey is twice blessed." There's no heat in the orphanage, but there are braziers in the conference room where the participants can warm their hands before the handover takes place. An attractive young woman appears in the conference room holding in

her arms the new daughter, dressed in a thick yellow snow suit. Many parents feel their beautiful child is a gift from God. In this case, the beautiful child is, in a sense, a gift from the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China.

Scene the third takes place in front of the curtain: The parents are deciding that the little girl, who is now seven, should get to know something about her Chinese heritage. She has shown no special interest in this, but she has surpassed her father's and her mother's expectations in every respect and so it is something owed to her. Father is pacing back and forth: "I don't want us to go to Beijing or Shanghai. Big cities all over the world are too much alike. Besides, they are too expensive, like Hong Kong. Plus, Guangdong and Hong Kong are Cantonese, whereas she is not from the South." Mother: "Let's see what else we can find."

The curtain now opens, and the parents move to the kitchen table at center stage. They set about deciding that Kunming is the place. Father: "It's smaller, though large enough to have good schools and several universities and other amenities; it seems to be a mix of Han Chinese and local ethnic minorities." Mother: "It's distinctively located, in close proximity to not only Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam but also Tibet and Sichuan." They both agree that Yunnan province is a sort of distant cousin to Hunan, geographically and perhaps even in culinary terms. Father and mother met while both were working at a conservation organization, and Yunnan province is biologically the most important in all of China. Father: "Wait, wait; this is the clincher – it's called 'Spring City' because it basically has four seasons of spring." Mother: "We'll bring the dog, too."

One thing they do not yet know about their newly chosen destination: it has Green Lake.

Chapter 3: Transformations

On the far side of the lake, after I have made my morning way through the interior walkways, past the people exercising and dancing and exercise-dancing, past the now dying water lilies and out to the perimeter again, I walk through groups of kindergarteners running relay races or jumping up and down to music. Their school across the street has just been repainted in bright colors and looks much better.

A few steps beyond the kids, there is an open stretch of water to my left. Here there is one thing new: the voices of two women coming from inside the park across the broad expanse of water. They are opera singers, of the Chinese opera sort, each warming up her instrument, standing at the edge of the water casting it out as far as it will go.

"*WooooooooOOOooooooooe..OuuuuuuUUUuuuu*."

They are not singing words so much as syllables, almost a kind of moaning. They stand under some trees with their backs to an odd structure, which either serves tea or is an administrative office or both -- it looks like a modern ranch house in California, with knotty pine exterior paneling and modern casement windows. I am reminded for some reason of a painting by Edward Hopper, except that the faces are Chinese. I can only hear them for about ten or twenty paces because soon they are drowned out by the boom box used by the fifty or so former chorus girls (so I imagine) who meet every morning in the same place to dancercize. Still, the opera singers are a lovely little interlude.

Nothing much new at the lake, but on the other hand the authorities have just adorned it with a new bumper-cars ride, just inside the entrance gate nearest our apartment. This took over a large round raised platform of stone tiles that was never much used anyway, so it is not too bad, and the kids will love it. Immediately after finishing it, masons built a one-room storage house next to it, which took a couple of days. A week later they tore that down, closed the entrance and began digging up that section of the walkways inside the park. It has been closed for over a month now, and the bumper cars still have not been used.

* * *

The city continues to busy itself with transforming itself. Items:

- There's a new skyscraper abuilding. It is prominent in the view from my apartment window for it towers over everything else, even the tall office buildings. There are many more towering like this in other parts of the city. The skyscraper's upper floors are way above the steeple of the large Christian church nearby which has been under renovation for a couple of years now and which is nearing the finish line.

- Every manhole cover in the city, at least in every part of the city I have experienced, was dug up and replaced last year.

- Last week they replaced the overhead electrical wiring and the transformers throughout the city. I know this because I saw the huge wooden spools of cable they were using, and we had no electricity in the apartment complex for a day; my travel agent, whose office is in another part of the city altogether, told me that they were without power for a day recently also. At about 11 p.m. on Sunday night, I watched as a work crew, standing below a new transformer they had just installed on a platform on one of the utility poles, used a long bamboo pole to reach up and throw the three switches that turn it on. *Zzzzz*.

- The next day other work crews started digging out some of the manholes again, the ones that lead to valves in water pipes, this time to install new and larger valves.

The universities, too: several have built entirely new campuses, far away from the ones near Green Lake. I don't even know where these campuses are. They will be for undergraduates, and already first and second year undergrads are housed and taught there. Over the next two years, all undergrads and their professors will migrate out there, and the Green Lake campus will become the research and graduate teaching campus. (A master's degree used to be a big deal here, sufficient for teaching; now the PhD is required).

The building in which I have my office, on the northern section of the Green Lake campus, was completely renovated over the summer, while I was away, and other renovations are in process now. My old office had a certain charm, full of hand-built wooden furniture from (most probably) the fifties, and piled high with papers and paraphernalia left there by a retired professor who hadn't used the office in five years -- everything was removed and disappeared. New electrical outlets and overhead lights were installed; everything (but the concrete floor, which remains the same) was painted

white; the rust-stained sink in the corner was magically restored using some sort of acid. Modern office furniture that could populate buildings in Sao Paulo, Milan, Phoenix, or Shanghai was installed.

* * *

Still, the old China persists in the interstices of the modernization process -- now and then. I pay my electric bills at the bank. Banks are open seven days a week. On a recent Sunday, I went to pay my bill. Each clerk sits behind the bulletproof glass and speaks through that round plastic louvered thing that looks like Darth Vader's mouthpiece. Each clerk is fully equipped, surrounded by all the technologically advanced equipment in a modern office: fax/scanning machine, a computer CPU, monitor and keyboard, and a telephone. There is hardly enough room for all this in the little space each clerk occupies. I slip the plastic card identifying my account through the little depression in the marble counter that goes under the bulletproof glass. She checks her computer -- networked to the bank's central computer (often down) -- writes the amount owed on a piece of paper, and I slip two 100 yuan notes through to her. She calculates the change I am owed. She calculates it not on any of all that sophisticated equipment surrounding her, but on an inconspicuous little abacus almost completely hidden from the customer behind the computer keyboard.

And the guy rotating the two balls in his left hand while walking backwards around the lake is still there every day. My expert on these balls turns out to live in Falls Church, VA. Keith emailed me, after I'd talked about them last time:

> Chinese “exercise balls”, aka “yin yang balls”. I've got a bowlful of about a dozen in my living room (I pick up a pair every time I go to San Francisco - it's an ongoing project to fill the bowl). Fundamental and critical difference between Western and Eastern thought: Western thought believes mind is separate from body (Descartes, dualism). Eastern thought believes they are inseparable: the “bodymind”. The movement of the balls in the hand works to affect the mind in the same way that acupuncture affects seemingly non-related parts of the body and mind. Has to do with the flow of Qi, the energy of life. ... They're actually hollow, and each one contains a chime that rings when you shake it. It really is a “chime” sound -- very pretty. They're sold in pairs, and one rings on a high note, the other a lower note -- yin and yang. The standard model is the silver steel version, but you

can also find balls with very elaborate and colorful enameling, which are probably made more for the tourist trade.

Just walking around still fascinates, perhaps more so now that I see individual faces more clearly and with greater -- delight and amusement. The toddlers are still marvelous, most of them dumbstruck when a Westerner stops to say hello to them, some with the most wonderful little smiles of appreciation.

* * *

In October, on National Day, they had a dinner for three or four hundred people out at the convention center. I was included because the university nominated me as a Foreign Expert. The Governor of the province spoke about the progress that Yunnan is making and the advance of "the reforms." The Governor is the same age as, has the same physical build as, and wears the same spectacles as Hu Jintao, and he of course wears the same dark suits. The entire congregation was then bused over to the basketball pavilion, built in the style of "modern architecture," for a performance by ethnic minorities, singers, dancers, acrobats:

Yunnan Celebration of 55th Anniversary of the Founding of the PRC

Salute to the Five Star Red Flag

Yi People's Style Dragon Dance

Children's Singing and Dancing Light Blessing

Falling in Love with the PRC

My Homeland
Falling in Love with the PRC
Wa People Singing for the New Life
My China Heart
Kunming City Bus Company Drum Dance

Yi People's Cigarette Box Dance and Rap (18 Life-Style Changes of Yunnan)

Opera of Three Different Styles: Flowers over Colorful Yunnan

Female Singer: Zhong Yong Chuoma of Tibet ("56 Blessings")

Cheer for the Homeland in October (Grand Finale)

One of the many things included in the Cigarette Box Dance and Rap was a group of guys in *Tour de France* outfits and helmets making their bicycles dance. They were pretty good.

A few weeks later, Yunnan's annual dinner specifically for those designated Foreign Experts was held. Eleven of us, through the efforts of our host institutions, received gold-colored Friend of Yunnan medals, a handshake from the Vice Governor, and a good dinner. I somehow received the honor of giving a speech on behalf of the recipients. I spoke, one paragraph at a time, each then translated by Aretha Liu, chief translator for the bureau in charge, about my conservation project. (Ms. Liu had a student in the old days who suggested that Aretha would be a good name if Ms. Liu wanted to take an English name, which she did; and incidentally Aretha introduced the Vice-Governor as "Her Highness, the Vice-Governor of Yunnan Province.")

One of the best things about the occasion for me was that Doug Briggs, the young doctor who volunteers his services here through Project Grace, was also honored, and I got to renew my acquaintanceship with him. He is the one from whom came the story about the mountain-top visit to his shoeshine girl's dying mother. He tells me he has lots of other stories he has collected and promises to email them to me; I look forward to getting them. He is moving to the northwestern part of the province, to Zhongdian (recently renamed Shangri-La and close to Tibet), and will be working up there. Since I was sitting next to the Vice Governor at dinner, I asked Doug if he needed anything. He said he needed a certificate from the Health Department that was slow in coming. The Vice Governor is a take-charge lady (what good is power if you never use it?), and soon she was directing another official there to help Doug out.

On my right sat a man from the party secretariat. He spoke good English and had lived in Brisbane for half a year. I explained to him that in America the network of the sort of biodiversity data centers I want to bring to China was built from the bottom up, proceeding state-by-state and eventually surrounding Washington, DC after about twenty years. We hoped to follow the same strategy in China, eventually surrounding Beijing. He said: "you know, that strategy is the same one Mao Zedong employed!"

* * *

Odds and ends.

Seen on a t-shirt, with a picture of the Statue of Liberty, worn by a young woman I passed in the street:

LAY LADY
LIBERTY
#1

We are very much influenced by the United States

My friend, Bin, was riding his bike on a cold winter night about a year ago. He saw a guy sitting alone, shivering in just a t-shirt. He asked him what his problem was. The guy said he had been tricked out of all his possessions, having given them to someone who promised to get him a job. John Bean gave him 40 *kuai* ($5). The guy called him back about six months later to tell him that he recently found a job in the construction industry.

Jowit, J, 2004, *The Observer*, "Eat less meat and you'll help save the planet." In the last four decades, meat eating in Europe has risen from an annual average of 56kgs (123 lbs) per person to 89kg (196 lbs). People in developing countries ate far less to start with, though China's total per head is now up from 4kgs (8.8 lbs) to 54kg (119 lbs).

The Call to China. That was the call that thousands of Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States heard and which brought them to faraway China. Now this from a review in *The New York Review of Books* by Anthony Grafton, a professor of Renaissance history at Princeton:

> as Lionel Trilling noted long ago, money is -- or used to be -- ashamed of itself. Colleges and universities offered a respected place where malefactors of great wealth could turn their perishable piles of cash into massive lecture halls, libraries, and dormitories, and fashionable space where the malefactor's spawn could gain some polish before they began bilking investors or hiring Pinkertons to break strikes. A century ago, white male patricians awaited the Call to China. Nowadays multiracial groups of boys and girls, many of them Chinese, Japanese, or Korean by descent, sip hot chocolate and sing "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore" while waiting for the Call to Wall Street.

* * *

Pessimism ruled out. "Inveterate worriers" should stop worrying about China's growth, according to the *Economist*, because this growth is now spreading from the traditionally more prosperous coastal cities to the interior of the country -- places like Kunming. But can the exports which have supported the country's amazing growth, "averaging better than 9% a year over the past 25 years," continue to grow? Indeed, exports are likely to fall, if the Chinese currency is revalued, or if the American economy, where many of them still go, starts to slow down. Not to worry, though, because several factors will mitigate: "For a start, its economy, though trade-dependent, is not excessively so. Its ratio of exports to GDP stands at around 30%: high by the standards of America and Japan, but nothing out of the ordinary compared with European or other East Asian nations."

And domestic consumption is now kicking in as a spur to growth. Prosperity is spreading and more Chinese can now afford "life's little luxuries." The country's domestic economy is thus becoming "a powerful engine of growth in its own right, just as happened earlier in Japan and, indeed, in America before that." Not that there aren't hurdles still to be jumped, the main one being state-control of sectors of the economy and protection of "inefficient state-owned firms that ought to go bust".

The key fact is that China for the foreseeable future will remain the world's lowest-cost manufacturer of most household items. "So the process of allowing its hundreds of millions—deprived of material comforts by the insanities of Maoism—to catch up must in the end guarantee a healthy home market. Caution about China is in order: it has gigantic political and social problems, not to mention severe energy shortages and a terrifying level of bad debt. Pessimism, though, is not."

* * *

The preservation of Oriental biodiversity -- an immense but fascinating task even when confined to China, even when confined to Yunnan province. Just making a beginning is difficult. Take plants, for instance. China has over 30,000 species, perhaps a third more than the United States or Europe. If you want to keep track of these, you need their names. In fact, at the present time, the names are changing, many of them. A decade long (or more) international effort is now underway to update and revise the taxonomy of all Chinese plants, the *Flora of China* project. (This reminds me

that we once had a guest in DC, a woman from NYC, who stared at the *Flora of West Virginia* volumes on our bookshelves and said, "Who is this Flora? And why are there so many volumes about her?").

Once the names settle down, a preliminary prioritization is needed. Which are abundant or common and in no danger of extinction, and which might be threatened? Even if these questions are asked only of Yunnan province, the task is substantial because Yunnan has perhaps two-thirds of all of the plant species in China, an incredible amount for a single province.

(One might think that botanists, plant professionals, are answering these questions, but in fact botanists are mainly concerned with a different task of enormous complexity: describing the characteristics of each species and preparing a series of steps, which they call "keys," one needs to go through with individual plants in order to identify what species it is, however similar it may seem to another species. And then there is periodic revision of all this as new knowledge comes to light, such as is going on now with the *Flora of China* project.)

Preliminary prioritization requires follow up in the form of determining and recording where species thought to be under threat of some kind are located and how many of them there are in each place. The threat need not be in the form of something like deforestation or road construction: extreme rarity is a form of precariousness that threatens existence in a meaningful sense.

Artemisia annua, sweet wormwood, a spiky-leafed weed with yellow flowers, is abundant in a large area of the world, and in no danger of extinction. But the immense benefit drawn from it serves as a useful backdrop against which to view the loss of other possible benefits when any species goes extinct. And the compelling story here involves China, including Yunnan province, at the very center. Mao, in the mid-1960s, ordered Chinese science to discover malaria-fighting drugs as a means of helping his ally, Ho Chi Minh, win the Vietnam War. (Quinine was becoming increasingly ineffective). Two teams, eventually consisting of more than 500 scientists, set to work in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, each pursuing a different approach. One screened 40,000 known chemicals for antimalarial effects. The other, headed by Tu Youyou, proved to be more effective and pursued leads on offer from Traditional Chinese Medicine, TCM. Researchers were sent into rural villages to ask local medicine men and women for their secret fever cures, especially those derived from plants. Qinghao, a name carved into tombs as far back as 168 BC and usually administered as a tea, showed particular promise. Qinghao is *Artemisia annua*.

But the chemical structure of qinghao was very largely unknown, and its mechanism of action was a mystery, as were many other things: what a maximally effective dosage would be; what dosage would be safe; how best to extract it; how best to administer it -- pill, injection, suppository? Moreover, nine other substances from the TCM search also needed exploration. By the time it was discovered what the crucial chemical in qinghao was, now known as artemisinin, the war was nearing an end. Nevertheless, clinical trials proceeded, trials which demonstrated the drug's great power in parasite-killing but also that the body cleaned the drug out so rapidly that leftover parasites were able to rebound quickly. A process of combining artemisinin with other drugs was then commenced, a process which ultimately proved effective. Ironically, one of the combinatory drugs was mefloquine, a drug the US had developed for its soldiers, but which produced nightmares and paranoia in some who took it.

Today, artemisinin is the primary drug used in the treatment of malaria. More than 400 million doses of the drug are administered each year. No career I know of offers more opportunity to benefit humankind than drug discovery. Obviously, the discoverers and those whose diseases are cured both want all the opportunities biodiversity has to offer. Losing a species is losing opportunity.

* * *

The story of Zhou Jintao (Peter) continues. Peter is the man I described last year who had known the Flying Tigers when he was a young man and who had spent more than two decades in prison here as a political undesirable.

Last spring, Bin and I went over to the old people's home to take him to lunch, only to find that he had just been taken to the hospital that morning. We called again several times in the interim, only to be told each time that he was still in the hospital.

We were worried about him and eventually decided to go over to the hospital and see him there. The hospital is over near the Bird & Flower Market. Given the speed with which buildings decay here, I would say that the hospital is about 15 years old. Three beds to a room. We got there about a quarter past noon, always a bad time because everyone is out to lunch. We decided to just go upstairs and ask at each nursing station, since the reception desk was unmanned, or rather unwomanned. We did this for four or five floors, but without luck. The hospital was not run down, but it definitely shows signs of

wear. At one station there was one of those machines that monitors pulse rates -- the kind that "flatline" when the patient's heart stops -- but we couldn't tell who it was hooked up to, if anyone. A few people were wandering around; the nurses (perhaps they were doctors) looked harried. A patient, an old man in a jacket, came out of his room into the hall, looked around for a place to spit, and then spit on the floor.

We went out and had dumplings for lunch and came back at 2. The woman at the reception desk said she had no way to search her computer by patient name, but we finally determined that she could search by intake date and that an approximate date would be good enough. Here we had success. We were surprised to find that he was in ward 7, floor 9, bed 15, of the new building, a building where, apparently, party officials have first call.

I had been by this building several times but had had no idea it was a hospital. The first-floor façade and entrance way are built in traditional Chinese style, featuring a carved wooden lattice. This is very unusual for any sort of new building in Kunming at this point, let alone a hospital. Once inside, however, everything is marble and granite and could be anywhere in the world.

At the nurse's station, the sign said, in English, "Cadre station No. 1." We found Peter in his room. He was dressed and in an easy chair next to his bed, watching CCTV-9, the station in English. He had one of those things that supplies oxygen to the nose around his head. He had the remote control in his hand. He had fallen asleep.

I woke him, and he was delighted to see us. He knew my name, and we quickly determined that, far from being at death's door, he was in good shape. He said that he had had a pain in his back and in addition had been unable to sleep for four days straight, so he had decided to go to the hospital. His room was very nice, better than his room at the old people's home (he has a sister whose home he spends his weekends in). I think he was treating this as a kind of vacation.

How did he rate a cadre's room?

He rated it as a veteran.

Which war? WW2? Korea? No, he had been a member of the guerrilla forces who had thrown Chiang Kai-shek out of Yunnan from February to December of 1949. Here is a man, a banker, who was imprisoned as a

"political undesirable" for 21 years, starting in 1958, and it turns out he had fought for Mao!

Actually, he didn't do any fighting. He was an instructor. Many, perhaps most, of the troops could neither read nor write. If you are going to run an army, better teach the men to read and write, so they can, among things, understand orders. That must be the theory.

We looked Peter up again recently but couldn't connect with him -- back in the hospital. I hope it's just another vacation.

* * * <> * * *

Quite a few things new at the lake this spring.

Thinking about these changes, though, prompts me to recall something I've altogether forgotten to mention. When we first arrived at Green Lake, in September of 2002, you had to pay a fee if you wanted to go through one of the gates and walk around on the central "island." The fee was small (something like a quarter, as I recall), but it had the effect of confining many people to the walkway around the lake and venturing inside only on special occasions. The fee was abolished sometime after we arrived. I've forgotten why, but I think it was in celebration of an anniversary of Mao's victory over Chiang Kai-shek.

The part behind the gate nearest to our apartment reopened several months ago, with new paving tiles throughout. Similar renovation was made on the other side of the park, even though that had been previously renovated. There are also now little white fences around the base of each tree along the walkways -- the pickets crisscross diagonally and seem, oddly, to be made of cement. More significantly, the whole park has been made kid-friendly. There are now little benches facing the water that consist of two rabbits or turtles or squirrels or penguins carved from stone, on their haunches, holding with their paws a rectangular piece of polished gray stone for you to sit on. The ride which our daughter liked, the one where you pedal a surfaced submarine around a small lagoon and shoot a laser at military-looking mines -- which spout water when you hit the target -- has had its scruffy old mines replaced by new dolphins and other appealing animal figurines. Even the submarines have been replaced with canopied open pedal boats. Several free-standing planters have been added in various venues, designed to look somewhat like cartoon characters.

The bumper car ride I mentioned last time finally has a shiny new side-building made of yellow enameled metal. I saw the bumper cars in action for the first time the other night: seemed rather like the highways. Certainly, the drivers, who included a lot of adults, enjoyed banging into each other. A miniature amusement park for very young kids has been installed in an area behind the pagoda in which our daughter celebrated her 8th birthday with her friends. An unused building just inside the north gate was converted in a matter of weeks into a two-story restaurant with an outdoor terrace on the upper floor (serves noodles, nothing special). And behind a Chinese wall, in an area that was not much used even for the potted-plant nursery it had been originally, has been constructed a beautiful new tennis court. I need to figure out how to get permission to play there.

* * *

Other things also continue to change, really too fast to keep track of them all. In the very first days when our family (and our pooch) came here almost three years ago, daughter Alex and I went for a short stroll to see the neighborhood around the university guesthouse where we were staying. We walked up the block, around to the left past a vest-pocket park and a public toilet, and eventually into a narrow lane where we heard the sounds of kids in school behind a tall brick wall on our right. Above the wall, and back a bit, we could see the open windows in the four-story structure the sounds were coming from. I said to my daughter, "Maybe that's the school you will be going to." She was silent, daunted by the prospect of attending second grade in a language she did not understand.

"Ok, I'll go -- but I won't understand a word they say," she said emphatically as we escorted her to the school's gate about a week later -- it was in fact the school she and I had heard and seen on that first day. Since then, I have walked through that crooked narrow lane, too small for cars (but not for bicycles and motorcycles), a thousand times. It is my favorite route for walking from my apartment near the lake to my office.

The other morning when I headed into the lane, I sensed something different. The wall that runs along it actually encloses an apartment complex, and only at one point comes into contact with a corner of Alex's school. Incredibly, on the lane side of the wall, in the slim space between the lane and the wall, several small apartments (if you could call them that) had in the distant past been built, one of them a couple of narrow rooms occupied by an ancient couple who kept roosters in cages. I used to exchange greetings with the woman every morning (I waived, she smiled, her glass eye sparkling). The

couple had disappeared when I got back to Kunming last fall, and the apartments were vacant. This morning, these structures -- and the wall there too -- had been knocked down. Everything was rubble, dominated by one of those caterpillar machines with a giant arm that scoops up enormous amounts of bricks and tiles and earth.

Four four-year old boys, adorable, dirty street urchins, stood there absolutely transfixed by that machine. They settled down on a ledge on the other side of the lane. The boys ignored the calls of their mothers from down near the little toilet building. Instead, they watched in awe as the machine did its tricks. (The wall was rebuilt by the end of the week).

* * *

The route from apartment to office also takes me on a footbridge over the heavily trafficked (usually traffic-jammed) 1-2-1 Road. That bridge was the first image I ever saw of Kunming. Three years ago, while using the internet to research where we might go for our year in China, I picked up on the fact that Kunming had a lot to recommend it ("The City of Eternal Spring"). And I found a website put up by a professor of journalism at a small school in South Dakota who was then a visiting teacher at Yunnan Normal University. His family had been given an apartment in a building that overlooks one end of the bridge, and he had put onto the internet pictures of the view from his window, among other images. Since I have been here, I have walked over that bridge every day.

The bridge has always been crowded with nanocapitalists selling everything from goldfish to pencils and stickers to CD's to posters to fried potato slices on a stick, slathered with red pepper sauce. This always made it difficult to get by, especially at noon and in the evening when school children on either side of the bridge are pouring over it in both directions and workers headed home are walking their bicycles through the crowd. The half block which leads up to the bridge has always been a sort of an extension of the bridge itself, though dominated by fast food vendors doing a brisk business with the students from the university, who come out the small west gate to get the cheapest food in a city of cheap food -- omelets, fried potatoes, a sort of Chinese burrito, etc.

Periodically, the police would come by and clear out the vendors, none of whom had a permit. The vendors always had an eye out for when the police were coming and would wheel their carts to safety, embers glowing, as fast as they could. But now the police are serious. They have set up a booth on

one end of the bridge and are permanently stationed there. This has changed the whole area. What was once noisy and bustling is now just another place to walk.

That contest between the vendors and the police characterizes for me what one sees and feels about the way life is actually lived in China today. An industrious and still relatively poor people dealing with the rules and regulations which a higher power has laid down about them and their future development. Each individual vendor in flight may have tiny dimensions within a larger picture. It is not war, nor even a national campaign to get people to do something like combat AIDS or drive cars. But the tiny dimensions seem somehow multiplied a billion-fold -- here is where the feeling comes in -- and one believes that taken altogether these events sink into the center of China with even more weight and do more to reveal the spirit of the times than any statistic or pronouncement from the Tartar City.

* * *

A visit from the military. Not the Chinese military, but the US military, and right here is Kunming! Probably through my neighbor in DC, a Colonel Hogan contacted me by email, asking for information about who his class in environmental pollution could speak to when they came to Kunming for a couple of days. I tried to fix them up with a professor who is a specialist in "restoration ecology," but it turned out that he is not so much an expert in restoring polluted lakes as in how plants distribute pollutants and other chemicals within their cells. My colleague here was then kind enough to step in. When they finally arrived, he gave them a slideshow on the province and arranged for the Deputy Director of the Kunming Water Research Institute (part of the provincial government) to speak to them and to take them out on Dianchi (Lake Dian), the very large, heavily polluted lake that adjoins Kunming. The students were officers, mainly, and a few civilians who work for the military. They are taking courses at National Defense University (www.ndu.edu) -- specifically, NDU's Industrial College of the Armed Forces. (The idea is that since industrial supply is such an important factor in war, the armed forces should study industry). ICAF is headquartered at Fort McNair, near the Navy Yard, in Southwest DC. Fort McNair is a historic place: it is where the "Lincoln conspirators" were hung.

Hogan turned out to be an Australian. He told me there is a chair reserved for an Australian and one for a Canadian on the faculty of ICAF. I told him this seemed like small compensation for all the military trouble we have gotten Australia in over the years -- a role that Winston Churchill used to

play. One of the other teachers who came with Hogan and about twenty students was a former CIA guy who speaks Russian and what seemed like a dozen other languages, including Dutch, Romanian, and Bulgarian. Another was a Stanford Law grad who came with the Clinton administration to the State Department, where she was (I think) a Deputy Undersecretary for Oceans and the Environment. The four of us had a nice dinner at one of the few old structures that instead of being torn down has been renovated and turned into a restaurant. They were stunned when the tab for all four of us, which included our beer, came to only 84 *kuai*, about $10. I walked them back to their hotel on the lake, in front of which an "English Corner" was taking place -- about a hundred students, and others, who want to practice their English congregate weekly at the same place and talk to each other; foreign guests are most welcome.

* * *

A visit from HK. When I was in HK on my way back to the US in December, one of my professor friends there told me that his university had an "Industrial Attachment Scheme" which paid for students who are between their second and third years to spend a summer working at a business; several of his students had requested work at an NGO in China instead, and he wondered whether I would be willing to be the NGO host. I told him I was going to be back in the states for the summer, so I wouldn't really be able to train them and supervise them on a day-by-day basis, except possibly via email. It turned out that their exams would be over very early and that they would be ready to travel by May 16; that would give me at least three weeks with them, the first of which would be a week of training in our methodology. My co-worker, who has a Master's degree, could be the onsite supervisor for the rest of the time. We decided to give this a try, and when I returned to HK at the end of March, Paul had three students for me to interview, with the thought that I would choose two of them. I liked all three and dreaded having to leave one out, but Paul then somehow arranged for all three to come. Two of them have been here a week and have already been turned into first-class conservation scientists, one now working on acquiring range and habitat data for all of the fish and reptiles of China and the other on putting information about the province's parks and preserves into the database. They will also have the primary responsibility for training their newly-arrived colleague, although Jiang Bin and I will also play a role in that. All three speak excellent Mandarin as well as Cantonese and English. They are shy about their abilities with Mandarin, but I have heard them speaking with grad students here, and I am impressed with how smoothly it all goes.

The things that do give them some trouble, however, are the simplified Chinese characters. Starting around 1920, many Chinese intellectuals began to propound the view that traditional characters were cumbersome, difficult to learn, old-fashioned. Some even wanted a wholly alphabetic system. Simplification of the characters then suggested itself, though nothing came of the suggestion until the civil war had been settled. More than fifty years ago lists of simplified characters were officially adopted and the alphabetic system called Pinyin was introduced. Hong Kong, and Taiwan of course, ignored all this. One advantage this gives my HK students is the ability to read the older labels on dried plant specimens preserved in herbaria here --- labels often prepared seventy-five or a hundred years ago. (With the end of the UK lease in 1997, it should be noted, and the handover to the PRC, Hong Kong has increasingly supplemented its native Cantonese education with courses in Mandarin that employ the simplified characters).

* * *

My colleague was recently made the first UNESCO Cousteau Ecotechnie Professor in China. The head of the Asia section of UNESCO, who is Japanese, and his assistant in Beijing for environmental affairs, who is also Japanese, came down for the brief ceremony. Afterwards a few of us toured the campus with them, one of the highlights of which is one of the few Chinese-looking buildings on campus. This building was the place where, under the ancient system, candidates could present themselves to take the imperial examination. This examination, remarkably, was open to all males regardless of social standing (though in practical fact only the wealthy could afford the many years of study and the distinguished tutors necessary to be in a position to take the examination). Successful candidates could, after many more examinations in other locations, become mandarins and eventually rise in the civil administration of the largest country on earth. This particular building is also of interest because it was the place where a famous local poet gave a speech in the late forties in which agents of the Kuomintang government claimed to hear undertones of sympathy for Mao and his peasant revolution. After the speech, he was assassinated.

The building is still used today for meetings and various other activities. The head man from UNESCO walked over to some bulletin boards outside the main doors. He came back and said he could read about 60% of the characters. He then lamented at some length, and amusingly, the passing of the days when Chinese and Japanese could "talk" to each other by writing out characters for the other to read. "This was a very good system -- and then they had to go and change it!"

* * *

One of the couple of western restaurants that we *laowai* frequent is named Salvador's. It opened first in one of Yunnan's most scenic tourist destinations, the old town of Dali, surrounded by snow-covered mountains and a large lake -- it was Salvador's of Dali before it moved here to Kunming. I discovered that Salvador's makes and sells fresh pesto. I bought some to take home the other night and put it on cold pasta noodles, with olive oil and parmesan cheese. I was scarfing this down before going to my Monday night badminton session, when I decided to turn on the television to see what was on CCTV-9, the English-language channel. A dull show called "Dialogue" was on. Many foreign guests, often paired with some Chinese professor who studies the West, appear on this show, where they are asked questions like "What factors will affect the growth of China's automobile industry?" or "Does America still believe in the One-China policy?"

But this evening the guest was an attractive young woman from the Ministry of Commerce, and she was discussing the sanctions America was threatening to impose on China's textile industry. She would do well at an American law school and pressed China's case with uncommon vigor. Essentially her argument was that China for years suffered under US and EU quota systems, then it reconstructed (at considerable cost) its economy to be able to join WTO, and now that its production efficiencies are winning customers, the West is talking about sanctions. She also noted that much of the growth in China's exports is actually coming from local firms owned in large measure by Americans and Europeans. Throughout her dialogue a subtitle appeared that said "Textile dispute." I therefore couldn't tell who she was until near the end, when "Ministry of Commerce" appeared, along with her name: Yuan Yuan. This is almost too good to be true, for the currency of China is, of course, the yuan. They tell me that there are a number of characters that can be used for what in pinyin is rendered as "yuan," but I'm afraid I just can't resist thinking of this woman as Money Money.

* * *

It has hardly rained at all since last fall, and now as summer approaches the rainy season is at least three weeks late. There is, moreover, not a drop of water in the offing.

A recent *Economist* had an article entitled "China's Water Crisis," based mainly on recent speeches by a former Stanford professor, John McAlister,

who has founded a company, AquaBioTronic, which possesses a technology for converting waste water into drinkable water. He is having trouble selling his technology in China, despite the crisis. He maintains, if I may put a few words in his mouth, that that great sucking sound that George Bush heard when NAFTA was signed is here in China a real sucking sound -- water being taken from the water tables. Almost every body of water in the country ("never especially blessed with water") is polluted. As a consequence -- China's miraculous growth is in jeopardy. (McAlister uses the term "ecological suicide"). His view is that this will not only affect China, but the world economy as well since so much of world economic growth these days depends on the growth of the Chinese economy. Wen Jiabao, now China's Premier, publicized the water crisis some years ago when he was a mere Deputy Vice-Premier, and it has been put into five-year plans ever since and given the highest priority, but none of this seems to be having much effect.

This crisis is going to be felt the hardest in the more industrialized parts of the country, which do not include Yunnan Province, whose income comes 70% from tobacco. Even a genuine drought here would likely have effects for only a year or two (I would imagine), whereas in other parts of the country, the crisis looks like a permanent thing. On the other hand, I suppose that China's missing sense of urgency has something to do with its 3,500 years. The traditional view is that the history of China is the history of a settled civilization contending with nomadic peoples who reside in Asia's interior. This has of course produced many crises of the most severe kind over the centuries. There have of course also been frequent natural disasters like the flooding of the rivers and earthquakes right in the center of some of the most densely populated areas in the world, to say nothing of the war with Japan, or the civil war, or the Cultural Revolution. Yet that settled civilization seems always to prevail, teaching the nomadic conquerors how to take a bath and read a book, somehow restoring what nature or war has devastated, and gritting its teeth and smiling about what the Twentieth Century handed them. Is the present crisis all that different? That may be the view. On the other hand, that sucking sound could be a warning that perhaps there are things that can't be reversed.

Meanwhile, the nights here now are balmy and dry and beautiful, and one wants to stay out past midnight in the open air, talking of Robert Louis Stevenson and violence in Buddhism, sipping China's only decent wine while one's friends drink the local beer. Every day, warmer than the last, the young women wear fewer and fewer clothes. Where will it all end?

* * * ~ * * *

From the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (December 15, 1945):

> No matter how the situation develops, our Party must always calculate on a long-term basis, if our position is to be invincible. At present, our Party on the one hand persists in its stand for self-government and self-defence in the Liberated Areas, firmly opposes attacks by the Kuomintang and consolidates the gains won by the people of these areas. On the other hand, we support the democratic movement now developing in the Kuomintang areas (as marked by the student strike in Kunming [4]) in order to isolate the reactionaries, win numerous allies for ourselves and expand the national democratic united front under our Party's influence.

The editors' note 4 says:

> On the evening of November 25, 1945, more than six thousand college and middle school students in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, assembled at the Southwest Associated University to discuss current affairs and protest against the civil war. The Kuomintang reactionaries sent troops who surrounded the assembly, fired on the students with light artillery, machine-guns and rifles and placed guards around the university to prevent teachers and students from going home. Subsequently, students from Kunming's schools and colleges joined in a strike. On December 1 the Kuomintang reactionaries dispatched a large number of soldiers and secret agents to the Southwest Associated University and the Teachers College where they threw hand-grenades, killing four people and wounding over ten. This incident was known as the "December 1st Massacre".

Mao quote hyperlink:
http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_09.htm

The graves of the four martyrs are in a corner of what is now Yunnan Normal University. I attended the ceremony there commemorating the 60th anniversary of the December 1 event. Yunnan Normal, the "Teachers College" to which the note refers, is one of three busy universities along the busy "1-2-1 Road" which I cross each day, using the pedestrian flyover. Until a few days ago I had not realized that this street is named for this event: "12-1 Road" or "December 1 Road."

Southwest Associated University was a consortium of faculties fleeing further and further south from the war zone in northeastern and then in central China: National Peking (now Beijing) University, Tsinghua University (aka Qinghua University, often called the MIT of China), and Nankai University. The site now occupied by Normal was the main site where these faculties did their teaching, starting in the late thirties, for about a decade or more.

My friend John Israel, recently retired from his professorship at University of Virginia, and the first American scholar to make his way all the way to Kunming after the US recognized the PRC, wrote a history of Southwest Associated University, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford 1999). I have known about this book since I first met him in 2003. I had a general intention to obtain it and read it but had not yet followed through.

Then a month ago, I was reading a copy of the *London Review of Books* which a friend had given me and which I had brought with me to China. The review (by Frank Kermode) is of a new biography of William Empson, often called "the greatest English literary critic of the 20th century." Kermode:

> In August 1937 [Empson] set out on another Oriental adventure when he accepted a three-year appointment at the National Peking University. At much the same time the Japanese invaded China, and when he arrived, via the Trans-Siberian Railway, he had no job to go to. … The Japanese particularly hated the northern Chinese universities, which were forced to flee. Empson went with them [writing about] the food, the conditions ['the savage life and the fleas and the bombs'], the complex political situation, in which the Kuomintang was in conflict with the Communist Party as well as with the invaders. Most impressive is his admiration and respect for his colleagues; the company of these professional scholars allowed him to feel that, despite the uniquely difficult conditions, what he now belonged to was a real university.

Empson:

> Camp life was fun; I was in very good company . . . I hoped I wasn't making too much noise typing about the use of sense in *Measure for Measure* [later a chapter in his magnum opus, *The Structure of Complex Words*, published in 1951] . . . I know the quality of the men I have to eat with. I suppose there is no other country in the world where that type of man would take the migration and its startling

> hardships, not merely without false heroics, but as a trip that leaves you both waiting to collect news about your special branch of learning and also interested in the local scenery and food.

The faculties fled first to Changsha, in Hunan Province (the province our daughter was born in), and then, when that was bombed, to Kunming. John told me that actually the humanities faculty was for the first year in Mengzi, which is about half way to the Vietnam border from here, but that when proper facilities had been constructed in Kunming, it joined the other faculties here in the capital city. I was somewhat startled to realize that Empson, a famous but rather esoteric Englishman, trod the ground I tread daily. (But then, on the other hand, I had never in my life seen a picture of Alain Robbe-Grillet, the French anti-novelist, until I saw one the other day in the window of a tiny used book store here in Kunming which I pass regularly. Could he, too, have been here at one point?)

I first learned of Empson when I was studying philosophy of language as an undergraduate. Empson was from the literary world, and so had but provisional standing with the philosophers; still, the philosophers were at the time interested in "ordinary language philosophy," an approach which held that many of the hoarier questions of philosophy would go away if you realized they involved linguistic distortions and were far from the language that people ordinarily use. Empson was a very, very close student of the way language has been used. He could find hidden meanings in almost anything, and often one contradicted another. His most famous book is *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. All this made him of interest even to philosophers, not that I ever managed to plow my way through the whole book.

But back to the ceremony commemorating the 60th anniversary of the December 1 event. The ceremony was brief: a speech by the son of one of the martyrs; a speech by a Beijing woman from the Central Committee (retired -- ever the backwater, Kunming). Everyone stood during the ceremony. There were about 200 gray-haired people standing in front and, standing in formation at the back, a further 400 students and police officers (I'm not sure why the police were there). Afterwards, the officials left and the rest of us milled around among the graves and associated memorials. I met the son and grandson of Wen Yiduo, the famous poet famously associated with Yunnan, who was assassinated by the Kuomintang about seven months after the December 1st Massacre when he turned from scholarly to more political modes. He had lived along the walkway behind the apartment complex in which I now stay. There is a small memorial to him there with a rather nice portrait painted onto a wall; it stands just outside the gate to a

primary school that was built on the site of his home. Wen Yiduo looked somewhat like Trotsky, at least in this portrait, which is taken from a famous photograph.

I learned that 150,000 people – then half of the city's entire population – turned out for the funeral parade for the four martyrs (only one of whom was a Communist). They were not allowed to carry banners. Instead, they sang a song, which four of the older people at the memorial ceremony sang again for the media – several times.

We toured the brand-new extension to the museum next to this site. The young women docents were stunned that John knew so much about all this and could fill them in on many facts. He identified many of the people in the photographs for them, including the one Westerner pictured (in a faculty photo), Robert Winter, an American who apparently took over Empson's subjects when he left. Robert Payne, author of many books on communist societies, also taught at Lianda. Payne was a good friend of Wen Yiduo, and Payne kept and published extensive diaries about his days in Yunnan. The extension ends with a room depicting many of the great scientists who attended Lianda, the most prominent being the Nobel laureates, C.N. Yang and T.D. Lee. Yang was the son of a Tsinghua mathematician. After graduating from Lianda he studied with Fermi at Chicago, where he got his doctorate, and then went straight to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. He did much of his work at Stonybrook. T.D. Lee followed a similar path.

The net result of this, for me, was that I bought and read, and thoroughly enjoyed, John's book. It provides a perspective on the years from Japan's declaration of war to the victory by Mao in the civil war which is very different from the more standard accounts. One gets to know very human individuals, not just high military and political figures. One of the things I found most interesting was the contrast between the Lianda faculties and those of the university they found already established here in Kunming, Yunnan University. Lianda professors came from eastern China and consisted largely of men who had obtained a PhD from an Ivy League school in the US. Yunnan University professors, in contrast, had higher degrees from the Sorbonne or the University of Paris, and their second language was French, not English.

* * *

Where will it all end? That was the question with which I ended the last episode in these Green Lake reflections. The morning and the afternoon of the next day, Sunday, May 29, were as sunny and as hot as usual. I learned at brunch -- a group of us about to leave Kunming for the summer had gathered for brunch at the best hotel in town, the Harbour Plaza -- that three of my friends had bicycled about 20 km. out of city the previous day, north to the largest of the reservoirs that supply Kunming. The reservoir was mighty low, though not absolutely dry like some of the other reservoirs.

There were never any water use restrictions during this whole period, and large trucks continued to go around spraying water on trees and lawns in the universities and in parks; the gardeners in my own little apartment complex continued to water everything daily.

I learned, however, that the provincial government had not been idle: they had placed around 400 artillery pieces around the city with hopes of using them to seed the clouds. One problem with this: you need clouds to seed if you are going to seed clouds, and there were none.

I also learned that the government claimed to have set up a massive pumping operation, not for pumping water out of the water table, but for moving water around from one reservoir to another. One problem with this: when all of the reservoirs run out of water, there is of course nothing to pump.

We walked back through Green Lake park after brunch, a hot trip, cooled somewhat, it must be admitted, by the shade of the trees. We noticed that the water in the shallower parts of the lake had turned bright green. The purest algal bloom I have ever seen. This had the effect of enhancing the beauty of the already beautiful lotus flowers which had recently appeared. Pierre mentioned that as a teenager he had one summer been given the job of minding a neighbor's swimming pool. Things went along fine for a while, but then one night, the water turned green. He never was able to correct this, and the owners had a devil of a time with it also when they returned.

About 4:15 pm it clouded over and began to rain. It rained steadily for about two hours, then cleared up. The next morning was drizzly; it felt like the rainy season had returned at last. But it hadn't. Despite a few cloudy days and a fitful drizzle or two, there was no sustained rain for the five remaining days I was in Kunming, and most afternoons were hot and sunny.

On the plane, which left for Incheon at 10 minutes before midnight on 3 June, I read in *The Korea Herald* that there had been heavy rain and flooding in Hunan province during this same week that the drought in Kunming continued.

Later in June, Pierre emailed me:

> Yes, Hardy, the rain began last night. It was rather dramatic to witness, as the sky turned black in the early evening, and stayed that way for a few hours without rain. At around 1am, it began to pour and 12 hours later, is still coming down.

The net effect was to shorten the already short rainy season, normally from late April to around the end of August or mid-September, by more than a month. Kunming gets very little rain out of the rainy season. It is a city in which dusty shop floors are swabbed each morning and dust continually settles on everything you own. I must say, however, that when I returned at the beginning of October, I saw very little effect of the truncated season. Perhaps the rain that did come was heavier than usual.

* * *

I do know that Dianchi (Lake Dian), the large lake beside Kunming, one of the four most polluted in China, is no healthier. The story of the ecological disaster which afflicts the lake is told in Judith Shapiro's terrific book, *Mao's War Against Nature* (Cambridge 2001).

The dying of the lake is a consequence first of the Great Leap Forward and then of the break between the Soviet Union and China in July of 1960, when the USSR withdrew its aid and "self-sufficiency" [*zili gengsheng*] was the response. The leap produced famine, in which tens of millions died. The dying of the people and the withdrawal of aid produced a destructive campaign to turn every scrap of landscape into productive farmland. The campaign elevated one particular community's falsified success in self-sufficiency into a model to be copied everywhere. The campaign resulted here in Kunming in an attempt to convert the marshes protecting and filtering Dianchi into rice paddies. The attempt involved enormous resources, at enormous cost, and was an utter failure. Filling in these marshes was like removing the lake's liver. There is nothing now to filter the pollutants running into the lake from surrounding farmland, and from the city. The lake – China's sixth largest freshwater lake -- is now on its deathbed.

There is much more to the story, but perhaps next time. We can also talk about elephants.

* * *

John and I took Peter Zhao out to dinner a month ago. Peter is still doing fine. We took him on a long walk to a restaurant between the Harbour Plaza Hotel and the new skyscraper city library, a restaurant with the odd name of "Bamboo Civet." We sat outside on a cool evening, dining on prawns steamed over tea leaves. It turned out that Peter had spent a year at Southwest Associated Universities, until his family ran out of money. On our walk back, we discovered that Peter remembered the school song. So did John. The two of them sang it – forcefully – as we walked along. Many a head turned to see this.

* * *

There is a seven-part documentary on CCTV-9, the English-language channel here, about the life of Edgar Snow, in honor of the centenary of his birth. Edgar Snow is the author of *Red Star Over China*, the first book about Mao. The book was based on his interviews with Mao in the late thirties. Snow traveled, with the help of cloak and dagger, through Kuomintang lines to the caves of Yenan in Shaanxi Province, where Mao had stopped after the Long March. (The pinyin spelling is Yan'an, but the romanization the Chinese postal system uses is Yenan). The resulting book was a bestseller, and, more importantly, was translated into Chinese and became the main source the Chinese people had about the man locked in a life-and-death struggle with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

The thing I liked best about the documentary was that in the first show they travel to Snow's birthplace, Kansas City. They find his birth certificate in a small Snow museum. They go to the address listed on the certificate. A Chinese reporter knocks on the door of this typical American two-story apartment building. A young guy answers the door. "We're from CCTV in China, and we'd like to see the place where Edgar Snow's family lived." "Who's Edgar Snow?" He politely shows them around, pointlessly, however, for no particular apartment can be identified with Snow. They then find Charlie Smith, who went to high school with Snow. Remember, this is the centenary of Snow's birth. Charlie Smith is 100 years old and still going strong. He is happy to talk to reporters from China and tell them stories

about his old friend, Edgar Snow. I loved Charlie Smith, and I will point him out as a role model to Peter Zhao; may Peter live to be a 100 or more.

* * *

Green Lake? The Black-headed Gulls arrived on schedule some weeks ago, now that it is fall, and the bread people were not a moment behind. I wrote several years ago that there are several thousand gulls, and that "Green Lake is ready for them, with 'seagull bread,' sold by vendors all around the lake. People tear off pieces of bread and toss the pieces up into the air, where the seagulls, whose flocks fly continuously around in a great circle formation, catch them -- acrobatically." It is the same this year, and it is particularly lovely because the weather has been so beautiful: cloudless skies and summertime temperatures. The charm of the gulls wears thin in February and March when their droppings have thickly coated the roofs of the pedal boats that people rent, and much else besides.

The lake is still lit up at night. There is a grand way leading in from the South Gate paved with white stone that is particularly beautiful, with the willow trees along either side illuminated in different colors. But even more obscure parts of the park have plenty of lights. And the entire border of the lake, with its carved white stone Chinese railing, is lit on the pedestrian side by lights shining straight up from the pavement and on the water side by lights shining on the railing. My favorite scene is a short white stone bridge with three wide arches. The arches are illuminated from below and are reflected by the lake. I will write later about the groups in the park that perform music on traditional instruments.

* * *

How about if I return to Empson to end this? I read this somewhere, but have forgotten exactly where:

"The only religion Empson could ever stomach was Buddhism, about which he wrote a book-length study. To his dismay, 'The Face of the Buddha' was lost when a friend left the only manuscript in a taxi."

I like to think that though it may never be read it was at least in circulation, maybe even still moving around.

Chapter 5: Three Types of Trip, and Trifles

Among Green Lake's virtues is its proximity to other places in Yunnan that exhibit the province's geographic, ethnic, and biological diversity. I wrote about our family's trip to Jinghong, capital of Yunnan's fascinating Xishuangbanna prefecture, not long after it occurred in 2003, but that account got lost when Yahoo made an executive decision to clear out older emails from its accounts. (Caused a huge migration to gmail, no doubt). This trip is worth recalling now because it is about a part of Yunnan which is less traveled than others, particularly back then.

Almost all of Yunnan is south of the northernmost border of Myanmar. Few people outside China seem to realize this, and many in China are unaware of it as well, I would guess. A portion of southern Yunnan is south of the very northern borders of Laos and Vietnam, both of which are considered to be tropical countries. All this makes Yunnan in some sense a part of SE Asia as well as China. Jinghong is located in the portion which is south of the northern borders of Laos and Vietnam and is roughly on the same latitude as Mandalay, Myanmar.

In February, as Kunming was becoming cooler (not by much, though), we decided to fly down to the tropical part of Yunnan and experience a week there. The average high in Jinghong in February is about 84° F (28.6° C), only a few degrees cooler than in August, though rainfall is significantly lower. We booked a hotel recommended by a friend who had been there recently and bought airline tickets. We could not take our dog, Shanghai, with us of course, so we arranged for one of our friends of whom Shanghai was especially fond, Ming, to take care of her while we were away. We then took the short flight down to Jinghong.

The night before we left we used one of our locally-bought DVDs and watched a very odd movie, *Adaptation*, starring Nicolas Cage. The producers of this movie bought the rights to *The Orchid Thief* by Susan Orlean, a non-fiction book. I had read the book and enjoyed it very much. It is a Florida story: such things as sales to northerners of lots which are in fact under water feature prominently, as does the history of the Seminole Indians. The story was sparked by a small article in the *Herald* which Orlean had read while visiting relatives in Miami. A young man had been arrested for collecting orchids in the Fakahatchee Strand preserve. The book tells how this unlikely individual came to be one of the world's experts on orchids without any formal education in the subject. That is engrossing, but more than that the book is a history of orchid collecting itself, a vast worldwide enterprise -- so great is our love of orchids -- beginning with the

English at the height of their empire in the 19th Century. The movie oddly discards almost all of this fascinating material in favor of a story about how difficult it is to write a screenplay about such a story. Cage is a tortured soul. One brief attempt, however, is made to tell a bit of the history of collecting. A thick mist fills the screen. A narrator uses the word "dangerous." A collector-explorer is wading through a swamp. Voices are heard just as the orchid is sighted in a patch of sunlight. Much crashing about as the explorer is killed by natives. An empty row boat is seen drifting aimlessly in a pool. Beneath that final scene appears one word: *Xishuangbanna*.

The landscape below the plane as it circles around in its lengthy landing pattern is stunning. It is not the landscape's beauty which is stunning, because it is far from beautiful: it is because a huge area looks exactly like one of those bristle mats that people put in front of their doors, so you can wipe the soles of your shoes of dirt before entering. This vast area was all tropical rainforest fifty years before we arrived. The story I have heard is that that forest was cut down because the Chinese economy needed rubber, and those opposed to Mao's takeover of China were making it difficult for China to obtain the rubber it needed. Again, Yunnan's southerly position within the Middle Kingdom was key: there really was no other place sufficiently tropical and sufficiently large where rubber could be grown on the scale needed. Hainan island is even further south, and it, too, began to be populated with rubber plantations, but Yunnan is vastly larger. Exit rainforest and its biological diversity; enter rubber plantations and monoculture and the appearance of a doormat. Mao didn't just want rubber, he wanted self-sufficiency in rubber.

In fact, Xishuangbanna does today have some nature preserves, created, I believe, after the overwhelming effect of the transformation to rubber plantations had sunk in. These preserves were created out of what was left of the primary forest once the vast majority of it had been put to the axe. Typically, such preserves are on the steeper slopes which were passed by in the initial conversion as too difficult to access efficiently. We visited and stayed at one of them, a botanic garden rather than a preserve *per se*, during our Jinghong week.

We landed in the sunny afternoon, exited under a sign which read "Peculiar Chamnel," got a taxi to the Golden Banna, and then walked around. Susan had visited Thailand and Cambodia a number of times before this and pointed out the styles of clothing and of buildings here which were distinctively SE Asian. These were numerous and hard to miss, but what surprised us more in some respects was the amount of new construction and renovation. Jinghong was transforming itself from a remote town to a tourist and second-home destination

(second-apartment, in fact, because the new units were all in ten-story tall white apartment buildings).

Our hotel had a large swimming pool in its interior courtyard. The hotel itself was a few blocks away from the beginning of the downtown, was fairly new, and was in a bland modern style. The rooms were comfortable enough, but after the fog burned off and the sun heated everything up, it was the swimming pool which was inviting. We soon found, however, that the pool was ice cold since no attempt was made to retain any of the day's warming effect after the sun went down. Jinghong's January lows at night are 53° F (11.6° C).

On our first morning in Jinghong we awoke to a city smothered in thick fog. This proved to be a daily phenomenon, one which we were told occurs throughout most of the year. The fog is in part due to Jinghong's lower elevation: Jinghong is at about 1800 ft (558 m) above sea level, whereas Kunming's elevation is almost three times that. It burns off fairly quickly, despite its density, which apparently has been diminished to a degree by the rise of the rubber plantations. The fog is a characteristic of the ecosystem here, and the plantations have altered this characteristic as well as many others.

We set out that evening to find the Mekong Café, which had been recommended to us by a number of friends in Kunming. We walked past a couple of other recommended places to eventually find the café on the second floor above a busy street, an open-air structure under a Thai-style wooden roof. Part of the pleasure of the place is watching the street below: an orange-robed monk stepping down from a bus, women carrying things suspended fore and aft from their long bong-bong boards (as a student of mine called them), adorable children holding the hands of their grandparents, though perhaps the most exotic creatures below are the Western backpackers with rings through their lips. Not all of the people who frequent the café are backpackers, though. On one visit we encountered a group of young women from the famous Miss Porter's School in Connecticut. Miss Porter's is an expensive prep school, known long ago as a "finishing school" (a phrase I have always found amusing), ranked as the number one boarding school for girls by *US News*. It was founded in 1843 by the educational reformer Sarah Porter, a woman who wanted chemistry, botany, geology and other sciences to be in the curriculum. Perhaps its most famous alumna is Jackie Kennedy, though Oprah Winfrey's niece graduated from the school in 1994. Oprah was the commencement speaker that year and subsequently became deeply involved with the school. At any rate, here were about ten of these young women upstairs at the Mekong Café in Jinghong, all very pleasant and all very interested to find others from the home country. The

school believes that travel broadens. It has a Student Year Abroad Program which includes China.

The food at the Mekong Café included a number of western dishes but was mainly what I will call Thai-style dishes, though no doubt more knowledgeable restaurant critics would have more precise names for them. At any rate, they were all very good. The last night we were there we met the owner, Vicky, a member of Xishuangbanna's Hani minority (the prefecture has at least 13 recognized minorities) who grew up in a small village outside of Puer, the famous tea town I would pass through on our way down to Jinghong by car on a subsequent visit. She had been away and had just returned to Jinghong. I think I inquired about the extensive collection of jazz CD's that the cafe had (I was also surprised to find a biography of California poet, Robinson Jeffers), and she told me that that was because she was married to a German.

The Lancang River slices through Jinghong, though most of the city is on the west side of the river. The Lancang flows SE to Laos and changes its name to the Mekong River there. It is a broad, powerful river, crossed in Jinghong by a modern bridge full of cars, trucks and buses. We crossed one time just to see what was over there but did not find much. Susan joined a trip on a large raft-like boat at one point and spent an afternoon on the river.

The two rural counties which are on either side of Jinghong are Menghai and Mengla. Within the latter lies the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden. We wanted to see that, and since it includes some motel accommodations arranged to stay there for two nights. The trip out to XTBG by bus takes more than an hour and was interesting for a number of reasons. One was that it gave us the opportunity to pass through portions of some of the rubber plantations, to see at ground level some of the bristles on the doormat we had seen from the sky. Row after row of rubber trees, tall enough that workers had no trouble walking under them, all of this making a dark monotonous "forest." Another was that we passed one of the entrances to the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, one of those preserves created (in 1958, promoted to national level in 1986) in the aftermath of the transformation to rubber plantations. Still another was that on a particularly sharp U-curve we looked out the window of the bus to see a bicyclist coming towards us, our German friend from The Box pub/restaurant in Kunming. He is a very good football player, by the way, and is the star of the expat team in Kunming; obviously, long bicycle rides help him stay in shape.

The bus let us off in a dusty hamlet across a river from XTBG, which we accessed over a footbridge. The contrast between the hamlet and the lush botanical garden was striking. XTBG is an institution of the Chinese Academy of

Sciences. It mainly serves the purpose of research in tropical forest ecology, though it also has related purposes included among which are conservation, education, specialized agriculture, germplasm/seed bank, biomolecular research, even public awareness through limited tourism. The site here in Mengla consists of 11.25 sq km (4.34 sq miles) and consists of over thirty "living collections" of altogether more than 13,000 species. The living collections are basically gardens within the garden that visitors can tour, and which represent different ecosystems within Yunnan. XTBG is a big operation, containing office space and research facilities for hundreds of researchers, including numerous graduate students working on a PhD.

We wandered about and enjoyed ourselves in this beautiful environment. The day was hot, the flowers numerous. Back at the motel, there were buses waiting for the tour groups they had transported for the day out here to return for the drive back to Jinghong. We were staying the night, however, and found that there was a good restaurant right on the grounds where we had a very nice dinner. The next day I concerned myself with birds. Although XTBG is mainly about plants, certain eminently worthwhile birds from the area frequent the grounds. Never one to let a gorgeous creature stand between me and a good time, I particularly want to pursue a sunbird.

Sunbirds are, indeed, gorgeous creatures:

> small, slender passerines from the Old World, usually with downward-curved bills. Many are brightly coloured, often with iridescent feathers, particularly in the males. Many species also have especially long tail feathers. Their range extends from Africa to Australia, across Madagascar, Egypt, Iran, Yemen, southern China, the Indian subcontinent, the Indochinese peninsulas, the Philippines, Southeast Asia and the surrounding Pacific islands, and the uppermost part of northern Australia. [Wikipedia]

"Southern China" and "Southeast Asia" are the key words here, once you get past the bright colors and the iridescence. If I am going to see a sunbird it is likely to be at XTBG. I have brought my binoculars.

There was considerably less fog at XTBG in the morning than there had been in Jinghong, at least on this particular morning, a good thing because I wanted to get out early. The forest awakening is always attractive, of course, a plethora of sounds and scents. I did not really know where to look but thought I would try my luck just strolling through the living collections. The first unusual bird I

managed to spy was not a sunbird but a Coppersmith barbet. Wow! What a gorgeous creature!

The beauty of this bird which is about half the size of a pigeon is said to lie in the head and throat -- think of it as wearing a black knit cap such as a bank robber might wear but cut back to reveal a substantial crimson forehead and yellow in a large circle around the eyes and on the throat. Below that more crimson in a broad necklace, and below that a lesser amount of yellow similarly configured. I think the feet are beautiful, too, bright red and all the brighter because they appear directly below a drab front. Coppersmiths are said to be "fond of sunning themselves in the morning on bare top branches of tall trees, often flitting about to sit next to each other," and indeed that was how I found this bird. "Coppersmith" comes from the rapid *tunk . . . tunk . . . tunk* call, reminiscent of a smith working copper. I am especially fond of fresh figs, and so is this bird.

The next bird I managed to find was a Long-tailed shrike. Shrikes are famous for impaling prey such as lizards or small rodents on thorns or spikes in a nearby bush -- after eating the head or the brain. This bird had a gray head and back, a black mask, a narrow, long black tail, and a rusty or rufous rump and flanks. I had now seen a paradigm of fruit-eating and a paradigm of meat-eating.

But still no sunbird. I saw a number of the birds I regularly see in Kunming, but still no sunbird. Eventually I found an odd little corner, not far from a maintenance yard where I saw a flash of red. A bit more pursuit and my binoculars magnified the Crimson sunbird in a small tree in front of me. The bird is tiny, smaller than a House sparrow, but hard to miss if you are in the right place. This was an adult male. Imagine a man wearing a three-piece suit with one of those old-fashioned vests (as in waistcoat), the top of which is a very deep U. Now imagine his entire head, throat, and chest a bright crimson. Add a thin, down-curved sickle-shaped bill (the bird feeds on nectar) from the base of which proceeds a black line in the shape of Salvador Dali's moustache. The back is dark, some say maroon, the rump yellow, the belly dark grayish olive. End with a long greenish-blue tail. What a gorgeous creature!

* * *

Here is another type of trip. Although I pass through Green Lake park as often as I can, I am sometimes in more of a hurry than other times, even though I am taking the long way to my office. This morning I was in more of a hurry than the other people strolling along there, particularly in the area where the walkway narrows a bit as it passes between the little lagoon where kids can shoot lasers

from submarine-like pedal boats at "mines" and where there is an entrance to the interior koi ponds. Actually, directly across from the submarines is another part of the main lake where family-size paddle boats, sans lasers, are tied up. There is a grass-covered strip at that point between the walkway and the wall that bounds that part of the lake, a wall which is just above the level of the lake. This strip has posts supporting a sheet metal canopy that extends out over the boats aways.

A group of four elderly people were directly in front of me and several families in front of them, all enjoying the day. I decided that rather than zig to my left to pass the four, then zig to my right to pass the first family, then another zig left -- and so on -- I would go to my right and along the edge of the water by the paddle boats. This meant having to squeeze past the posts, but I'd done that before. This time, however, I tripped and fell into the lake.

The water was not deep, only up to about my waist. Nor was it very cold. The splash, of course, caused people to turn and look at this *laowai* in the lake. They had to be quick, however, because I was up and out in just a few seconds. With egg on my face, and a rather squooshy stride, I walked back to my apartment, which was fortunately not far away, and changed clothes.

* * *

Kunming, as I've mentioned before, has good pizza and pasta. That is only to be expected, given the universal appeal of these foods and the simplicity with which they can be made. Tomatoes, for example, are abundant here and have been incorporated into a number of local dishes – stir-fried tomato and eggs; tomato and tofu; and so on. So, some very familiar things to any Westerner are to be found here in the capital of Yunnan Province. But German music?

I recently attended a performance here by Max Raabe and his Palaster Orchester in the university's auditorium. Max has recreated a cabaret orchestra from 1920's and 1930's Berlin. There are eleven men dressed in tuxedoes, plus a statuesque blonde woman in a magenta evening gown who plays the violin. For the first act, the men are dressed in white tuxedoes, except for Max, a tall slim man with light-colored slicked-back hair (*naturlich*) who is dressed in a black tux. Max does most of the singing, aided now and then mainly by the four guys who play various types of saxophone. He sings, of course, in German, except for certain American classics. The first act:

Bilbao
Bei mir bist du schoen

Die drei kleinen schweinchen (three sax guys with pigs' noses)
I'm singing in the rain
Das gibt's nur einmal
Cheek to cheek
Am Amazonas
Over my shoulder
Salome (a fox trot)
Mein gorilla

For the second act, the guys come out in black tuxes, the blonde has a sparkly light green dress, and Max has white tie and tails. The program:

Wochenend und Sonnenschein
Coubanakan (sung in Spanish)
Night and day
Chinesisches lied (Max memorized some Chinese; much appreciated)
Wir sind von kopf bis fuss auf liebe eingestellt
Dein ist mein ganzes herz
Brazil
Amalie (a fox trot)
Avalon
Dort tanzt Lulu (a waltz)
Cosi Cosa (he mentioned Mario Lanza in his introduction)

(I feel confident of my German spellings here because the program from which I took them bears the logo of the "Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Chengdu").

The audience loved all this, and so did I. There were but ten of us foreigners in an audience of perhaps 500 people. The 500 demanded, and got, an encore.

Actually, one of the reasons I loved it was that it came as light relief from some marathon sessions with the *Ring of the Nibelungen*. Looking through the classical music section of one of my favorite DVD stores here, I noticed a box labeled "Ring of the Nibelungen." The price was 42 *kuai*. 8 *kuai* (give or take a *jiao* or two) = 1 USD. I bought it, thinking this was some obscure German opera company's production – but what can you lose for 42 *kuai*? Closer inspection of the box on the way home showed "The 8th Beijing Music Festival," which meant nothing to me (and still means nothing to me). Also: "Patrice Chereau's Centenary Production Filmed at Bayreuth" and "conducted by Pierre Boulez" -- now that's more like it!

In fact, it turned out to be none of the above. (This is not unusual in Kunming, where the back of the little folder the DVD comes in sometimes lists the cast and crew from an entirely different movie). What I had in fact in my sweaty little hand was the complete recording – eight DVD's – of the performances by the Metropolitan Opera which were broadcast on PBS over a period of years in the late eighties, early nineties. Pure gold. Siegfried Jerusalem is, of course, Siegfried. Hildegard Behrens is Brunnhilde. James Morris is Wotan. Jessye Norman is Sieglinde. Christa Ludvig is Fricka. Etc, etc. All conducted by Jimmy Levine. The production designer is Gunther Schneider-Siemssen, not so inventive as Patrice Chereau, and faulted by some critics for taking such a traditional approach, but terrific nonetheless. I could go on. But all I will say is that there is something like 24 hours of German opera here and watching all this in the eternal sun of a Kunming spring is -- blissful.

* * *

there's a wild mandarin duck on green lake right now,
actually both the male and the female

the male is not afraid of people and comes close to
shore .. he is fascinating to watch not just because
he is so preposterously beautiful but because he is
just like a little wind-up toy .. he closes and opens
his eyes periodically, tips his bill down into the
water (raising the feathers on the back of his head),
raises his bill to let the water run into his throat,
makes a sort of whirring sound, and turns around in
the water

the female stands off from him watching all this with
a sort of eerie fascination

So, I emailed friends. The two most beautiful ducks are the Mandarin and the North American wood duck. Turns out they, though they do not look alike, are in fact cousins, the only two members of the genus *Aix*, a name Aristotle used for a diving bird which remains unknown -- though it was neither the Mandarin nor the wood duck because the former is endemic to far east Asia and the latter to North America.

The Mandarin is more showy, the wood duck more elegant. The Mandarin drake (the female is drab) has a red bill, from the base of which proceeds over its head a long blue, green and copper stripe, actually a crest, at least at the back.

There is a large white crescent covering the forehead-temple-upper-cheek area (highlighting the dark eye), then below all that white a rust-colored patch with elongated feathers (silver white edges to each feather) that seem like mutton-chop whiskers gone berserk. The breast is a beautiful purple with two vertical white bars; the flanks are tan, the underside white, the feet orange. Two orange, squared-off rectangles protrude above the back on each side, sometime described as "sails." This is the male, of course, before he goes into winter's eclipse plumage.

Chinese refer to Mandarins as *yuanyang*, *yuan* being the male and *yang* the female. They are honored as a symbol of a lifelong, loving couple. Chinese weddings often feature a Mandarin duck pair in some way.

That was quite a sight. But on another occasion, we saw a Hoopoe, three actually. Walking along the filthy channelized river that runs through downtown, after a very nice lunch with Ma (my travel agent) and his wife Yanni, I noticed a Hoopoe flying back and forth across the river, on our left, to a grassy patch, on our right. Then I saw that there were two of them, and they were feeding a chick in a crack in the stone wall of the river on the far side. The Hoopoe is a bird remarkable for its odd and delightful appearance and behavior, its beauty, and its formidable distribution. It is about the size of a dove. The color of its shoulders and head is a warm beige, surmounted by a dramatic, collapsible-fan crest. The wings and tail are striped black and white. It also has an interesting thin, crescent-shaped bill. The Hoopoe is seen frequently bobbing up and down, probing the ground for worms and larvae. This reminds me of one of those eternally-pumping oil wells.

The Hoopoe is found from very southern England straight across all of Europe, central and southern Asia, and China. It is not particularly numerous in any of these places, however, so far as I know; so, seeing one is special, like seeing a cuckoo. I particularly like the Hoopoe also because of the place I first saw one: the grounds of our hotel in the zona Archeologica at Paestum, one the best preserved Greek temple sites in Italy. Here was this fascinating, ancient bird in this fascinating ancient place. To see one now in Old Cathay was delicious, like running into an old friend half way across the world. I had also seen one right in the middle of its vast range, in Tashkent, several years before this.

* * *

In Kunming, development continues apace. The street at the center of my little world, half way between my apartment and my office, home to the restaurants I frequent, has been completely remade in the last two years. Most recently,

there are twenty new buildings – stores, two stories each, alternately painted yellow and dark brown. This replaces a long wall and a string of small one-room shops open to the air. That sort of shop is now completely out of fashion in Kunming. Partly for general reasons, and partly because a conference of nine neighboring provincial governors will be held in June, these are being torn down throughout the city and replaced by newly planted green space or Hong Kong-Shanghai style stores with floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows and doors (much lower prices, though).

More important is what might be called education development. While I was away, an area of hutongs which I used to walk through on the way to and from my office was demolished. I call them "hutongs," though "hutong-like alleys and buildings" would probably be more correct. They were old one-story red brick buildings, each surrounded by walls and each containing some sort of interior courtyard. They were certainly not from the Ming dynasty: they seemed to me to be closer to fifty years old than to five hundred years old, despite their disrepair. They were quite run down, but this seemed to be more due to the fact that everyone knew they were going to be torn down (and so spent nothing on upkeep) than from centuries of wear and tear. Indeed, when we first arrived in 2002, I was told that they would be torn down very soon, but in fact they survived for three more years. I would say they occupied an area of about half a square city block, taking Manhattan blocks as a sort of world standard measure.

There were narrow lanes or alleys between the buildings. I remember walking through those lanes one night in the pitch dark when I was startled to realize there was something in the lane just in front of me. I used the weak light of the display on my mobile phone to shine on what was there – to discover a young couple necking on the steps of a gate. On another occasion, I saw a Hoopoe in the morning on the narrow walkway ahead of me. The whole complex served as faculty/staff housing in the old days, but the university has built a number of new and much larger complexes in various parts of the city.

In the space which has been cleared, a gigantic middle school, seven stories tall, is rising. As usual, the work proceeds seven days a week, dawn till nearly midnight. Four times as many young people go to college in China today compared with just eight years ago. If this new school is any indication, that number will quadruple again in another eight years. It is not the only new school I see. If I take another route to the office, I pass a brand new six or seven story elementary school building that occupies a walled-off corner of the main campus of the university. Still another route takes me past yet another such school.

And the university itself, as I have previously mentioned, is building – has built – a brand new undergraduate campus on a site far away from the center city. Next year all of the first three of the undergraduate class years -- freshman, sophomore, junior -- will be living and learning there. Seniors will still live on the old campus, nearer the professors for whom they will write a senior paper, one of the major features of the final year of their undergraduate education.

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To continue, now at the end of the year 2006, with *The Ring of the Nibelungen* for a moment, which I mentioned last time because I had found DVDs of the entire Ring Cycle here -- however odd this may sound in a report from China.

At the beginning of the first opera in the Cycle, *Das Rheingold*, in the depths of the Rhine, three Rhine maidens swim around (in some productions) guarding the Rhinegold. A fissure opens in the earth and the dwarf Alberich enters, spies the three and lusts. They, however, taunt him and humiliate him for his ugliness. Alberich steals their gold, learning that who renounces love will gain the ability to forge from the gold a magic ring. He disappears with the gold, takes it to the Nibelungen cave, and forges the Ring.

When he takes it to the underworld, the music shifts from Rheinisch to the sound of a multitude of Nibelungen pounding away with hammer and pick.

That is exactly – exactly! -- the sound I hear now outside my window, and just as musical. The reason the sound here is so musical, more of a tink than a thunk, is that the hammers are hitting hard tiles – they are removing the tiles with which all Chinese buildings for at least the past twenty-five years are covered (often inside as well as outside).

When I was here in the spring, the racket out my window was that of the construction of the vast middle school that I see now. I would guess this school has somewhere between five and ten thousand students, all in uniform. Now an old school, which stands behind the new one, and next to the railway tracks, is either being demolished or skinned alive for renovation. There are no large tractors or other earth-moving machines as there would be in the US, not yet. Instead, an army of Nibelungen (in hard hats – and taller, particularly these days) swarm over the buildings pounding away with hammer and pick, using what Fairbank continually refers to in his book as “muscle power.”

And what is this music I am listening to? I am listening to China forge a magic ring of --development. Down the old, up the new. Whether China has also renounced love, I leave to you.

This is China developing itself, at the furious pace known throughout the world. All this takes place after, of course (it's one of the main reasons the world is so interested in this phenomenon) a couple of hundred years of – what? Turmoil? Catastrophe? Imperial implosion? Revolution? All of the above?

And it is right here, right outside my window. Next time you are in Alberich's cave, think of China.

* * *

Probably about the time tile, much of it a light brown, started to appear on the outside (and often the inside as well) of Chinese buildings, a modern sidewalk was decreed from on high. In a city like Kunming, it has taken a while, but as I have mentioned before, the old, highly dangerous sidewalks are now being completely and rapidly replaced with what has been decreed.

The sidewalk is covered with tile, of course. often in alternating brown and white squares. In the middle is a lane, two tiles wide, of yellow tiles, each with four raised rectangles from top to bottom. When the lane comes to an end at the curb at the end of the block, there are four special yellow tiles with small circles on them.

These yellow lanes are, of course, for the blind. It is an intelligent, modern system. And Kunming has a number of blind people. When we first arrived here four years ago, I found it exotic and amusing that there were a number of massage parlors with names like "Professional Blind Man Doctor's Massage Clinic" and, a few doors down, "Woodpecker Professional Blind Man Medical Treatment Massage Room." These days I just take it in a part of the scene. These blind masseurs often take their business out to Green Lake, wearing their ankle-length white doctor's coats, and wait for someone to sit down on one of their stools while they massage the person's neck and shoulders.

I have seen other blind people as well. There is a man who has a small electronic keyboard that he plays while his wife sings (a wavering screech, which one person I know found enchanting, but she the only one) and holds out a cup. He does not walk around alone, but instead follows behind his wife with his keyboard strung over one shoulder and his left hand on her shoulder.

The one thing I had never seen when I first wrote about this, and which I had never seen in the four years since, is a blind person using the yellow lane. Until this morning. Across the street from where my two friends, Laura and Pierre, first lived, I walked past a young blind man with his white cane who was feeling his way efficiently down the yellow lane. It lightened my heart to see this independent person benefiting from what I now view as an eminently rational decision by those authorities on high. (When Laura and Pierre lived on that street about a year ago, incidentally, the entire roadway was under heavy construction; now it is a modern urban thoroughfare, with an attractive glass-covered skyscraper at the far end, the headquarters of the municipal government).

* * *

On a random day this past summer, during the World Cup and just after the Mexican elections, I came across a tab on the *NY Times* website that was labeled "Most Popular." Included there was this:

Keywords most frequently searched by NYTimes.com readers.

1. China
2. Mexico
3. World cup
4. Immigration
5. India
6. Gay
7. Iraq
8. Supreme court
9. Bush
10. Art

"China #1" would be a good title for a book, and no doubt this title has already been used, most likely for a book about the growth of the Chinese economy. This keyword table, however, shows China as #1 in a different sense -- as a measure of what the outside world is interested in.

* * *

A Chinese joke:

A typical Chinese family compound, a square building built around an open courtyard. Different parts of the extended family occupy sides of the square. To one family, a child is born.

The child is unusual because he does not talk, well past the age at which other children the same age have begun to talk. Finally, however, at a communal dinner, the child raises his arm, points, and says, "Grandfather!" Grandfather falls dead.

Soon thereafter, at another communal dinner, the child raises its arm again, points, and says, "Grandmother!" Grandmother falls dead.

A third dinner, and the child again raises his arm. The finger waivers, this time in the direction of father. The father brushes the child's arm away and just as the child says "Father!" says, "No, no, don't point at me!"

The father survives, but the father in the compound next-door falls dead.

* * *

I personally have experienced no problems -- as of yet -- with accessing any site I want on the internet, though others claim to have had significant difficulties with certain sites. It seems generally to be Chinese sites which are blocked, perhaps on the theory that sites in other languages pose a secondary threat.

I have heard that there is extensive use of proxy servers: the user finds a proxy server site on the net which has not been blocked by the censors (many ways to find them) enters there the web address to which the user wants to go, then the proxy fetches the page for display. Any use of that proxy can only be traced to the server, not to the user, so I understand. The user then can surf from site to site without being detected. That is of course why with these things the word "proxy" is used.

According to *The Economist*, China has "an estimated 30,000 government censors behind the world's most elaborate censorship programme — known as the Great Firewall of China by detractors, and as the Golden Shield by the Communist Party."

But now when China blocks a proxy, users find a new one at specialized sites created for that purpose. These in turn are blocked. "China's censors are probably the fastest to react, but even then, some proxies survive for a week or more." "'It's a game called cat and rat,' says Mao Xianghui, a partner in an

investment firm in Shanghai. His blog provided advice on using proxies to sidestep censorship, until authorities shut it down last year."

It occurs to me that the next step is as follows: since censors can only trace use of a forbidden page to the proxy server, and since only the proxy server can trace it any further, it is in the censors' interest in some cases to create their own proxy servers and dupe people into using them. No doubt this has already occurred or is in the offing.

One final note: the article which quotes Mr. Mao about the cat and the rat, is in a section of the magazine called "Technology Quarterly," a section which can only be accessed by subscribers. However, students here have found an Australian site that gets around this, and which *The Economist* itself needs to block. If that occurs, it won't make much difference. Wuhan University's subscription is available on their campus internet which students here, at of course a different university far away, have found a way to access.

A second final note, from a later period: the game continues and has its ups and its downs.

* * *

When I arrived in the middle of October, China was in the middle of "100 Days of Intellectual Property Protection", or some such. This was in preparation for a WTO conference at which the American Secretary of Commerce spoke. Television news was full of scenes of hundreds of thousands of DVD's being swept around and crushed.

I began to think there might be something to this. The best DVD store around, on nearby 1-2-1 Road, had far fewer DVD's on its shelves. DVD's here come in a printed cardboard folder which in the West is used as the outside wrapping for a black plastic case which has the DVD inside. Here the DVD is inside the cardboard folder and there is no plastic case. I found that the 1-2-1 store, instead of packing them in on its shelves as usual, one behind the other so that only the spine is visible, maybe 50 to a shelf-rack, had the full front of the folder facing the customer, so that there were only eight or ten to a shelf-rack at most. They had also removed one entire rack from the store.

When my friend asked about this, they said that it was difficult to get DVD's from their supplier.

I was busy, so I did not return to a DVD store for a month or more. I did walk by another store regularly, however, one that is next to a police station, and it did not seem to be any different from last spring, though my inspection was cursory. The 100 days ended. The conference was held. The Secretary spoke and was on TV.

I finally returned recently to the store on the 1-2-1. The DVD's are packed 50 to a shelf-rack again, though the absent rack is still absent. My other favorite store, on a madhouse of a street called "the student street" because thousands of students use it to get to and from their dormitories, has its usual full supply.

* * *

CCTV-9, run by the government, is the only English language station I can get. The only things worth watching are the travel shows. There's also a show called "Rediscovering China", hosted by a young occidental woman who graduated from Rice University in Texas and is fluent in Mandarin. She has since moved on, but if you want to see what the next generation of Old China Hands looks like, Google "Eve Bower" and "China."

* * *

A filling that had been put into the center of the penultimate molar on the left side of my jaw when I was a boy fell out while I was enjoying another dinner composed of many delicious dishes in Kunming. I suddenly needed a crown.

My friend Howard told me that he had gone to a dentistry near the center of town, in the section where the old city had been that was torn down to make way for bland modern buildings. I had been to this area along the channelized river a number of times, on my way to the Bank of China to obtain advances on my credit card so that I would have cash to spend. My friend Ming said he was willing to go with me as translator, and that on the way we could stop at a restaurant for lunch that specializes in *jiaozi* (dumplings), which he knows I like.

The walk there takes you from Green Lake up and along a street that passes a number of interesting places, the first of which is the large, modern, gated complex of apartments where Howard lives, on the 11th floor of the corner building. Diagonally across from that is an office building which is the headquarters of one of the large tobacco companies in Yunnan. Next comes a hotel, set way back from the street, favored by the government agencies for their various events. Then there is a Buddhist temple, the busy sidewalk in front of which is populated by beggars, vendors, and people waiting in line to buy tickets. A large vegetarian restaurant. Finally, the main entrance to the Kunming Zoo.

Ahead is the modern bridge suspended down the center of its two lanes by cables which all emanate from a very tall pillar half way across, the longer cables of course being near the beginning and end of the bridge -- all of them forming an aesthetic triangle. There are steps from the bridge leading down to the walkways on either side of the river, but Ming and I turned right at the cross street there before the bridge because the *jiaozu* place is near that intersection and affords an alternative way to descend to the river. I was planning just to find out about cost on this first visit to the dentist and to make an appointment for later in the week, so we decided to have lunch, which was very good: we had both fried and steamed dumplings, most of them filled with pork, dipped in various sauces, and accompanied by a cup of seaweed soup.

The dental office was modern in every way. It had large plate-glass windows facing the river, about ten of the same dental chairs found in Europe and the US and equipped with overhead mirrors and lights, the latest in high-speed drills, and magazines in the waiting room in front of the receptionist's desk. It was this receptionist who answered our questions about the different types of crowns available and the cost of each. When I had made this choice (I declined the gold), I inquired about an appointment, but the receptionist said, in effect, "How about right now?" Most of the dental chairs were filled, one by a young child, but there were a few empty ones, so I said OK.

The dentists, of whom there appeared to be about a half dozen or more, were all young women clothed head-to-foot in white, including of course a face mask. All young women except for one older man who was basically their mentor, called in for consultation in difficult cases. In no time at all, I had an x-ray of my teeth taken and was under the drill, the remainder of my tooth being shaped in just the right way to receive a new crown. The dentist, whose eyes were the only thing I could see of her, knew the English phrase, "Rinse please." When the drilling was done she used some sort of wax to take an impression of what was left of my tooth for the purpose of fashioning the crown. A temporary crown was installed. Come back in about three or four days. I did, and the final steps went just as smoothly. At the end, I insisted that Ming take a picture of me and the dentist with the camera I had brought. That was the first time I saw her attractive young face.

I asked Ming later whether the prices I had been quoted were the same as what would be quoted to him. "Yes," he said.

* * *

And now for something completely different.

Those who stray off the beaten path of tourism or those who have come to reside a while cannot fail to see the blue chicken, the blue-black chicken. It is part of getting to know China at a deeper level. But on the other hand, this brings up the whole thorny topic of skin color.

"White" people of course are not white, as even the youngest child who has used that crayon to color a face in his coloring book, trying earnestly to stay within the lines, realizes immediately upon viewing the result. In the old days, there was another crayon labeled "flesh" that produced a more satisfactory result if you yourself were "white" but which puzzled or irritated you if you were not. "Flesh" is now called "peach." Whatever the right name, when it comes to chickens we Occidentals are used to seeing birds in the supermarket that are about the same color as the crayon in question, chickens that are a cross between the Cornish and the Plymouth Rock. Indeed, I would have advised the Crayola company of Easton Pennsylvania (founded as Binney & Smith in 1885 and now owned by Hallmark) to do away with the obviously unsatisfactory "peach" label and replace it with "chicken skin" -- would have, that is, until getting to know China and the blue-black chicken in local markets.

To the Westerner chicken skin of that unfamiliar color suggests an off-putting product, especially when it is realized that the flesh and bones are of the same color, but such is not the case, at least not to Chinese taste buds. Plus, it is a form of Chinese medicine, as are so many things right up the food chain to the very top, the tiger.

The blue-black chicken is actually the Silkie. Here's a recipe:

2 lbs (about 1 kg) Silkie, whole, halved or quartered
3 medium size pieces of ginseng root, previously soaked in water for an hour
1 similar piece of ginger, smashed
2 large garlic cloves, smashed
6 whole peppercorns
Soy sauce to taste

Cover the ingredients with water, bring to a boil and skim; simmer for 2 to 4 hours. (Jujubes and orange peel can also be added). Debone the chicken and strain the soup as desired. Garnish with chopped scallions.

This soup, particularly with the jujubes and the orange peel, is favored especially for postpartum recovery, but it is also admired for its general health benefits, even for its taste. Moreover, there is since 2006 scientific evidence for the health benefits, as the Silkie has been shown to contain carnosine in

amounts twice as great as those in western breeds, according to Mingyong Xie, PhD, of the Food Science Laboratory at Nanchang University. Carnosine is a dietary supplement taken in hopes of increasing muscle strength, warding off the effects of aging, and alleviating diseases such as autism and diabetes.

I have never seen a live Silkie, but there is a picture of one posted above the chicken pieces in our local Walmart, the bottom floor of which is a food market. A more adorable animal I have seldom seen, a cartoonist's dream, eccentrically shaped and covered in deep fluff from comb to toe, including feathers on the outside of the legs and feet that are not unlike chaps, if chaps extended down the outside of the boots. This feathery fluff, which feels like down, was thought to be fur by Marco Polo when he described the sites of a city he called Kien-ning-fu in what is now Fujian province (Chapter LXXIV):

> I have been told but did not myself see the animal, that there are found at this place a species of domestic fowls which have no feathers, their skins being clothed with black hair, resembling the fur of cats. They lay eggs like other fowls, and they are good to eat.

The picture in the Walmart is of a Silkie with white feathers, Polo mentions black, and they have in fact been bred in a large variety of colors, including buff and lavender. They all have turquoise blue earlobes. The weight of the evidence appears to be that the breed originated in China. If the Panda ever dies out, the Silkie would make a good substitute. The Silkie's personality is apparently as engaging as its appearance, and in the West it appears most frequently as a pet.

* * *

From Kunming, I made my traditional stop in Hong Kong for a couple of days before flying on to San Francisco. It is always a marked change to go from mainland China to Hong Kong, but never more so than in early December.

In Kunming, there is a little Christmas around the fringes, rather as at Halloween there are a few costumes and a few cardboard cutouts of witches and skeletons provided by Budweiser. There are a few bars, very few, with plastic Christmas trees and some waiters and waitresses standing outside with Santa caps on their heads.

But in Hong Kong, it is Christmas shopping season in full force. And not just any old Christmas shopping season, but the American Christmas shopping season. The Muzak piped into shopping malls and locations of the Pacific Coffee Company (rival of Starbucks) is all the traditional American junk, from "Rudolph

the Red-Nosed Reindeer" to "Have Yourself a Merry, Merry Christmas" to "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," "Little Drummer Boy" – and dozens and dozens of others.

I read on the internet that an employees' union in the UK is considering mounting a lawsuit on the grounds that for employees to be subjected to this all day long is a form of torture. That's right, in Hong Kong you can't get it out of your head, in Kunming it is peace and quiet.

* * *

This chapter began by reconstructing an account of a trip we took to Xishuangbanna several months after we first arrived in Kunming, reconstructing it because Yahoo had deleted the long email on it we'd sent to friends. Keeping with this chapter's theme, it is worth reconstructing a third trip, also deleted by Yahoo: the trip back to the US with our dog, the beautiful small (for this sort of dog) Malamute whom my wife named Shanghai.

Getting Shanghai to Kunming, detailed in the first chapter, was stressful enough, but that pales in comparison to the return. All because of a lady who had taken her toy dog on the plane with her.

But first something about Shanghai in Kunming, and how she likes it. People here frequently walk around eating food, particularly at lunch time and snack time. They frequently drop food items. Shanghai loves this, and she inspects every object on the sidewalk to see whether it can be eaten. And she pulls; she pulls and pulls from one potential food item to the next, and we pull her away from them because most of them have bad consequences on her digestive system. All this means that her walk becomes a pulling contest. And she is the type of dog that pulls sleds.

Shanghai discovered in China that she likes mango. She has always liked being adored. Our kind host here, the honorable professor, was kind enough early on to drive us out into the countryside for a trip up what is known locally as "ecological valley." I think the professor and Shanghai bonded on this journey. Lots of people were amused to see her, a beautiful snow dog in a country that favors small, beautifully ugly dogs. Shanghai is eating a lot of rice, she is almost on a sort of rice diet. The rice and the dry dog food here have been good for her, keeping her slim, active, and alert. We take walks around Green Lake every evening (dogs are not allowed in the park) for more than an hour. Shanghai hops from planter to planter, madly sniffing everything. The graduate students, particularly the young women, all adore her. All want their picture taken with

her, as do a number of tourists walking around the lake. Shanghai smiles in every one of those pictures. She likes to sit in the bay window at the back of the apartment. We are up on the 5th floor, and she can look down on the walkway between our building and the older one next to us. This is a perspective she does not get back home.

January 9 is the day Shanghai and I are scheduled to leave Kunming for San Francisco, by way of Hong Kong. Here is the scheduled route:

- China Southern Airlines (Kunming-HK),
- Cathay Pacific (HK-San Francisco)

I purchased the ticket on China Southern in early December, after my travel agent had checked with China Southern and confirmed with them that I could take Shanghai with me.

But over the past three days:

Monday: the China Southern cargo guy (Mr Li) now maintains to my travel agent that the airline cannot take Shanghai to HK, even though we were sold a ticket based on the understanding that they would take her. He maintains that:

-- the ticketing people were not aware of this policy

-- a woman this fall took her dog with her to HK at the last moment, did not have the proper paperwork, was told the dog had to be in quarantine for 3 months, refused to pay (presumably sticking China Southern with the bill – and the dog)

-- Hong Kong has a regulation that prohibits dogs from being imported there from Kunming (dubious; moreover, we are not importing a dog from Kunming to HK, but merely using HK as a transit zone for a trip to SFO).

Tuesday, a day of considerable anxiety: my travel agent calls Mr Li back to explain that our situation is nothing like this lady's and that we have all the necessary permits from HK. No luck. Stacy, at the kennel in Hong Kong which is helping us, calls China Southern offices there to get them to call Kunming, but Mr Li remains adamant, now going so far as to claim that it is company policy not to ship pet dogs.

That night, we have a "Farewell to Shanghai" party at our apartment. All our friends have their picture taken with Shanghai. Wu takes the pictures with his digital camera.

Wednesday, more anxiety: hearing nothing further from China Southern, we pursue the idea that perhaps China Eastern will ship her.

11:30am: a freight forwarding company that works with China Eastern calls to say that, yes, China Eastern will take her, but they have no flight tomorrow and it would have to be on Monday. This means I can pursue either of two options: a) change all my reservations to Monday, so that I can go with Shanghai; or b) go as scheduled on Thursday and Shanghai is shipped as cargo on the following Monday.

3:00pm: for reasons too detailed to explain it is decided that b) is the only option, and I start making arrangements with Stacy to arrange for the shipment on Monday.

4:25: Ming and I start out from our offices at the university to take a taxi to the travel agent's office in order to go with him to China Eastern to purchase the air way bill we need in order to ship Shanghai.

4:40: while we are in the taxi, Ming (who has already called China Southern's offices in Beijing and Guangzhou to complain) calls Mr Li. Mr Li, amazingly, begins to show signs he could conceivably change his mind about shipping Shanghai from Kunming to Hong Kong. Under questioning from Ming, at one point he asks how many hours Shanghai will be in Hong Kong. Ming asks me. I tell him, "ten hours." But Mr Li remains non-committal.

4:55: We meet Xiaowei, the travel agent, on the sidewalk outside his office building, saving us a long climb up the stairs to his office which is on the sixth floor. We go over to a street-level office of the same company next door in order to make some copies of documents we need for China Eastern. Ming uses his mobile phone to call Mr Li one last time. While he is talking, we all three begin looking for a cab to take us to China Eastern.

5:00: Mr Li changes his mind and says we can come over and see him in his office, which is in a residential section near the airport.

5:15 We pull up to an intersection in the residential section, and Mr Li comes out and meets us and leads us back to his office on the ground floor of an apartment building. Mr Li, a tall, thin man in his early thirties, is a "by the book"

person. The faxed copy of the HK permit I have is not good enough for him, so he calls the HK Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department to verify that the permit is legitimate. He finds someone there who can speak Mandarin and who is able to confirm that the permit is in fact legitimate. Mr Li then looks through the volumes of regulations he has on his desk to confirm that the dog carrier is within the allowable dimensions and weight for excess baggage (this involves converting inches and pounds to centimeters and kilograms). He examines the animal health certificate supplied by the Yunnan Department of Animal Inspection and Quarantine, as well as the rabies vaccination certificate supplied by Shanghai's veterinarian in the US before we originally left a year and a half ago.

All this while he is fielding calls on his mobile phone and making calls on his landline phone. Eventually he pulls out a blank "air way bill" and feeds it into his manual typewriter to start filling it out. Manual typewriters, of course, do not have Chinese characters, so the air way bill is filled out entirely in English -- twice, after he discovers a mistake on his first attempt and tears that up.

While he is doing all this, I show him the picture of Shanghai I always carry around with me in the little credit card case I have. He tells Xiaowei and Ming that though he has never seen a Malamute before, he owns two Huskies, as does his boss!

The fee for the way-bill is about $25. At about 6:30 we have what we need.

Accordingly, this Thursday morning we are all standing around in the "Air Logistics" building next to the airport terminal building admiring Shanghai: my colleagues who picked us up at 7am, Mr Li, several people from a freight-forwarding company who the travel agent (or someone) involved as facilitators in this process, various people who work for the air logistics office, and some passersby. Eventually, Shanghai's travel carrier is put together, with her in it. Everything is put on a scale, and a guy comes with a dolly and takes her away. Just like that.

The next I see of her (there were exactly twelve people on the two-hour flight from Kunming to Hong Kong, by the way) is at the place in the HK airport cargo buildings where I saw her when she was shipped into China a year and a half ago. She is still in her carrier, of course. Stacy and a young guy from Agriculture and Fisheries come with her. We load the carrier into Stacy's van and drive over to the "animal hostel" a few buildings away. There, Shanghai is shown to her -- jail cell!

It is in fact very much like a jail cell, a small, tiled room about the size of a decent closet, with a gate of iron bars. I go into Hong Kong and visit the offices of a small local green group with offices across the street from the northern end of Kowloon Park, there to meet with my friend, one of the association's directors, and the woman who is its Chief Executive.

Back at the airport about 10 pm, Stacy and Shanghai are waiting for me in the passenger check-in area for Cathay Pacific. Shanghai is processed as a piece of excess baggage -- and, after I have paid a small fee, goes down the chute with the other baggage. Just like that.

Our flight departs at 11:45 pm and arrives in San Francisco before it takes off -- at 7:35 pm. International date line, of course. The actual time between when Shanghai was taken out of her cell and put into her carrier to when she is delivered to me in the San Francisco airport -- and then carted (by me) off to the rental car center and ultimately freed was, approximately, 14 hours. Shanghai is mighty happy, to say the least, to finally get out of that carrier. She is not too sure about all this travel, but she enjoyed her time in China and the people she met there and the food she ate there. Now it is a simple matter of a drive to Washington, DC.

Chapter 19: Ceremony, Ice, Mangoes, Monkeys

One of the charms of China is going to the police station. Another charm is going to the dentist. I have been to the dentist in the past, but this time around it is the police. Anyone who is not a tourist has to register with the police and get a stamped certificate each time they reenter the Middle Kingdom. (Tourists are registered by the hotels the stay in).

But this is not some grim experience where the police lash you with, among other things, questions. On the contrary, it is often entertaining, as was my most recent registration. There is a desk in an office open to the street on a main thoroughfare near here where our district registers, a desk behind a wall of glass. The desk is mainly for citizens who have moved from one part of the city to another, or from the countryside to the city. I presented myself and looked through the glass. The young woman there, not in uniform, had an immediate reaction: a look of "This is trouble" in her eye. But after a quick phone call she led me around the corner and up into the police station to the third floor. There about six or eight (the number shifted regularly) young ladies attempted to deal with this crisis. Three of them, at some point during the next hour, used on me the one phrase they felt comfortable with in English: "Please wait a moment."

They all grouped around a computer screen where they discussed who should fill out the form and what information goes into which box. I had a Xerox copy of the ID page from my passport for them, but not one of my visa or of the lease to the apartment. At one point one of the young ladies punched something into her smartphone and then showed me the translation: "Do you have a copy of your landlady's ID card?" Alas, I did not. But that has never been an impediment before, nor did it prove to be this time.

There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing as copies were made of the documents I had brought, including the lease. It helped immensely that they already had a file on me, a paper file, though it took a half hour before they located it. None of these young ladies was in uniform, but eventually another young lady who was in the navy-blue police uniform, rather heavier than the others, was summoned. I had the impression she was the sort the others found amusing; she did make them laugh on several occasions, usually with her shrugs in response to questions. She tried to explain some things to the others, but it soon became clear that she was as much in the dark about certain things as they were.

At one point I was given a cup of tea. Even this simple act of courtesy proved to be of interest. This was tea in a paper cup, but no ordinary paper cup: for one

thing, it had the shield of the police office emblazoned on the outside and, for another thing -- wonder of wonders -- it contained a built-in tea bag. At the bottom of the cup was a small round clump of tea encased in a small round tea bag affixed to the bottom of the cup. I felt honored to have this latest advance in an ancient trade in my hand, even though tea purists and other devotees of the ancient tea ceremony would scoff.

After about an hour or so, the uniformed young lady indicated that I should come with her, and she led me back down the stairs and around the corner to the desk to which I had first presented myself. This was a good sign because I knew that this is where the printer is. She initiated the good old dot-matrix printer, printed my form, and stamped it in red. I was free to go.

* * *

A close friend's mother died of cancer in February, at a far-too-young age. I only encountered her occasionally, usually when she was preparing a delicious meal for us, but I had laughed with her, and I knew the deep loss felt by my friend and her family. The family was having a ceremony out in the Xi Shan honoring the mother. Would I like to come?

Of course I would. The family, including their darling daughter, and I got into their new car and headed for the Western Hills just as it was starting to rain. Possibly the beginning of the rainy season, which usually commences in May. The Western Hills are actually a small mountain range (certainly they are mountains by my standards -- I grew up in Illinois) that comes down to Dianchi, Lake Dian, the large lake at the north end of which Kunming is located. The Hills are an attractive and historic part of the Kunming environment. My family and I were taken there, and were duly impressed, when we first arrived in Kunming in the fall of 2002. There are hiking trails, grand views of the lake, temples, and the tomb of Nie Er, composer of the national anthem. The temples, starting at the bottom and proceeding upwards, (it is also possible to drive to the top and hike down) begin with Sanqingge, a Taoist temple built on the site of a villa of a Yuan dynasty prince. ("Yuan" is the name Kublai Khan chose for his dynasty in 1271). Above Sanqingge is Dragon's Gate, basically hanging on the side of the mountain, with even better views than Sanqingge itself. Next is Taihuasi, or Taihua Temple, which dates from the last true Chinese dynasty, the Ming (1368–1644). It was built in 1302 by a monk named Xuan Jian. There's a 600-year-old gingko tree and the Blue Pond. Last is Huating Temple, a Buddhist temple built in 1320 and renovated a number of times and rebuilt in 1920.

But we weren't going to any of these traditional sites. We were headed to a multi-story building built in the last fifteen or so years that is a combination Buddhist temple-mausoleum-cemetery. The mountains and the rain clouds were visible before us as we sped along the new elevated highway that now goes out to the Xi Shan, past rows and rows of empty high-rise apartment buildings built in the last couple of years. The top of our target temple rises above the trees and is in traditional temple style, but underneath that fancy roof is a five or six story building with walls covered in cream-colored tiles punctuated by very few windows.

An article which appeared in the *People's Daily*, December 8, 2000 may help explain where we were:

> Yunnan Builds Cultural, Artistic Cemetery
>
> The Jinbaoshan Artistic Cemetery integrating culture, art, sightseeing and tablets has been completed in Kunming, capital city of Yunnan Province.
>
> The modern cemetery is designed to promote the modern funeral and interment reform, as well as the development of the tourism industry.
>
> Covering 171 ha, the cemetery is located by the west bank of the picturesque Kunming Dianchi Lake. It was completed by the Yunnan Nuoshida Jinbaoshan Art Cemetery Ltd. in three years and at a total cost of 140 million yuan (US$16.8 million).
>
> The whole cemetery integrating the culture of parks and gardens, Confucianism, Buddhism and the cemetery culture is divided into five zones including the service sector zone and the leisure park zone, all with different architectural styles. The tree coverage in all zones reaches 80 percent.

We drove into the complex and parked right at the base of the main building. The main entrance is guarded by four large stone statues. Three large golden statues of Buddha adorn the back wall of the grand room beyond the entrance, but we waited on the porch to assemble our little party, which included two of my friend's co-workers and her husband's cousin, and to await the arrival of our guide. From the porch, one can see how close the lake is -- and the skyscrapers and other buildings that now adorn the far shore, few of them there when my family and I first visited the area.

The rain subsided just as we arrived, and it was promising to be a nice day. Our guide, in highly-polished black shoes and wearing a black suit and black tie, soon arrived and escorted us into the grand Buddha room. After a short wait, my friend's husband went upstairs and retrieved the box of ashes. A small ceremony ensued, involving five men in white dress-shirts and black pants, four of whom stood at the corners of a rectangle surrounding us. The fifth man led us all out after reciting commemorative prose, which he read from a book -- led us out to an

open-air electric vehicle with seats for almost all of us, including the five men and the guide. The main part of the cemetery is below the mausoleum, but we drove to a new part, above the mausoleum. This new part is rather like a large outdoor amphitheater (no stage, though), the tiny gravesites implanted into what would otherwise be tiers for spectators. Stairs had been built at regular intervals to provide access to the upper levels. We were escorted to a site about halfway up. This particular area is so new that very few gravesites are occupied at present.

The gravesite we were taken to already had a small dark gray headstone with my friend's mother's picture attached to it. There we were met by a Feng Shui Master, also in highly-polished black shoes, black suit, and black tie. He had with him three things: his *luopan*, a red pail filled with grain, and a coarse, yellowish bag of the sort that someone might discard after the rice or grain it contained was gone.

Wind-water, *feng shui*, is to do with proper orientation or alignment to ensure that *qi* ("life force" or "vital energy") flows appropriately. Its use in burials dates back at least to the third century A.D., to the commentary of Guo Pu, Taoist mystic, on the long lost *Zhangshu*, the Book (or Classic) of Burial. Guo's commentary includes statements like: "Bury with the Cerulean Dragon to the left, the White Tiger to the right, the Vermilion Bird in front, and the Dark Turtle in back." Guo lived from 274 to 324. He would have lived longer except that, in addition to being a commentator on classic texts and a natural historian, he was a diviner and omen-interpreter. Taken on by a powerful warlord who wanted to assume the throne of the Eastern Jin dynasty by force -- and who wanted favorable omens -- Guo failed to provide and so was executed. The warlord, however, grew ill and died that same year.

The burial plot is a tight fit for the box, so it was not clear to me how much leeway there was for alignment. Nonetheless, the Master began his recitations and squatted over the box using his *luopan*, which is a square board with a compass at the center surrounded by concentric rings containing various "formulas." The *luopan* marks 24 directions rather than four, 15 degrees each -- 360 degrees in all, in rough correlation to the number of days in a mean solar year. The *luopan* compass needle points to the south magnetic pole.

At one point he called for the yellow bag. One of the white-shirts reached into the bag and withdrew from it a magnificent live rooster, holding it upside down by the legs. The rooster's eye had the look of "I'm not sure I'm going to like this." It had comb, wattles and earlobes, and dark brown iridescent feathers, but it was the rooster's deep red comb which was of interest to the Master. While his assistant held the bird, the Master, still squatting, touched each point of the comb to the box, reciting something each time. The bird was then dispatched back into the

yellow bag where it remained just as calm and noiseless as it had before its upside-down journey to the daylight.

The Master sprinkled seed around. Two workmen came forward and cemented two small granite vases to the headstone, one on each side; these were then immediately filled with bouquets brought by the family. A spool of red thread was produced, and the thread was wrapped round and round the headstone, a custom associated with a new house. Obeisances were performed, food was laid on the grave.

The ceremony then moved on to a smoky structure consisting of perhaps a hundred small fireplaces, where the family burnt a special paper intended as cash for the afterlife. Joss sticks, many many of them, were lit and planted in a stone platform in the center of the structure, a stone platform topped with a bed of sand, sort of like a small children's sandbox.

The final act was the lighting of the firecrackers, a task assigned to my friend's husband. There is a small brick structure built against one side of the fireplace building, with small openings for entry, containing a number of small chambers. The roof consists of a wrought iron grating. In there he went, hanging the red strip of firecrackers on a hook. He lit the fuse and bolted from out the door liked greased lightning. There was the very loud noise of lots of exploding firecrackers. Smoke rose through the grating roof. But soon he realized that that was all for the chamber one over from his and that he needed to try again.

This time his exit made greased lightning seem like molasses, and this time he had success.

* * * ~ * * *

Two of the landmarks that stood out – literally – when I first came to Kunming were both high-rise buildings that had risen high, but which had never been completed -- far from it. One was right on Green Lake: just about ten floors of concrete skeleton draped in a green cover, there on a corner near the main entrance to the university. The story behind this one was a story of simple corruption, at least as it was related to me. Chinese officials seem to have trouble with their offspring, and in this case, it was the son of Yunnan's governor. Apparently, a Hong Kong developer was also involved. There is a height limitation for buildings immediately surrounding the lake, and indeed a large complex a little further away had been constructed on the basis that the units on its upper floors would be able to behold the beauty of the lake by looking over the structures

closer to the lake. The son and the developer from Hong Kong blatantly disregarded the height limitation in their desire to profit from the view. It would have worked, too, except that the father-governor was executed for malfeasance. In this case the offspring had trouble with the parent. That put the kybosh on the plan for the building; the Hong Kong developer also went broke, though whether as a result of this failure or other failures is unclear. The unfinished structure just sat there for years after we first came to Green Lake, until 2008 when construction was – somehow – restarted. Two red banners stretching the entire height of the building were added to the green cover, banners extolling the virtues of socialism. The building now appears to me to be a super luxurious apartment building, but whether it is as tall as the building originally intended for the site I do not know.

The other landmark is further away, but still very noticeable because it is taller and larger than the one near Green Lake and protrudes above much shorter structures. The story behind this one has fewer details to it, but again the end result was a large concrete shell just standing there, year after year, in this case without a green cover. Apparently when the building rose to a certain height, the commanding officer of a nearby military compound complained that people in the building would be able to monitor things going on in his compound. That put the kybosh on that one. There has been no change to this structure for more than a decade. It is rapidly becoming a historic landmark.

Quite possibly the military compound which was responsible for this landmark is now at the center of a major news story about cyberwarfare.

But first some background. From the *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2015:

> The investigation into the cyberattack on computers at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management is proceeding on the theory that the hack was directed by the Chinese government and aimed at uncovering sensitive, personal information that could have been used to blackmail or bribe government employees to obtain secrets, officials said Friday.
>
> Social Security numbers, email addresses, job performance reviews and other personal information of about four million government workers were siphoned out of the computer servers, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal assessments of the breach.

From the *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2015:

> Who's the latest behind-the-scenes investor on Broadway? China.
>
> Three of the hottest musicals on Broadway have Chinese backers as China starts expanding live theatrical entertainment at home and looks to New York for expertise.

> China Media Capital, a state-backed private-equity fund, has invested in the production company behind Tony-nominated "Hand to God" and "Something Rotten!" Beijing-based China Broadway Entertainment is a backer of "An American in Paris," which is nominated for 12 Tonys.

Now that we have a clear picture of how zany this relationship between the world's largest communist country and the country which is the capital of capitalism, we can proceed.

Enter Ge Xing, stage left. Exit Bo Xilai, stage right. Admittedly, Ge is a small fish compared to a whale like Bo, but the school of fish that a small one is a part of can sometimes outweigh even a whale.

Ge is an expert in malware, short for "malicious software." His goal is to get his malware on computers which his school of fish has targeted. One tactic is to send an email which contains attractive lies about the wonders to behold if the attachment to the email is opened. The attachment often appears to be a simple Word document, and in fact it can contain useful information for the recipient –- as a decoy. The attachment also contains malware which installs itself without the user's consent and begins searching the victim's computer and sending information about it to specialized locations on the internet; nor need this communication be solely one-way – in some cases the malware can also receive commands from its originator and do further dirty work. This nefarious technique is known as "spear phishing," right in line with our ocean metaphor. It would hardly be worth doing for an ordinary computer like mine or yours, but it is a different matter when the computer belongs to a government agency such as a military department or to a large corporation. In these cases, the planting of malware is a kind of attack, a cyberattack. And a successful cyberattack is referred to as – again right in line with the ocean metaphor – establishing a "beachhead" within the target agency or organization.

Two firms that are in the business of identifying and tracking cyberattacks, ThreatConnect and Defense Group, Inc., both in northern Virginia, where government contractors hang out, recently published the results of an analysis they conducted. The analysis builds on work by a laboratory-company built by Eugene Kaspersky, a charismatic Russian antivirus expert, and by PassiveTotal, a cybersecurity firm. It is this analysis, available online, which turned up Ge Xing – a cyberspy located in Kunming, where until now no one would have thought to look, perhaps because, if I may be presumptuous, the ocean is so far away from Yunnan province.

The path to Ge Xing's door begins with malware which the analysis is able to identify. This malware is part of a family known as Naikon which the experts are certain the Chinese military employs. The next step is to connect the use of the

identified weapons in the Naikon family with a particular domain name, and the analysis says the eight weapons it identified were all connected to greensky27.vicp.net. (Don't both looking; it's no longer online). Further steps thus involved finding out who is behind greensky27. This was accomplished in part by looking at five years' worth of internet traffic going back and forth between the domain and the malware. This involved about 1,236 IP addresses in 26 cities, in eight countries, because the hacker's intent was to complicate and conceal. Somehow, however, all this traffic ended up in Kunming.

Further research revealed that greensky27 has a penchant for social media and that on these, he is not shy. Particularly on his QQ Weibo account (Chinese version of Facebook), he put up more than 500 postings and more than 700 photos. The photos include the back of his VW Golf, including the license plate, and various bicycle routes he rides in Kunming. The identification with the People's Liberation Army comes from the fact that he posted photos taken at PLA events, like a firefighting demonstration and a commemoration: "Yunnan Province celebrates 87 years of PLA Army Building." It also comes from the fact that a number of the photos, for example of snow in Kunming (always noteworthy because it is unusual), can be shown to have been taken inside a known PLA compound.

Ge Xing is not, as the analysis report says at one point, one of those "hoodie-wearing teens crouched over a computer in their mom's basement." On the contrary he is a professional employed by the PLA's Chengdu Military Region Second Technical Reconnaissance Bureau, located in Kunming. More specifically, he is employed by a unit with the Military Unit Cover Designator 78020, commonly referred to as Unit 78020, and with the help of Google search, found to be located at 158 Jiao Chang Zhong Lu (Lu=Street) in the central part of the city. Satellite photos of this compound appear in the report.

That greensky27 = Ge Xing comes from those social media sites in which he identified himself. This in turn led, simply by googling the name, to two published papers on Thai politics from 2008 where the author affiliation reads: "Chinese People's Liberation Army Unit 78020, Yunnan, Kunming, 650223". The author bios in these two articles show 1980 as year of birth.

Ge Xing is not a spear maker, it would appear, but a spear thrower who is expert at sifting through what the spear brings back to the boat. The patterns the ThreatConnect/DGI analysis discerns in internet activity related to greensky27.vicp.net – such things as coincidence with normal working hours and the annual Spring Festival (Chinese New Year, when the entire nation stands still for a week) – further link Ge Xing to the use of Naikon to penetrate governments of the SE Asia/South Pacific region, all of whom are particularly exercised over China's activities in the South China Sea.

The discoveries and analysis of all this, made available on the internet, has a title: Camerashy. Odd title, since Ge Xing was apparently anything but camera shy. Indeed, his addiction to the phenomenon of the current age, social media, displays so much about him that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he is a nice guy. Ge is probably now in prison, though. Perhaps he has the cell next to Bo Xilai.

I don't know if that unfinished skyscraper I have known as a Kunming landmark exists because it was stopped by the commander of Unit 78020, but it is certainly possible.

* * *

Refugees from the fighting in eastern China and in Burma during the Second Sino-Japanese War experienced a feeling of relief when they reached faraway Yunnan. What a calm and peaceful place; such beautiful weather. Nothing ever happens here, in the middle of nowhere. But in fact, in the 19th century the province had been far from tranquil. The Du Wenxiu Rebellion (also known as the Panthay Rebellion, 1856-1873), a war between Hui (Muslim) Chinese and Han Chinese, had resulted in the deaths of over a million people. One source says the entire population of the province at this time was only eight million. There were other cataclysms as well. The Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) was a far grander Guignol, though centered in eastern China – yet it affected Yunnan also, in the form of plague brought in by people (and their rats) fleeing the battleground.

Earlier in the 19th century, however, a sequence of dire events occurred which had a far greater impact on the province than anything that followed. Yunnan province, parts of which are tropical and whose capital is called "City of Eternal Spring", is subject to periodic droughts, and the lack of rain in the summer of 1814 at first appeared to be just another one of these. Indeed, it was, but what happened the following spring was something of an altogether different origin and an altogether different magnitude.

> . . . the expected southwest winds did not arrive to disperse the clouds, which instead labored over the mountains, depositing flooding rains that drowned the winter crops. Wheat and barley sprouted underwater, while row after row of broad beans disintegrated into the mud. The bitter rains continued through the disastrous summer and autumn. The aqueous rice fields might yet have survived had it not been for a frosty August, which strangled the budding rice plants at the critical point of their maturation.

A frosty August?

> After a traumatic winter with high mortality, the people's hopes rose again in the late spring with the coming of the rains, this time in normal, moderate quantities. But the summer, of which these rains would ordinarily

> have been the sweet harbinger, never prospered. Instead, the bewildered and heartbroken Yunnanese endured unprecedented snows in July.

Snows in July!

And it was the same the following year, 1817: "Snow fell again over Kunming and frosts covered the ground from June through August."

What could cause such startling events, such calamities? Something very far away -- 5,000 kilometers (3000 miles) away -- "the most powerful volcanic eruption in recorded human history."

All of these quotations are from Gillen D'Arcy Wood's book, *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World*. A superb work, published in 2014, it tells the story of the explosion of Mount Tambora on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa on April 10, 1815 and the disastrous consequences this had on the world's weather for the following three years. Chapter 5 is entitled "The Seven Sorrows of Yunnan." "[N]o region in China, it appears, suffered so greatly as the southwest province of Yunnan."

The chapter begins by recounting the forces that account for the province's mild climate. The summer monsoons which originate in the Bay of Bengal take a northward course which passes over the eastern end of the world's highest mountain range in order to reach Yunnan. This course deprives them of much of their water and calms their winds. The winter cold from Mongolia is also held in abeyance by mountains, and a stationary high-pressure zone is created over the province. Yunnan was particularly vulnerable to any change in this protective system. Its elevation is similar to that of the capital of Colorado, the famous mile-high Denver (sister city to Kunming), so unstinting summer sunshine is required to ripen crops that would otherwise be unable to mature at such an elevation. The cold and continual rains of 1815 were thus a disaster. Rice is particularly vulnerable to cold temperatures, being tropical in origin. Wood suggests that two-thirds of the crop failed, and by the time he makes this statement one wonders how one-third could possibly have survived. The following year the crop failed again, "this time completely."

At this point Wood turns to poetry: he is, after all, a professor of English at the home campus of the University of Illinois, an Australian descended from prominent ministers. He turns not to poems he himself has composed, but to those of Li Yuyang, who had for years competed in China's imperial examinations which reward successful candidates with careers in government. Of the Bai ethnic minority around the ancient town of Dali, Li had studied at a prestigious Confucian academy in Kunming. But having repeatedly failed to win a place, Li turned to farming, just at the worst time possible. Deprived of food by Tambora, he still had his mastery of metre, which he put to effective use. Wood, with the aid of

colleagues, translates seven of the poems, of which I here quote a portion of one from 1816:

> Rain falls unending, like tears of blood
> from the sentimental man.
> Houses sink and shudder
> like fish in the rippling water
> I see my older boy pulling at his mother's skirt.
> The little one cries unheard. Money gone, and
> Rice rare as pearls, we offer our blanket to save ourselves.

It turns out that the provincial government has reserves of rice in its granaries, which it now decides to open – rather late in an emergency so dire, but welcome nonetheless. The reserves are a concomitant of the regulation of the price of rice, but they also represent the world's largest and oldest system of state famine relief, and in Yunnan had existed for a thousand years. The granaries were supposed to contain supplies sufficient to provide each adult male a full month's supply. Yet, like all infrastructure everywhere, repairs were needed, and the actual supply in 1817 is unknown. What is known is that Li Yuyang appeared each day at the main gate of Kunming, his hair now turning white in his mid-thirties, to receive a weak rice porridge "consisting of barley flour and broken rice seeds mixed with buckwheat or vegetables – a deliberately wretched porridge so that only the truly famished would line up to consume it."

Even this eventually fails. "Outside the starved corpses pile high/While in her room the young mother/Waits upon her child's death . . ." The reader is surprised to find that anyone survives until the spring of 1818. But by the summer of that year, the stratosphere is finally clear of volcanic dust, and the autumn harvest is of a bumper crop.

Yet the Tambora explosion had still further impact on Yunnan. Wood argues that a case can be made that the famine of 1815-18 was responsible for the province's shift from producing mainly rice and other grains to becoming the nation's principal supplier of opium. As he notes, the opium problem in China is traditionally thought of as resting upon opium imported from India by the British in order to compensate for the huge trade imbalance the United Kingdom had with the Middle Kingdom. But from 1820 on Yunnan was a major producer of opium, a fact that startled the emperor and the mandarins who surrounded him when they first learned of it. The emperor responded by mandating anti-cultivation efforts of his officials, but they had little effect. Farmers had even well before Tambora been forced by the demands of taxation to abandon mere self-sufficiency as a goal and to enter the market place of supply and demand in order to maximize their income. Opium, they learned, commanded a pretty penny. Moreover, the local officials

charged with enforcing the emperor's anti-cultivation measures found it easier to meet their taxation quotas by taxing opium rather than grains, so enforcement was not what the mandarins had envisaged. Over the next century opium grew so dominant that the province had to import its rice from its neighbors to the south, exporting in return not only opium itself but ethnic minorities such as the Hmong who were proficient at growing opium and who would in the years to come teach SE Asia how to grow it. Wood says that by the early 20th century China exported over 89% of the world's narcotics and in Yunnan 90% of adult males used it, half of whom were addicts.

In reading this, I am reminded of something I wrote about Kunming in my email journal years ago. As always, I went to register with the police after returning to the city, bringing a Chinese friend to serve as interpreter. The policeman left his desk and took my documents to another part of the station. We could hardly help noticing the tall piles of papers stacked neatly on his desk since one had as its top sheet a photograph of another American, a good friend of mine who had registered a week or so before. My interpreter then told me that the other stack was of people who had died of heroin abuse.

Tambora affected the entire world, though it is difficult to be certain how extensive the effect was since many countries, some continents, did not maintain any meteorological records, certainly none as long-standing as those of China. Tambora affected different places to different degrees, Yunnan harshly because of the unique balance of weather forces that enable its climate. Wood's book has absorbing and important chapters about India, Ireland, the United States east of the Appalachians, and other places.

* * * ~ * * *

On April 2, 2016 a photograph appeared on the front page of a number of newspapers showing a group of international leaders meeting in Washington to discuss nuclear safety. There are ten people sitting around a fairly small table, four with their backs to us and difficult to identify (though we can see the name card for High Representative, Frederica Mogherini, European Union). The six whose faces we can see are John Kerry, David Cameron, Francis Hollande, Barack Obama, Xi Jinping, and (barely visible) Justin Trudeau.

There are no other people in the photograph, no assistants or advisors. Just the ten. President Obama is saying something, and the others are listening. Nor is there any apparatus in this picture: no microphones, headphones, laptops, mobile phones.

It is clear that they are all speaking English or at least listening to English being spoken. Xi Jinping is clearly listening to what Obama has to say.

We can safely say that Obama does not speak Chinese. Does Xi speak English? -- that is the question that came to my mind. I've often been interested in who, among the leaders we see so often in the news, speaks what? It is a curious thing about the news that this never comes up, never seems to be considered news. It is not as though speaking the same language is unimportant. A remark several years ago on a CNN talk show by David Kay, former UN Chief Weapons Inspector, was that mistranslation played a role in the Weapons of Mass Destruction justification for invading Iraq: "Very often, as you know, with Google Translate, you get very different meanings. And in the case in 2003, what Colin Powell cited as communication intercepts in the Security Council, indeed, did not mean what we thought they meant. It was a combination of mistranslation and code words they used. "

But back to Xi. A little research reveals that there's a blog on the net, published April 16, which contains an interview with Huang Youyi, Xi Jinping's translator for English. From this we learn that Xi "uses a lot of traditional idioms," that Chinese companies do a poor job at global outreach, that it is more difficult to translate for scholars than for political leaders, that Chinese use many adverbs, English-speakers far fewer, that Huang and Xi are the same age and that both were rusticated in the turmoil of the 60's, and finally that, of Xi, "I don't think he has a very strong command of English." The photograph seems to say, however, that he is a better listener than speaker.

* * *

The New York Botanical Garden is a major scientific organization. NYBG is possessed of 7.3 million dried plant specimens in its William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, the largest herbarium in the Western hemisphere. As of mid-2016, 2.5 million specimen records and 1.5 million images are available over the internet through NYBG's Virtual Herbarium, and every month about 20,000 records and images are added to this total. It is not necessary to register to use the Virtual Herbarium. Just go to the "science" pages of the NYBG website and start searching.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences is a major scientific organization. CAS has a Division of Life Sciences and Medicine which includes many large and important botanical institutions. The Kunming Institute of Botany alone has over 1 million dried plant specimens. CAS also has a Virtual Herbarium available on its website, but in order to use it it is necessary to register. Per Google translate, the registration form includes these terms and conditions:

> For the maintenance of public order and social stability, please consciously abide by the following terms:
> A, shall not be used to endanger national security, leaking state secrets, shall not be violated national social collective legitimate rights and interests of citizens, you must not use this site production, reproduction and dissemination of the following information:

(A) to incite resistance, undermine the Constitution and laws and administrative regulations to implement;
(B) incitement to subvert state power and overthrow the socialist system;
(C) incitement to split the country and undermine national unity;
(Iv) incitement to ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, undermining national unity;
(5) fabrication or distortion of facts, spread rumors, disturbs social order;
(Vi) promoting feudal superstitions, obscenity, pornography, gambling, violence, murder, terrorism, abetting crime;
(Vii) an affront others or fabricating facts to slander others, or other malicious attacks;
(Viii) damage the reputation of state organs;
(Ix) other violations of the Constitution and laws and administrative regulations;
(J) commercial advertising behavior.
Second, mutual respect, for their words and actions.

I have read and agree to the "China Digital Herbarium user registration agreement" all the terms
Actual name: site only accepts real name registered users
Male / Female
Login password: use a combination of uppercase/lowercase letters and numbers
Confirm password: Password strength:
E-mail:

* * *

Mangoes were introduced into Yunnan from Thailand in 1914. One of the characteristic sights of Kunming today is the street vendor with piles of mangoes on his or her cart. There are also many fruit shops, open to the sidewalk, with prominent displays of mangoes.

There are hundreds of mango cultivars worldwide at this point, but the particular cultivar which predominates in Yunnan is known as the Ivory. Not plump, but long and a bit thin, the name comes from its resemblance to a young elephant's tusk. The flesh is not fibrous, and the taste is sweet. The tree that was the first to be imported to and planted in Yunnan, over a century ago, is still alive and producing.

I presume that mangoes were common in Yunnan back even during the Cultural Revolution, whose beginning this year is the 50th anniversary of. (Caught up in revolutionary spirit, I have just ended a sentence with a preposition). But it appears that back then they were unknown in the cold power centers of northeastern China. And it appears also that Mao did not like them, which helps explain why when in August 1968 he was given either a basket of or a case of (accounts differ) mangoes by the visiting Foreign Minister of Pakistan, he passed them on to the Capital Worker and Peasant Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team. This was a big team with a big task. The Red Guards were at this point out of control, and violence between rival factions was the norm, famous Qinghua (Tsinghua) University in Beijing being the center of this violence. Mao sent 30,000

workers, his Thought Propaganda Team, into the university to bring conflict to an end -- at the ultimate cost of a significant number (accounts differ) of workers killed or seriously wounded, some even taken prisoner and beaten.

Alfreda ("Freda") Murck, a scholar of Chinese art, describes what happened next:

> Although he was committing his enormous personal authority to suppress the Red Guards and restore order to the Qinghua campus, even Mao may not have anticipated the excitement that the gift of mangoes would generate. The transformation of the mango from fruit to near-divine symbol was swift. As soon as the gift arrived on the Qinghua campus, workers were energized and deeply moved. The message accompanying the mangoes said that Mao was making the Worker Peasant Propaganda Teams the permanent managers of education. According to Hinton's [William Hinton, American Maoist] interviews, workers stayed up through the night looking at and touching the mangoes, discussing the implications of the new policy, and contemplating Mao's generous act. Some student Red Guards, the objects of the repression, also were caught up in the excitement, perhaps relieved that someone -- the Chairman himself -- had intervened to end the violence.

"Golden Mangoes—The Life Cycle of a Cultural Revolution Symbol', *Asian Art*, 57 (2007), 1–22.

At this point mangoes went viral. Distributed by Mao's bodyguard to various factories, they were placed on industrial altars and workers paid obeisance in filing past them. The *People's Daily* ran numerous articles to their glory. A class-struggle (yet another) was turned, featuring the gift of the mangoes, into something less violent. Suddenly you could buy just about anything decorated with a mango motif: enameled cups (always with lids, to keep the tea hot), trays, plates, cloth, medallions, quilt covers, cigarette packages (Mango Brand), washbasins -- you name it. Wax replica mangoes in glass cases were also popular.

Although time was short, planners of the huge October 1 National Day celebration in front of the Forbidden City managed to incorporate mangoes into the ceremony, in a big way. Murck again:

> In the parade, the message of the mango was communicated through colorful floats, slogans, and mass card flashing (Fig. 7). In the square opposite the Gate of Heavenly Peace, tens of thousands of participants held aloft colored cards to configure the ten-character slogan "The working class must lead in all things." In the parade, monumental sculptures of Mao with wishes for long life without limit were followed by large baskets of mangoes surrounded by marching groups carrying streamers and sunflowers (Fig. 8). The sunflowers around the basket of mangoes implied that the fruit stood for Mao himself, the precious health-giving mango evoking the leader. . . . One mango float was preceded by slogans celebrating Mao and followed by

> a slogan promoting the working class (Fig. 9). Huge characters carried by workers respectfully wished Chairman Mao long life. They were followed by large panels inscribed with lines from a popular song penned by Lin Biao: "Sailing on the high seas depends on the helms man; making revolution depends on Mao Zedong's thought." Between the two panels rose a colossal white statue of Mao posed with hands behind his back, a wind lifting the flaps of his thick coat. Behind the great helmsman came replicas of the four volumes of Selected Works of Mao Zedong, followed in turn by a dish of monumental mangoes. More workers carried large characters pledging the working class's loyalty to Chairman Mao.

The numerous scholarly (and other) articles about the mango incident do not lack for interpretation. We are reminded of the role that relics and other sacred objects play in Chinese culture. The factory altars, the filing past, the bowing are emphasized. The word “worship” is used. Buddhist *sariras* are mentioned. The golden color of the mango and the golden color of the emperor’s robes is compared. The political significance of the gift’s show of support for the workers against the now abhorred Red Guards is not slighted.

One interpretation fastens upon the notion of hosting, Mao as host:

> Hosting is at its core a moral and economic event production and a form of sociality. Hosting is a moral event production because a recognition and acknowledgement of social worth is communicated between, and co-produced by host and guest, and the hosting event always entails morally inflected judgements of all the details of the whole event (behaviour, utterances, gestures, levels of courtesy, politeness, and generosity).

I have a rather simpler take on this: the Chinese have a sense of humor. Even the grim Great Leap Forward and the angry Cultural Revolution could not wipe this out. To be sure, not every Chinese has this, and the locals who beat and killed a dentist in eastern Sichuan province because he remarked that the somewhat shriveled touring mango brought by a Propaganda Team looked like nothing more than a sweet potato, were seriously deficient not only in humor but in humanity. But one of the virtues of Murck’s article is that she includes numerous photographs from the period, nearly twenty in all. Most are of objects with the Mango motif, but three show people closely enough for us to see the expressions on their faces. The first is of about twenty people from the team sent in to quell the violence at Tsinghua (Qinghua) University standing around a table with a pile of mangoes, holding up a picture of Mao and their Little Red Books. These people are laughing, not just smiling. The second is of another worker group of about the same size, mainly women in white aprons and caps, laughing -- clearly laughing -- at a mango in a glass container of formaldehyde held up by a co-worker. They clearly think the whole thing is very funny. The third is of a man and a woman in full Mao gear peering at a mango in what looks like a small aquarium set on a table; both are holding Little Red Books in their right hands. The man is looking down on the

mango with a bemused expression of "What is this thing?" The woman has bent down slightly for a view through the side, and the wonderful, wry smile on her face says, "Pretty funny, isn't this?"

* * *

Upon boarding the Beijing-Kunming flight I was standing next to my aisle seat waiting for the persons who had the other two seats to arrive. The young woman who had the middle seat soon arrived. Not long after that a short older man arrived who had the window seat. He was wearing a beret. I was impressed not only by the beret, but also by his sport coat, which reminded me of the Virginia hunt country, his tie, the wide-wale corduroy trousers, and the polished black brogue dress shoes. Here was a most interesting man, but I did not know if he spoke English; it would have been awkward to find out during the flight with a young woman seated between us, so I did not try to find out. Waiting for our luggage, however, I learned he could speak English, and from that moment on I was not going to miss the chance to get to know him. He is an 86-year-old retired professor. His name is Bingheng.

I secured his email address and arranged to meet him a few days later at a restaurant run by another of my German friends, Fried, which is easy to locate because it is right in the center of Green Lake park. I invited my other retired professor friend (American) in Kunming to join us, and the three of us had a wonderful time together. Bingheng later emailed me that he wanted to return the favor by inviting us to dinner near his apartment at the Kunming University of Science and Technology (not the campus behind Yunda's north campus, but an even larger campus right in the center of downtown). I told him that that would be most appreciated, but that John was leaving Kunming for several weeks in Shanghai, where his wife brings her Chinese language students each summer. He would be back June 4th, however, and perhaps we could accept the invitation after that.

All this was agreed upon, and Bingheng invited us to dinner on the 8th. On the 8th, John emailed me: "My cold has come back with a vengeance and I'm really under the weather. Please beg off for me on Bingheng's invitation."

What to do? A few days earlier I had had dinner with Ying and Gordon. Ying is a 30ish young woman who had decided early on that she wanted to learn American English rather than British English. She is very proficient at it. She says things like "Tell me about it!" and "I was really pissed." Her parents taught English in Kunming, father high school, mother primary school. Gordon grew up on the west coast of Scotland, is interested in martial arts, and is a graduate student at London's famous School of Oriental and African Studies. I thought Ying and Gordon would be good substitutes for John and his wife, so I contacted them by WeChat. Ying could make it, but Gordon could not

His invitation said to meet him at 5 at the main gate to his university. There's a long driveway from the gate to the buildings, but as soon as he emerged at that distance from a doorway there, there was no question who this was -- because he was so well dressed, just as he had been on the plane when I first met him. On this occasion, he was wearing an off-white golfer's hat, a jacket of the same color, shoes of the same color, a tan dress shirt, a brown belt and off-white, pleated trousers.

He led us back through the extensive campus to his very nice apartment on the 10th floor. I gained the impression that he didn't mind at all the inclusion of Ying in the response to his invitation, especially as she had showed up in an especially short dress. His apartment has two levels and is decorated with works of art -- both Chinese traditional (including calligraphy) and Chinese modern (giant eggs in a nest of strips of metal) -- a handsome Grandfather Clock, even coasters with paintings by van Gogh.

The three of us chatted over tea until it was time to go to dinner. His English is slow, but fairly good. I showed him pictures of my family on the mobile phone I use here in China. He showed Ying and me pictures of his family on the large LCD screen which dominates the living room, though the pictures cycled every few seconds and he had difficulty pausing them. Bingheng was born in 1930, and so was 15 when WW2 ended and the war between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao resumed. I take it Bingheng was a young radical, because he supported Mao. Ying and I asked if he ever fought in a battle, ever fired a gun. No, no, he said, laughing. He was a political organizer for the CCP in rural Yunnan rather than a soldier.

He recalled for us how everyone felt that with CKS defeated, now China in the new decade of the 1950s could have real democracy. Everyone was equal, and western-style freedoms would move the country forward on a path similar to Europe and America. It didn't take long for people to realize that things wouldn't work out quite in that way, he said.

We ate dinner at the Xuanwei Ham restaurant near one of the side entrances to the university. In addition to thin slices of the famous ham, very salty and cold and delicious, we had a soup with tofu and bean sprouts and several stir-fried dishes: pork with vegetables, thinly-sliced potato rounds with hot peppers, and a delicious dark green vegetable. During the dinner we learned that it was liver cancer which had led to the death of Bingheng's wife in February, age only 72. He also told us much less tragic things, for instance that once when he was in Chicago, he wanted to bring back presents for his grandchildren. When they opened the boxes, they found everything had a label that said, "Made in China."

Bingheng's father, Qinglai, was a famous man. There's a Wikipedia article about him that, as of today, needs a lot of improvement, but some essential facts are there. In essence: mathematician from Yunnan (Mile City, actually, southeast of here); first person to introduce modern mathematics into China; served as influential president of Yunnan University, 1937-1947; studied in Europe for eight

years (1913 to 1921); in 1921 established the Department of Mathematics in what is now Nanjing University; wrote more than ten textbooks on geometry, calculus, differential equations, mechanics, etc.; in 1926 became professor of mathematics at Tsinghua University (the MIT of China); discovered legendary mathematician Hua Luogeng; was persecuted to death in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution.

My American friend for whom Ying was substituting is, as I've mentioned before, the author of *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution*, the definitive history of the university formed here in Kunming when professors from the major universities in Beijing and Nanjing fled the Japanese armies. In that book, he states that Qinglai smoothed over the cultural clash between the American/English PhDs from the North and the French PhDs of Yunda. This he was able to do because Qinglai himself had formerly served as director of Tsinghua University's Institute of Mathematics in Beijing. The other main reference to Qinglai in John's book is to a public meeting on July 7,1944 at Yunda which attracted 2000 people to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Marco Polo Incident in which Chinese troops had first resisted Japanese troops, leading to all-out warfare between the two nations. Local authorities were nervous about this meeting, and even sent troops "to preserve order," but Qinglai turned them away. At the meeting, however, when a sociologist spoke out that educated men should be concerned with politics Qinglai "sprang to his feet to object. Arguing by analogy from his own discipline of mathematics, [he] said that scholars should adhere to fixed rules, not become advocates of sudden erratic change." This provoked Wen Yiduo, most famous of all the scholars in Kunming at the time, to speak out, ultimately labeling intellectuals as "Gutless, timid, fawning." Wen was assassinated by the Kuomintang some months later, whereas Qinglai was (in effect) assassinated in 1969 by the Cultural Revolution.

Bingheng and his brother wrote a 400+ page biography of their father. As I remember, Bingheng said that when his father arrived in France to work on a PhD in mathematics in 1913 he was actually headed to Belgium, but by the time he was in fact ready to go, WW1 had broken out and the Germans had overrun Belgium. His father stayed in France and got his PhD at the University of Paris.

At one point many years later Bingheng followed in his father's footsteps and went to France and (I think) Belgium. I have the impression he was only there for a year or two. He came back and got a job teaching physics at the Railway Institute in the capital of Hunan province, Changsha (dear to us because we went there to adopt our daughter). He was there 26 years.

During the campaign to root out Capitalist Roaders, he was in jail once, for a month, until his family managed to get him out. His father, after all, had been president of Yunnan University, to say nothing about his being one of the leading figures in mathematics in all of China. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, he was confined for a longer period to a compound for quarantined intellectuals. A classroom building was converted into a dormitory for diseased persons like

himself. I think it was after Cultural Revolution that Bingheng went to France again, and when he returned from that he eventually managed to leave the Railway Institute and establish in Kunming a laboratory doing research in laser physics. I take it this was sometime in the mid-eighties. I think the lab was affiliated with Kunming University of Technology, which later merged with another university. I asked him where the money for the lab came: "The government -- they were very interested in acquiring expertise in lasers."

I wanted to go back to his experiences in Kunming before Mao, and this involved asking about Long Yun, the very interesting warlord of Yunnan province from 1927 on through the end of WW2, about whom I've written before. Bingheng himself does not remember ever seeing Long Yun, but his father was invited by the warlord to attend a film showing (this must have been in the mid-30s). Father brought Bingheng's older brother, and Long Yun picked the little boy up and put him on his lap to watch the film.

I have eaten several times at the Yenching Palace in Cleveland Park on upper Connecticut Ave in Washington, DC (now, alas, a Walgreens). When I asked Bingheng if he knew who had owned this restaurant, he thought for a moment and then said: "Long Yun's son."

Have I mentioned that it was an absolute delight to be with this man?

* * *

> Monkeys: If we wanted to go and try to see the Yunnan snub-nosed monkey, it involves a day-long bus trip up to a place called Tacheng, a small town between Lijiang, Zhongdian and Weixi. In Tacheng we would have to hire a jeep to take us up to the monkeys. . . .
>
> My suggested plan would be to go up to a nearby town called Judian first. While from Judian there is a direct road to Tacheng, there is also an old road through more or less pristine forest over a high pass to Weixi. I remember this road as pretty spectacular and it should be worthwhile seeing particularly now in autumn. Then from Weixi to Tacheng it is not very far any more.

So begins the trip to the Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey (aka Yunnan Golden Monkey), an endangered species. The message is from YunnanExplorer, and without his leadership the only way I would be able to shake hands with the snubs would be to join a tour group of some sort, if I could find one.

The trip began at 5:30 in the morning, preparing for meeting a car that would take us from a small village outside Dali Old Town to the bus station in Xiaguan (new Dali) for a 6:55 departure. The bus ride was long, about six hours, first north along modern expressways and into a new range of mountains, then across a

bridge over the Jinsha (Yangtze), then south right along the river to a place where we could catch a ferry to the outskirts of Judian.

Judian is a busy rural town with a main drag and a cross street that ends at "the market", open-air but roofed and consisting of tables where vegetables and cuts of pork are laid out by vendors. As for restaurants, one walks up the main drag and chooses one of the rooms wide open to the street that serve food, all of them pretty much the same. The rule is to stay at the newest hotel, and never to stay at one older than three years. The first one we saw after leaving the bus fit the bill, with large pleasantly equipped rooms (including wifi and cable TV) and private baths. $14 for the night. The following day YE was able to use his impressive command of local lingo to arrange for a car to take us over the old mountain road directly to Tacheng, rather than the longer, but faster route along the river. The first driver we approached declined to take us after phoning someone who said the road was too muddy. But Mr. Yuan agreed to take us. Mr. Yuan is of the Naxi ethnic minority and originally from Lijiang.

The road proved to be heavily rutted with one hairpin turn after another, but it was not muddy. Still, it was quite an experience. The views across the mountains were dramatic. At the summit we tipped into a rut which raised the passenger-side rear wheel in the air, and we were stuck. When Mr. Yuan got out to inspect, the wheel returned to the ground, but went back up as soon as he got back in the driver's seat. With one of us (me) standing on the rear bumper, the weight was sufficient to keep the wheel on the ground. We proceeded on down the other side, where the views over valleys to surrounding Colorado-like mountains were just as lovely as those on the other side. As we approached utilitarian Weixi, Yuan suggested that he knew a good place for chicken, beyond the city, along the road to Tacheng. This was not just any old chicken restaurant, he assured us, but one that served "earth chicken."

He knew the rustic side road to turn left on, and soon we had ordered. Wandering around the farm-like setting while the meal was being prepared, we found the dark one-room kitchen where pots were boiling over the open fire. We also found there a man sitting among a half dozen dead, plucked chickens on the floor; he was holding the head of one in an open fire. Apparently, this burns off wattles and flaps. Not long after that we were dining on a large bowl of thick soup of chicken, feet and head and all. I was given the head, which has about as much meat on it as the neck, maybe less; I declined the feet. Among the four cars already parked outside when we pulled up, there was a car from Kunming; earth chicken is apparently in the guidebooks.

Mr. Yuan told us that he has two daughters and that the older, age 25, will get married in February. (Ethnic minorities are allowed more than one child). He reminded us that his surname extends all the way back to Kublai Khan, who conquered China, including Yunnan, in the last half of the 13th Century and established the Yuan dynasty. Mr. Yuan was an excellent driver and a good

companion, so we asked whether he would be willing to stay in Tacheng that evening, drive us to the monkeys the next day (no jeep needed we had discovered), and then drive us back to Judian. He agreed; he had relatives in Tacheng he could stay with. It took us about 5 1/2 hours, not counting the earth chicken lunch, to reach Tacheng.

Tacheng is of similar size to Judian, but is somewhat less prosperous, with older hotels. It caters (a bit) to monkey visitors and is very near the entrance to Baima Mountain National Nature Reserve (over 180,000 hectares, created 1983). Mr. Yuan picked us up early in the morning. He had been to Baima before and had seen the monkeys, so he knew where to go. We found, however, that although we could drive into the reserve early it does not officially open until 8:30. We also found that when you pay the fee they take you in an electric vehicle to a point where you can hike up with a guide to where the monkeys are. The cooperative troop there is fed lichen and peanuts daily and a hard-boiled egg once a week, so they can be counted on to appear at an appointed place on schedule. Estimates are that the total population in the reserve is now perhaps 1,700 individuals. This is perhaps twice the number of ten or fifteen years ago, but although this may seem like a large number, in fact finding any monkey not bribed with food in the vastness of the mountains here would be nearly impossible.

We were shown, in the impressive reserve headquarters, a good film about the monkeys after we paid the entrance and parking fees. Little Spot is a young, white-haired snub born prematurely as the winter snows are ending rather than in warmer weather. He has difficulty clinging to the underside of his mother when she moves about. (Females give birth about once every third year). The snubs are organized into families, each dominated by a single male and containing perhaps a half-dozen females and young. The dominant male is about twice the size of a mature female. There is also a bachelor group, and the bachelors who have matured at age six or seven look for any sign of weakness in the dominant males. Vicious fights can occur, and in this film an aging male is displaced. At this point Little Spot is in danger because the new dominants often kill offspring of their predecessors. The snubs eat a variety of foods, depending on the season, but a mainstay is songluo, a particularly long-hair lichen which looks as if it came from a plantation in humid Louisiana. The snubs nap for about two hours each afternoon.

A young woman accompanied the three of us in the electric vehicle and walked with us on the trail up the mountain. She had only started this a month or so ago and was not a zoologist, but she did tell us that the snubs do not like rain because, lacking a protruding nose, the water seeps into their nostrils too readily. On the way up, we glimpsed a large male heading off into the bushes and three younger snubs climbing about in trees. The feeding spot was just a roped-off area on a hillside forest. Somewhat surprisingly, there was no evidence of feeding. The snubs seemed unconcerned by our presence, some climbing around in the branches, some probing the ground, some sitting in trees eating lichen. Many photos were taken.

There are many remarkable things about the snubs, one being that they live at a higher altitude than any other (nonhuman) primate species, from about 3000 to 4700 m (10,000 to 15,000 ft). Their appearance is striking, not only the lack of protrusion, but the prominent pink lips in a white face, not unlike heavily made-up prostitutes -- only rouge is lacking. Apparently, the fact that they move through the forest in large packs is unusual for such primates, probably a result of the lichen being so abundant that competition for food is minimal and is replaced by the need to move on once the local supply is consumed. About half the world's total population of snubs resides in Baima, but there are more than a dozen other populations in NW Yunnan, some in adjacent Tibet. Hunting the monkeys was banned in 1975 and cutting old-growth forest was banned in 1998.

After the monkeys, we wanted to see a nearby mountain-top monastery, the ascent to which on a brand new concrete road had as many hairpin-turns as our entire trip of the previous day, though the distance was much shorter. The monastery was under construction, but we took a long, paved walkway through the forest around it and around the mountain top. The entire way was festooned with prayer flags hung in the branches, thousands and thousands of prayer flags. Two-thirds of the way around we came upon a very tall monastic complex, newly built up right against a dramatic cliff face, the rooms of which contained various newly constructed Buddhist deities. The whole complex is known as the Dharma Monastery, and although in Yunnan province it was very much in the style of nearby Xizang province (Tibet).

The road back to Judian was, contrary to an impression I had erroneously gained, not an expressway, but a two-lane, poorly-maintained road right along the Jinsha (Yangtze) river, mountains rising dramatically on both sides. The same hotel, then another six-hour bus the next day back to Dali Old Town.

* * *

Those who have traveled here this far may remember that very early in this journey I was startled to learn that a figure so quintessentially English, so focused on England and the English language, as the literary critic William Empson (1906-84) had for several years resided in Kunming. This was during the war when he taught at Lianda. Thus began for me a process of discovery which yielded many other surprises.

My final comment on Empson back then was to note that a manuscript he'd finished in 1947, *The Face of the Buddha*, had been lost because he'd given it to a friend who left it in a taxi. Turns out that more than half a century later it has been found and published. Apparently, the friend thought he'd left in the taxi but

in fact he'd given it to an agent whose papers ended up in the British Museum wherein it was discovered.

A short review of the book (by Michael Wood) in the very journal which started me out in discovering hidden aspects of Empson, *The London Review of Books*, says:

> For Empson the two chief Western assumptions about Buddhist sculpture – 'the faces have no expression at all … or else they all sneer' – are about as far from the truth as they could be. 'The drooping eyelids of the great creatures are heavy with patience and suffering,' he writes, 'and the subtle irony which offends us in their raised eyebrows … is in effect an appeal to us to feel, as they do, that it is odd that we let our desires subject us to so much torment in the world.'

The main thesis which Empson advances on the basis of his inspection of Buddhas in perhaps a dozen countries is that in many, primarily in the Far East, the face is asymmetrical. "The asymmetrical face demands a certain humanising of the god, an attempt to get under his skin," he says. What does this mean? It means there is a duality: the Buddha's face "is at once blind and all-seeing … so at once sufficient to itself and of universal charity."

Yunnan has Buddhas, though other gods predominate in most of the village temples I have visited. From now on when I encounter one I will be looking for that sufficiency and that charity.

* * *

I think I will head around the lake again. I hear that the place where the guys with the sky-high kites used to be is now occupied by guys with whips. The leather lashes extend from the end of a long stick. These are used to strike a top that looks somewhat like a metal Thermos with a point on the bottom. The lashing spins this thing so fast that it hums or whistles as it spins around. I think also it is now time, at last, to find out how to get a pair of those yin yang balls and learn how to manipulate them properly. On my next walk around Green Lake, perhaps I can even show off my new-found skill, while at the same time looking at the water's surface for still more reflections.