

Our Trip to China - June 1983

Introduction

Early in 1982, my eye caught a small advertisement in the *Jerusalem Post*, announcing organized group tours to China from London. The idea quickly fired the imagination of my husband and me, but we couldn't carry through our plans that summer.

Later in the year, we heard that the same agents were organizing a tour out of Israel for the summer of 1983, and we quickly signed on. This group came to be known as the Museum Group, since the initiative had come from Rivka Bitterman, Curator for Far Eastern Art at the Israel Museum. In fact, less than half of the 26 people were connected with the museum, being volunteers and docents, and the others came in answer to publicity. The only prerequisite was a foreign passport, since there were no diplomatic relations between Israel and China at that time.

The company included three doctors — an eye surgeon, an orthopedic surgeon and a GP — a fact which made us feel better about possible health problems. The tour leaders from London were Laura and Cecil Kline.

The character of our group naturally influenced our choice of itinerary — it was to be an Art and Archaeology tour. In the three weeks we covered a great deal of territory, and while the emphasis was on museums and excavations we of course saw the major places of interest in the towns we visited.

In the months before our trip, we met several times for background lectures on Chinese culture and history. Many of our group were very knowledgeable, having studied the subject at university level, or being travelers and art collectors. There was also much anxiety and trepidation about the unknown aspects of our great adventure, arising from the terrible stories we had heard about standards of hygiene and accommodation. There were moments when we almost gave up the idea, but thank goodness we didn't, because most of our fears were not substantiated.

Since we were a Jewish group from Jerusalem, we asked for a visit to Kai-Feng. A Chinese Jewish community had flourished in this town for well over 1,000 years, unbeknown to the outside world until the 17th century. The original settlers, traders from Persia, maintained their customs and religion, but gradual assimilation into Chinese life eventually took its toll, and by the nineteenth century the community had virtually ceased to exist. Our enquiries assured us that nothing Jewish remained now, not even the memorial stela, which stood in the grounds of the synagogue, so we cancelled that visit, although Kai-Feng was quite close to Zhen Zhou, one of our major stops. The story of the Russian Jews, who settled in Manchuria at the beginning of the twentieth century, is a separate short chapter, lasting only 40 to 50 years.

We saw a great deal during our visit, but China is so vast, there is still so much to see, that we would happily return for further exploration.

Monday, May 30, 1983

Here I am, spending my 50-something birthday in Hong Kong, on our way to our adventurous first trip to China. We arrived here exactly 24 hours after leaving home on

Sunday 29 at 3:15 a.m., feeling somewhat worse for wear. The trip with Lufthansa was actually 21 hours flying time, as we had to fly from Tel Aviv to Munich and Frankfurt, and then back over the Middle East via Karachi, so it became rather tedious. Really felt like kissing the earth when we got out of the plane, but bad luck for Pauline Lockman — her suitcase and Mrs. Slopak's didn't arrive! So much for German efficiency!

We walked out a little in the afternoon and were happy that we recognized some landmarks from our last trip about six years ago. Had quite forgotten how crowded and noisy and “markety” this town is. In the evening we had a birthday dinner, together with our friend Zipora Kessel, at the Jade Garden Restaurant, which was most enjoyable after the endless air flight meals. Sylvia and Harry Feller, fellow travelers from Jerusalem who I only knew by sight, were also dining there. We ate fresh lychee nuts to celebrate.

I must have a good night's sleep. It is now 10:30 a.m. and tomorrow we are off by train to Canton, or rather Guangzhou, and Red China. I have decided to keep a diary of this trip, because I think it's going to be something quite different. In any case, we are all excited, and facing the fact that our planning is now becoming a reality, we are actually on our way.

Tuesday, May 31

First night in Canton (Guangzhou), yet it seems we've been here longer than a few hours. We left our Hong Kong hotel, The Holiday Inn, just before noon for the Kowloon Station, passing very imposing modern structures.

Several hundred others, mostly Chinese, were heading in the same direction, and the queues were very long. Those coming from the People's Republic to Hong Kong were easily

recognized by the packages and electric appliances they were carrying: ventilators, radios, tape recorders and more. Rivka claimed she could recognize them by their lean and hungry look!

Soon our leaders shepherded us quite quickly through passport control and down to our train. There must have been 10–12 coaches and first thing we noticed were the lace curtains at the windows! The restaurant car looked very inviting with white tablecloths, miniature bonsai trees in pots on each table, and waitresses in white cotton jackets, dark trousers and caps. In fact, all the railway attendants wore white shirts, with a red star over the pockets and on their berets.

The train proved to be very comfortable with two armchair-style seats on each side of the aisle and plenty of leg room. They were covered with white slipcovers and lace antimacassars, and were fixed on swivels so that they could be turned in all directions, but everyone chose to sit facing the same direction.

The train rode very smoothly and soon we were passing through the Territories with its enormous housing blocks, well decorated with laundry, and land reclamation projects. The color TV over the door kept us entertained with music, advertisements and much talk on unidentified subjects.

We had looked forward with great expectation to the actual crossing of the border, yet we hardly noticed when we did so. There was a rather long stop, but no customs or passport inspection, just a large sign, if you caught it, announcing the People's Republic of China, and a red flag. The sun was shining, though the sky was rather cloudy, and the countryside was

very, very green and well cultivated, mostly with rice and vegetables. Here and there were some brickyards, producing mostly red or gray-brown bricks, and other unidentified factories. In the distance there were rounded hills. Alongside the railway tracks were dirt paths for pedestrians and cyclists and we saw many water reservoirs, all a muddy yellow color, as was the Pearl River when we later crossed it. In three hours we saw only two mechanized farm vehicles, and some bicycles.

There were many ugly buffalo wandering along, plenty of ducks, and surprisingly few people. The villages we passed were dilapidated and haphazard, of red brick, and usually built in a compound surrounded by a wall, or in rows of six to eight tiny rooms. I had the immediate impression of poverty and neglect.

This impression was strongly reinforced in Canton, where even the handsomest buildings were unpainted, dirty and neglected. The older sections were even worse; tiny shops and dwelling places, laundry hanging out everywhere, but on the other hand, every balcony was covered with greenery. There were hordes of cycles on the roads. Our hotel has 16 stories, but is shabby and simple; although built in 1979 it is still unfinished. We have private bathrooms with very hot water, air conditioning and color TV.

The Canton restaurant, where we went for dinner, seemed capable of serving several hundred dinners at once, at various price levels. We were met by an explosive burst of firecrackers; it seems they were not in our honor, but for a bridal party, which we unfortunately couldn't see. Our vegetarian diet was a bit disappointing, especially after Hong Kong, but everything was tasty. Each dish was served separately, and there were at least three variations of mushrooms. Most interesting were fried hard-boiled eggs in sweet and sour sauce, and fresh pineapple.

Not even the tea was served in traditional dishes, but I did manage the whole meal with chopsticks, to my own surprise. There seems to be a shortage of vegetables, since mushrooms, young broccoli and bamboo shoots were all we had.

After dinner we visited the Culture Park, but there were not more than a couple of hundred people watching the entertainment groups and folk dancing. We saw an “aquarium” with dead fish in formaldehyde; a photography exhibition, with romantic portraits and nature; and travel shots, which were quite good but quite conventional. There were also amusement mirrors, a movie, and book stalls with an impressive array of children’s books, very attractively illustrated. The event was in honor of Children’s Day but there were not many children. It was a rather dreary evening.

Back at the hotel, we found two channels on TV, one showing a traditional Chinese opera in colorful costumes, and the other an art show about jade carving and pottery.

Wednesday, June 1

A long day, starting with breakfast at seven and leaving at eight for Foshan, a town about an hour away, where we visited the Shiwan Pottery Factory, and I finally bought a Tang horse! Then the Taoist temple set in fine gardens but mainly an historical sight now. There was an interesting museum as well, but all the archaeological explanations were in Chinese. We also saw paper cut-out and lantern-making workshops.

On the way back we had a good lunch. Almost half of the group is eating vegetarian, for a variety of reasons, and although this is supposed to be a great gastronomic town, they have little imagination in this respect. We finished up visiting the imposing Sun Yat Sen

Memorial. This is a large building with a pagoda-style roof, which contains a hall capable of seating 5,000 people. No supports are visible inside the hall. The memorial is set in a large park, and a statue of Dr. Sun Yat Sen stands in front. It was an inviting spot for photographs.

A long day, literally crammed with new and disturbing impressions and questionings. In the morning the roads were already crowded with bicycle riders, going to work or school. No private cars, and the trucks and pickups we saw all belong to government factories or co-operatives. Nevertheless, the traffic was heavy, especially into town. Cyclists also use bikes for business and portering. We saw many ingenious varieties of baskets for transporting vegetables, pigs and birds, and only one motorcycle during the whole day, carrying two adults with a child sandwiched between them. The speed limit is 30km/h!

There was terrible humidity, which got worse during the day. Again we were appalled by the tenements and seemingly terrible poverty, though we drove through a finer part of town and saw some new buildings, including a special hotel for overseas Chinese, and the World Trade Fair Center. In fact, one can see that Canton was once a handsome town with well laid out, wide avenues, plenty of trees, large parks and old handsome buildings; this was especially noted on Shamian Island, which used to be the international concession of the foreign powers during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Everything is so run-down and dilapidated, the pavements broken and glimpses into the little side alleys showed appalling conditions. Shocking to see young women working on the roads and in construction, yet they are probably happy to have the work, since we were told there is much unemployment. On the other hand, most building sites seem deserted, and there were few people in the bright green rice fields. Lots of people were just sitting about or squatting.

For one moment I had the feeling that I was in Egypt again, which we visited two years earlier, but a greener, more fertile version. The dirt roads, the noise and constant horn-blowing, the crowds were strangely familiar. Yet interestingly, I noted in the raggedy crowds many young people and children who were very well dressed — the women in pretty dresses, stockings and shoes, girls and boys in school uniforms, little ones in bright dresses and gay hair ribbons.

Several groups of children were out celebrating Children's Day. And always the men's white shirts, very white, and the large white sunhat worn by men and women alike. Grannies were much in evidence, usually wearing the old style Mao clothes, and they seem to be kept busy caring for the little ones, even though since 1980 only one child is allowed per family. There is much carrying of young and even older babies, because there seem to be no baby carriages.

It was sad to see people on the pavement trying to sell a few wares, plastic dishes, a handful of greens or glasses of cold tea. Roadside cafés and kiosks are springing up in response to the government's permission to start private business as a means to overcoming unemployment. The kiosks didn't look too inviting to us, but were well patronized. We also saw many street markets.

At the factories we visited, people sat and ate at their place of work, and people walked about the street with their rice bowls in hand.

I couldn't help but wondering what tales some of the older people could tell of the violent events they have witnessed or experienced during their lifetime, especially in recent years.

Yet again, perhaps they are better off today than in days when “dogs and Chinese” were not allowed to enter into the international zones, or during the feudal times. “Everything is for the ordinary people today,” the guide told us, “the grand old houses and the tennis courts are all for the ordinary people.”

He also told us that the cost of a bike was equal to three months salary, about \$90. He himself had recently married and was allotted living quarters of 32 square meters by his work unit. This contains three rooms, and the rent is negligible. He also explained how each town is divided into seven districts, and each one has a different day off. There is no official day of rest.

We would be very curious to hear what they think about their living conditions.

Tonight, TV showed *Heidi of the Alps* with Chinese subtitles, children’s fashions, sports, youth bands and other activities in honor of Children’s Day. Afterwards, an American medical film demonstrating a cataract operation followed.

Thursday, June 2

We traveled by train to Changsha, a trip which took some 15 hours! We had sleepers, four to a cabin, but it was not as comfortable as the express from Hong Kong and certainly not air-conditioned; but there were electric fans, and we got accustomed to the thermos of hot water, the covered teacups, and Chinese tea (leaves, not bags). Towards 6 p.m. it got cooler, but when we got in at three, it was like a steam bath. The temperature was 35° C.

The countryside is very green and well-cultivated, becoming hillier, and quite mountainous in the background. The villages look quite prosperous, but we saw people coming to the wells with large buckets on shoulder poles to take water.

We were near the restaurant car, so there was much traffic in the corridor! In addition to our own group, there were lots of Chinese with their food bowls going back and forth. We crossed a large body of water but I didn't know if it is a lake or a river.

In the morning we had visited a boarding kindergarten in the suburbs of Canton. There are about 100 such places in Canton and about 6,000 regular kindergartens. These were obviously "special" kids, well-dressed, well-fed, and they treated us to a lovely concert, with singing and dancing. "Jingle Bells" was part of the repertoire. They had a variety of flower and animal costumes.

Other classes were doing exercises, and still another group was swimming and splashing in the pool. There was plenty of equipment and space to play. There were about 160 children, and they sleep over from Monday to Saturday in the upstairs dormitory full of little beds. The cost is 10 yuan (\$5) for half a year, plus 20 yuan for food. We wondered how many other children had five meals a day! These are mostly children of cadres (top officials), whose parents work or are out of town, children of academics and also some neighborhood children. We saw the two white children of American families serving here. This is obviously a "show-piece," but they say it has existed since 1956, and the present headmistress has been here 18 years.

Then we drove up the mountain to the Canton Museum, an interesting old building, but it was closed. We drove on to Orchid Park, which was beautiful. The orchids were not in bloom but we were served cups of tea. We had a good lunch at the Bai Yun Restaurant, which had beautiful blue and white patterned glass screens and windows, and then it was back to the train.

Friday, June 3

What a pleasure to arrive in Changsha in Hunan Province. The light at the end of the long tunnel of night travel. Canton looked like Dante's Inferno in comparison. First of all, it is less humid and we were not perspiring all the time. The town was smaller and much cleaner, and although the living conditions are still crowded, there are no tenements. It is an educational center rather than an industrial town, and it was here that Mao Zedong (Tse-tung) studied and began his political activities.

Blooming magnolia trees lined the wide avenues. After the hot and crowded night on the train, a ride that took 16 hours and could have taken only eight by express, it was a pleasure to arrive at the state-owned Ruon Yuang Guest House, which is set in a beautiful estate. An ornamental lake containing carp and decorated with large pottery animals, fronted the main entrance. We entered a beautiful hall with an inside pool, rockery and a circular staircase, which led to comfortable rooms with en suite bathrooms. There were the usual thermos of hot water and covered teacups. We were privileged to be here since it is used mainly for VIP government guests, and we are absolutely delighted. Our anxieties about the accommodations had been alleviated.

Friday morning, June 3

We visited the hospital, founded as a pilot project by Yale University and said to be the best in the area. There was a special emphasis on acupuncture and some of the group even tried the treatment. It's primarily a teaching hospital, but as the doctors themselves admitted, still primitive and backward. The doctors traveling in our group were quite astonished at the conditions: 800 beds, and they treat 2,500 outpatients daily. The three-story building had no elevators. There were many women doctors, all of whom wore white caps and coats.

Our guide told us that there is a need for a change with regard to salaries. Young doctors earn about 50 yuan (\$25) a month, while senior physicians and professors can earn from 150–300. The young doctors are going to get a raise but all has yet to be done slowly and carefully, so as not to upset the wage scale. In view of the doctors' strike when we left home, these remarks were very apropos and provoked some laughter, much to the guide's puzzlement.

We then visited an embroidery factory, where all the girls were doing traditional work and following traditional patterns. I wondered if there's any modern art and how it looks. People crowded around us at the bus stop, as they did at the hospital, and eyed us curiously. They looked a rather different type from Cantonese, more provincial, slightly Mongolian. It was difficult for us to gauge what they were thinking, but they were friendly. Apparently, they didn't get many tourists here. We were also stopped by students who wanted to practice English.

Our new guide, Mr. Wan, was much better than the previous one. He was a licensed guide, pleasant, informative and knew how to manage a crowd, although he was still quite young and couldn't have had that much experience. His black hair stood straight up, a style I have noticed on many men. I couldn't clarify if it's an ethnic feature, or simply a matter of cut.

In the afternoon we visited the museum at Mawangdui, which houses artifacts and a female corpse from the Han Dynasty tombs dating back some two thousand years. The method of burial was similar to that which we had seen in Egypt, three coffins inside each other and the tomb dug into the mountainside. This was well reproduced in the annex nearby. It was amazing how well the body of the woman, still wearing her black wig, was preserved. The colors of the silk paintings and the lacquerware, the musical instruments, the variety of dishes, etc, were fascinating. Old silk books in scripts, which can be read today, were also part of the exhibit. It was really an extraordinary sensation to see the woman, and also her innards, on display! This also reminded us of the Cairo Museum. Pity they have no English explanatory material. The guide was a young woman, with a most pleasant, melodious voice, but she couldn't speak English and Mr. Wan translated.

Unexpected shopping in the museum shop which had some good reproductions of the exhibits, and also scroll paintings. There was also an official antique shop on the grounds, but I couldn't decide on anything, neither jade, porcelain or opium pipe, because of the pressure of time.

Friday evening, June 3

Since we had a semi-private dining room, we were able to have Kiddush with wine and *matzot* provided by observant members of the group, and after dinner we sang *zemirot* — perhaps the first time such observances were conducted in this city? We couldn't help feeling it was an occasion.

Later in our visit, we saw that the dining room next to ours was beautifully furnished in the Chinese style with dark bamboo furniture and lanterns. It must be for Chinese guests only.

There were many large houses on the estate, but most were empty. The guest house had been recently built and was really delightful; we could happily have spent more time here!

Saturday, June 4

Part of the group went to the porcelain factory and free market, and the Shabbat observers went for a walk. I joined them, thinking that a short walk would be very pleasant, but in fact we walked more than an hour and a half, and reached the Martyrs' Memorial, a museum of revolutionary history. This building, also set in a beautiful park, seemed to be similar in nature to Yad Vashem, our memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. The various rooms contained documents and photos of important people and high officers who had been involved in revolutionary activities, while many books contained the names of those who had been killed in the various uprisings. Large paper floral wreaths stood in the main hall.

During the walk we passed a school and saw kids doing their PT (physical training). There was one very white albino boy in the distance. The children and teachers were as intrigued by us as we by them, and it was impossible not to take pictures of them. One family insisted that their little boy shake hands. Others stared and gawked and all were happy to be photographed.

We were intrigued by the babies and little children wearing split pants, so that their little bottoms are exposed. Efficiency model! And economical! They can sit down anywhere and do their business with minimum fuss, and also save on laundry.

In the afternoon we made an official visit to a primary school. Not everyone in the group was enthusiastic about spending three hours at a school, but it was really interesting and enjoyable. We had our usual “briefing” from the principal (they love that word) then walked around classrooms and saw extracurricular activities. Paper cutting, clay modeling, games, and drawing, which was mostly copying from a book, but there were also two gifted boys in the class practicing calligraphy with brush and ink. But again I felt that there was no creativity or self-expression; everything was copying and repetition. Also a group of gymnasts gave us a little performance. Five girls and five boys about seven to nine years old, in leotards, performed on the beam and horse. They were very good and obviously being nurtured for higher things.

There were only about 500 children in the school, and 49 teachers. Perhaps, it was a special school, since so many wore red scarves and were members of the Young Pioneers, which is a political youth movement open to all. The atmosphere was pleasant and all the children were well dressed. When the bell rang for recess, they rushed out into the yard, and quickly got organized into play groups, and made quite a noise. Many played ping-pong, or enjoyed singing and dancing games, or skipped rope. The boys and girls played happily together.

In the older school we were given a special reception, which was a bit embarrassing. The children were assembled in the yard and when we appeared, they divided into two groups and clapped rhythmically as we walked through to the entrance of the building. We were received in the visitors’ room and a girl and a boy pupil served tea, very courteously and very pleasantly. They were about eleven or twelve years old. This was followed by a short performance of song and dance, including “Hello everybody, how are you?” and “Do re mi”

from *The Sound of Music*. The children were very poised and pretty and performed like real little troupers, to a groaning old gramophone, in a space of about two by three meters — a real delight and unexpected aspect of Chinese life and education.

Walking through the streets later, we caught glimpses into “houses” of the old style. How can people live like that and retain their poise and good humor? Often the door opens directly into the bedroom, where the bed is the main piece of furniture, together with some small wooden chairs. Perhaps there is another room beyond. Everything looks dirty and grimy. We saw a little old lady with tiny feet, walking along with great difficulty; others were sitting in the street reading or just looking at us. At one tiny place, a dressmaker was sewing for a waiting client, and she also had a second machine in the corner.

It was rather touching to see little library nooks in the streets, where people borrowed books, mostly paperbacks, and sat and read, oblivious to what was going on around them. This scene repeated itself quite often during our trip.

We stopped at the market stalls to look for a skirt for Pauline, whose suitcase had not yet arrived. What a commotion. Everyone crowded around and when Dita took out a 50 yuan note, what an exclamation! It was probably a month’s earnings for most of them. But the skirt was not in good condition and we didn’t buy it. Poor stall owner! She must have been disappointed, but we found something at our next stop and got a plastic bag into the bargain. White shirts seem to be the most popular attire for men.

The hat-maker also had good day, because we all decided to buy the Mao cap with the red star. I bet he prays for tourists every day. In that little shop we met a deaf-mute who

introduced himself with notes written in English. Nearby was a funeral parlor where a wake was being prepared, mostly by letting off strings of firecrackers. There were large paper wreaths similar to those we had seen at the Martyrs' Memorial. Three hours later, when we left the opera, a large crowd was still there and the guide told us they were probably well-off people who could provide much food. "Such ceremonies used to be held at home but that is no longer possible due to shortage of space. Cremation is now the order of the day and often Buddhist priests are called into say the prayers. The government doesn't like these old customs," said the guide, lowering his voice, and adding, "but can't do anything about it."

We were a little late arriving at the opera and created quite a sensation as the word went around and everyone craned and strained to see us. The theater was full, and the audience consisted of young and old, not especially dressed for the occasion. I was surprised how the actors were able to maintain their equilibrium during the unexpected hubbub. The costumes were very colorful, but after an hour of traditional music and slow action, most of us felt we had had enough.

Sunday, June 5

We had a short morning visit to the Lovely Dusk Pavilion near the Lushan Temple in the mountainous forest area. At 9:15 a.m. there were already hundreds of families on outings, but after having seen the living conditions we could easily understand this. We rushed madly up the stone steps to the top to see at least the outside of the pavilion, and managed to get back to the bus on time. The guide quoted a lovely poem, written by the eminent poet Du Fu, who lived in the eighth century during the Tang dynasty, and in whose memory this and many other pavilions were later erected.

A Tour to a Hill

A stony path winds up to cool mountains
Towards cottages hid deeply among white clouds;
Loving maple woods at dusk.
I stop my cart to sit and watch the frosty leaves
Rather than February flowers.

Mr. Wan talked quite a lot about Comrade Mao, because of his connection with the town, and when someone ventured to ask him about the Cultural Revolution, he replied, “We are not quite clear about what happened. Perhaps we should let the next generation talk about it. We do not know that criticism was overdone, and that the intellectuals suffered the most.” The other targets of attack were mainly the landlords and landowners.

The morning traffic was interesting and we saw that many men still work as beasts of burden, pulling very heavy loads with the help of a yoke on their backs. Even a girl could be seen occasionally at this work.

We went on to Orange Island, so-called because of the orange groves situated there, and saw “perfume carts” for the first time. This is the euphemistic name for containers of “night soil,” the human excrement that is collected for use as fertilizer. Nothing is wasted in China.

We were sorry to take leave of our guides in Changsha. Mr. Wan was a delightful young man, very bright and personable. Miss Zhou was also very capable and anxious to please, and keen to practice her English. There was a long train journey ahead. We had a couchette for

four and it was clean and comfortable, with the inevitable covered tea cups and thermos of hot water.

Now we were on the train to Zhen Zhou. Another 12-hour trip, but we're really getting to see the countryside. It's all very green, very lush rice fields, some of which were already being planted for the second harvest. We passed many villages (or communes?) which looked well ordered and slightly more roomy, but still with dirt paths. Not many people were seen in fields. Many thatched roofs, and red-brick buildings were most prevalent. There was quite a lot of building going on.

One doesn't get as strong an impression of the aesthetic in China as in Japan, yet even in the poorest tenements, there are plants in the windows and balconies and often a platform arrangement extends out of a window to hold plants, as well as the laundry hung on hangers. At factories we visited, we also saw the use of ornamental lakes and attractive arrangements of flowering pot plants, to beautify surroundings. We have often been surprised upon entering an unprepossessing building to find attractive restaurants inside, with inner courtyards, gardens, pools, lovely glass windows and bamboo screens. The blue and white color scheme is popular for dishes and decoration.

It was really hard to understand how they produce such quiet, well-mannered children under such difficult living conditions. Most people looked clean and tidy, even smart, in their spotless white shirts. Only the older people seemed to cling to the bygone drab blue clothes, while the younger folk and the children have burst out into color. Mr. Wan told us that people are much happier today.

We have had some interesting conversations with our national guide, Mr. Wang, during the long train rides. He spent eight and a half years in exile away in the mountains, because he was a teacher, an academic. He worked at physical labor for four years, until the commune discovered that he was a teacher, and then they allowed him to take charge of educating children for the remainder of the time.

Another chat with Mr. Wang was about minorities. He talked so much about the equality of the minority groups, which constitute about four percent of the population, that I asked him what he felt about intermarriage. Would he mind if his son married a girl from a minority group? Mr. Wang thought it would not be a good idea, not because he was in any way religious, but because of the differences in customs and appearances. "If he marries a Muslim girl and has to go to the mosque on Friday, he will feel uncomfortable. And if he marries a Cossack with yellow hair and a big nose like you, she will feel uncomfortable amongst us!" We had a good laugh, because my nose is really not especially large, but it was more an objectionable feature than my blue eyes! We have realized that although Mr. Wang has heard of the kibbutz, he doesn't know just what and where Israel is.

I think I am most bothered by the way people walk about with their rice bowls in hand. In hotels and in the streets, people carry their bowls with them to their take-away stores or their work-place kitchens, and then often eat while walking or sitting in the street, or at their work-benches. Food seemed to be cheap, though not plentiful, but no one looks hungry. Does a family ever sit down to eat together? Perhaps we were really seeing a very limited aspect of life without having a chance to see more of the middle class. One saw people going home with a bunch of spring onions or greens, or a cabbage or a handful of cucumbers. One woman was carrying a few slices of ham on top of her cabbage, all unwrapped.

After a long but quite pleasant train journey, we arrived at Zhen Zhou after midnight and were taken to the Henan Guest House, which was in fact a 12-storey hotel built in 1979. It was very comfortable, with plenty of towels, toilet paper, and as always, very hot water. We have found slippers in all hotel rooms, and the inevitable hot water thermos. These were seen everywhere, not only in hotels, so no wonder the Chinese product is the best! The summer blankets in this hotel were of toweling with attractive floral designs and colors. Looking out of the 12th-floor window at 7 a.m., we saw mostly green tree tops, and parks. The early morning gymnasts and joggers were just dispersing.

Monday evening, June 6

We covered a lot of territory today with our local guide, Mr. Mao. In the morning we visited the White Village Brigade (Bai Dong), about a half-hour ride from Zhen Zhou. It was a lovely ride along a tree-lined road, with wheat harvesting going on on both sides of the way. Everything was done by hand. The country was quite flat, and we saw lots of lotus ponds. Apparently, the lotus root is a popular dish. We have already eaten the seeds, which look rather like round gooseberries but have no special flavor. For the first time we saw two horse-drawn drays with four horses each for transporting the wheat, and during the whole morning we saw only two tractors and threshers.

We arrived at the commune, which consisted of a large red-brick compound containing new and old buildings, and we were led to the usual reception room. This time we sat at one long table covered with plastic table cloths and jade-green mugs. Paintings and various banners hung on the walls, including one for the Australian-Chinese Friendship League.

The leader of the women workers spoke to us and explained the history and workings of the commune. She was 28 years old and has worked at this job about nine years; although she seemed to be very bright, she spoke no English. Afterwards we toured the commune. It was certainly rich and prosperous, with pigs, cows, apple orchards, night-soil processing, and a soya bean-curd (tofu) factory. It was interesting to discover at last that this pasta-like product, which is served to us quite often, is made by skimming off huge vats of heated bean-milk liquid and hanging the curd up to dry. This year the wheat harvest was so bountiful they had to call in soldiers to help out. It was all most impressive.

The People's Commune, we were told, is not only a production organization but also an economic and cultural framework. The first one was founded in 1956 and followed earlier cooperative and mutual aid schemes. The first commune was set up in Henan Province, which is the one we were now visiting, and then other provinces followed suit. Each county has 12 to 15 communes, consisting of two to three villages, with about 50,000 members. These are divided into ten Production Brigades, which are subdivided into Production Teams. They work collectively in the fields, but there is no communal living as on the kibbutz. The members get their grain, vegetables, money, and fireworks from the commune, and they have private bank accounts and use their money as they see fit.

Bai Dong used to be a poor village, due to the many sand dunes, its unproductive land and recurrent flooding by the Yellow River. The major effort in the early years was to level the dunes and cover them with one million cubic meters of mud. "Thus under good party leadership, Bai Dong has become an extremely prosperous commune," said the guide. The average workday is eight hours, less in winter, more in summer.

The present philosophy is to reward for observing regulations and exceeding quotas. This gets good results, we were told. However, there are punishments for not following the rules or achieving the quota, but this statement was not amplified. Alex even had a conversation in Yiddish with a passing workman. The man had spent some years studying and working in California. He had picked up Yiddish and knew all about Israel.

The Brigade comprises five production teams, which work in five spheres — agriculture, forestation, animal husbandry, industry, commerce and transportation. They have six tractors and 120 machines for sowing, threshing, spraying and transport. We saw only two or three during our visit. There is a machine repair shop, and a small local store which caters to the members' daily needs. They sell wooden farm implements, cloth, shoes, rubber boots, stationary items, etc., but the shop, though quite large, was poorly lit. This dimness seems to be characteristic of Chinese housing.

Last, but not least, adjacent to the reception room, there was an art gallery, which exhibited paintings done by the members. These included traditional designs, portraits and semi-nudes.

In 1978 the total production value of the Brigade was 360,000 yuan, about \$180,000, and this year they expected to increase this to 1.7 million yuan. Their income last year was 2,000 yuan per capita, and 310 kilos of grain was distributed per person. Other free services include kindergarten and schooling, water and electricity; flour processing, housing, medicine and haircutting. Ninety-five percent of the population has moved into the new housing units, consisting of two-storey red-brick buildings with large individual yards. They were allocated on the basis of 25 square meters per person. If a commune owns a brickyard, the members can buy the bricks for about 1–1.5 cents per piece.

We actually visited a home in the new housing section, which consisted of six rooms for six people. There was little furniture, but several bikes, and an old-style kitchen. In the yard, there were geese, a pig, chickens, night soil containers, a cat tied by a red ribbon to a tree and flowering shrubs. It was very spacious.

We visited the clinic/pharmacy and heard about the paramedics or “barefoot doctors,” who work in the villages after receiving from six to twelve months medical training.

We asked Mr. Lee, our assistant guide, about courtships. It seems that here it is the girl who indicates her interest in the young man, by sending him a handkerchief. If he is interested, he takes the hint; if not, he returns the handkerchief. This sounds better than a blind date.

Returning to town, we visited a beautiful antique shop, government owned, opposite the hotel, but found it hard to make any decisions. The sales girls actually giggled when I approached them, so my blue eyes and “yellow” hair must have been too much for them.

We had an afternoon visit to the Yellow River Diversion Project, a couple of hours’ drive away. We had a crazy bus driver who thought constant honking at high speed was essential. There were crowds of bikes, and we saw many coolies, including girls, dragging loads. We held our breath nearly all the way, because have noticed that people are not very traffic conscious. They walk or ride their bicycles in the middle of the road; they cut across in front of the buses without warning, and apparently are not required to use lamps at night.

The Mangshan Pumping Station is a tremendous pioneering job. It is an attempt to control the Yellow River by raising and diverting the waters into a 40-kilometer long canal, which brings irrigation to dry areas. There are also several pavilions leading to the top of Mt. Mangshan, from which there is a marvelous view of the Yellow River. During our visit to the pumping station we were served “white tea,” a euphemistic name for plain hot water. I found it a poignant reminder of the hardships this country has suffered and the attempts to preserve the forms of hospitality in spite of them.

In the evening we went to the Martial Arts national competition, which was interesting because of our visit the next day to the Shaolin Monastery. But although it was an important event with big press and TV coverage, we found the shadowboxing (for men) and sword thrusting (for women) rather repetitive. We didn't have enough expertise to understand the finer points or the judging. However, we did see that Zhen Zhou has a very large and comprehensive sports center, which was very well patronized.

Zhen Zhou is a really beautifully laid out town with parks, and tree-lined avenues. Our hotel is situated on Golden Water Boulevard, which is seven kilometers long, and 42 meters wide, and has two rows of plane trees on each side. These provide wonderful shade for pedestrians and cyclists, who have special lanes at the sides of the road.

Though so many aspects of Chinese life are primitive, the emphasis on tree cultivation is remarkable. There seems to be conscious planning for shade-provision in towns and along the highways, not to mention the beauty the trees — mostly poplar, acacia, willows and plane — add to the landscape. There are always trees along the rail tracks and roads, which provide shade, and mark out fields, thus providing practical and aesthetic functions. We felt that our

own Jewish National Fund could emulate the Chinese method, rather than concentrate only on forests.

Tuesday, June 7

It was a long day, so it is difficult in the evening to remember everything. Our main destination was the Shaolin Monastery, four hours drive away, with its forest of stelae and stupas, and the ancient Buddhist temples, which were the birthplace of the martial arts. The founder of the monastery, Sakyamuni, was a disciple of Buddha who walked three years from India to bring Buddhism to China. He taught that the monks should learn to defend themselves against enemies and opponents and that daily physical training would help keep the monks healthy, being a counteraction to the long hours of the meditation that they practiced.

Our first stop in the morning was the Han Palace Tombs in Mixian County. It was most interesting to compare the stone carvings and wall paintings with Egyptian tombs. No artifacts were found here; they were stolen long ago. They are called Palace Tombs because they consist of several rooms whose purpose was illustrated by the wall carvings. For example, kitchen, dining room, stable, etc., as if they were still serving their normal functions. They are eight meters underground.

Then we stopped at the Zhongyue Taoist Temple, which was very picturesque, and consisted of a long promenade containing ten pavilions. Just as interesting as the historic stelae and giant cast-metal figures were the many ancient cypress trees growing in the courtyards. Some were over a thousand years old, with completely twisted trunks. Some of the calligraphy on

the stela was quite ancient and rare, and one stele described the five basic elements of the Chinese world — gold, wood, water, fire, and earth — of which all things are composed.

Although only open to tourism since 1978, there are already signs of commercialism. There were many little restaurants and stands selling breads, postcards, and drinks, and all offering the same wares. How can they all be making money? We met one American and one Japanese group. The others were all Chinese, perhaps some from overseas.

Prior to that we had an excellent lunch in the local guest house, ten courses, with a greater variety of vegetables than in any other place — string beans, cooked tomatoes, lovely bean sprouts, cabbage, fresh cucumbers, seaweed, baked sweet potatoes, and good sponge cake. It seems that there are better and worse cooks in China, too, and they don't all know how to cook rice so that each grain is separate.

The landscape was very interesting, though not so rich and verdant as before. There are cultivated fields everywhere, mainly of wheat, but also some of vegetables, lotus and apples. Every centimeter is being exploited, right up to the roads, and even including dry river beds. Every little scrap of space is growing something. It is mainly a flat area, but cut up into terraces, which adds interesting effects. There are few stones, but the earth looks very heavy and clayey, so that the terraces need no retaining walls. Throughout the day we saw only two mechanical threshers. There were mostly ox-drawn ploughs, and a few mules, despite the fact that the harvest seemed to be at its peak.

We passed some old villages with tiny brick houses, over-painted white, and with thatched roofs. There were also some new villages, with good looking two-storey housing, enclosed by

a wall. We saw some adobe villages, and some cave dwellings, which were nicely faced with stone and had adjoining gardens. One village had single houses in an unusual style, with large front verandas, two pillars and a colored geometric design across the whole façade. Others had pagoda-shaped roofs and animal decorations similar to those seen in the temples. There were many village markets at roadsides, and generally much activity and pavement living, except there are no pavements.

Breakfast is at 6:30 tomorrow morning and then we are off to Anyang. We skipped dinner tonight and tried to get to bed early.

Wednesday, June 8

A two and half hour train journey now to Anyang. Very flat country, miles of beautiful ripe wheat in fields, harvesting and threshing in full swing.

Anyang is a small town, but it also has tree-lined streets and several lanes for cycles. The drivers also honk like mad, and for the first time we saw pedicabs and mechanized rickshaws. Checked in at the local guest house and then went out to walk around. In the big street market where they were selling clothes and cloth, our group created a sensation; we attracted crowds, but whenever we tried to take photos, they melted away.

Zipora and I continued to walk through the residential area, and it made the most pleasant impression of any place we'd seen. The brick houses were whitewashed, with decorations and pictures painted on the walls. There were numbered entrances into courtyards, which seemed to house several families and lots of bicycles. Facing the entrance were more large paintings on the wall, and we had glimpses of little gardens, trees, tiny dwellings, some tidier

than others. There was a water tap and a gutter in the street, where two women were washing clothes and vegetables, but we also saw one woman doing her washing under running water in her own courtyard. People continued to stare at us. Only much later did we realize that Anyang is not even mentioned in our guidebook, so the reactions of the population were more understandable.

The second street was a conventional one with several grocery shops and restaurants. We discovered a noodle shop, about two meters square, run by two women. It seemed that people brought their own flour. One of the women weighed it and returned equal weight in noodles, which were made on a hand machine by the second woman. Half a dozen people stood in the doorway, with their bowls of flour. Further on, we saw a shirt factory, a shop with four sewing machines and two cutting and pressing tables. There was heavy traffic because of the lunch hour and the many children coming home from school.

People carried cabbages and cucumbers, some unattractive apricots and rather poor tomatoes. The atmosphere seemed more normal than any other place. We finally found our way back to the main market street, where Zipora succeeded in buying some baby shirts and got rid of her local money.

I should mention that tourists get different currency than that generally in use and the notes are called Foreign Exchange Certificates. One can use them at the Friendship Stores, but small vendors don't always accept them. However, those Chinese who want to get to the Friendship Stores try to get hold of this money. Both kinds of notes have the same value.

We had lunch at the guest house, where we had some interesting new foods and other vegetables. We sat in a large dining room, part of which was screened off to give us some privacy from other diners. This was quite customary in many places.

At one o'clock we boarded the bus to drive out to the scenic area of Linxiang for an overnight stay. I had imagined we were going to some beautiful scenic spot to see waterfalls, forests, etc. and to relax. We were warned that the accommodation would be quite simple, and, in fact, when we arrived, there were the usual white slipcovers, hot thermos, slippers, etc., but no water in the taps or toilet! However, we were promised water for the evening.

We left Linxiang at 3 p.m. to look at the Red Flag Canal and the Youth Tunnel. This turned out to be another 45-kilometer ride up into the mountains and it was quite magnificent, although not the relaxation we had expected.

The Red Flag Canal is a water diversion project, designed to bring water from the Changho River to the barren land of Linxiang County, which has always suffered from drought.

From 1960 to 1970, the people of this county worked at cutting the canal through innumerable mountains. They also built many bridges and aqueducts to link up the various sections of this 1,500-kilometer waterway. We visited the last section, called the Youth Tunnel, named for the volunteer youth groups who worked for six months to cut through the last mountain. It was a most dramatic sight, especially coming down the 463 stairs! Even here at the top of the mountain we had a "briefing" by one of the "model" workers and drank our "white tea" in the open under the trees.

The landscape during the drive was similar to that of the morning except the mountains were closer, and it was harvest time here as well. I have found it quite thrilling to see such vast stretches of wheat fields, and all stages of the harvesting being carried out right there by the roadside — reaping, threshing, winnowing and binding. Even the road itself was made use of as an additional threshing floor, the buses and trucks driving over the wheat helping to crush and separate the grain from the stalk. I think that the number of tractors and threshing machines we saw could have been counted on one hand. There were also many donkeys and mules pulling carts. The kids were home from school to help.

I had never seen such scenes, and found it beautiful and moving to see how a people works their land. It was almost primeval, literally *hamotzi lehem min ha'aretz* ... “Who bringeth bread out of the land” — from the blessing over bread. A brilliant sunshine heightened the impression. And the people! They had a different appearance than the town folk we have seen so far, and were obviously peasants born and bred. Wherever we stopped they gawked in amazement, but fled at the sight of our cameras. Some of the smaller children even cried! There seem to be more old people here than in the towns, and they wore the old Mao uniforms. There were also more children and a few women with bound feet.

The villages all looked more or less the same, in varying stages of ruin. All had dirt lanes, and many trees. Some houses were built in compound style, some in long rows, some had thatched roofs and some had pagoda-shaped roofs with decorations. We noticed small alcoves set into some of the walls next to the front door, but the guide couldn't explain it, so we did not know if they served as household shrines, or some other practical purpose such as a niche for lanterns. But many villages have new housing sections, with larger or smaller units built of red brick in two-storey fashion. I think I finally discovered why the houses

generally look dark — it's because there are windows only at the front. The back walls had no windows, and if they had been planned, they have been bricked up. Even the kitchen we saw at the commune had only one tiny window and it was quite dark in the middle of the day. Of course, the fact that they cook with small round briquettes of coal probably contributes to the blackening of the walls.

It was really a fabulous day and we returned to Linxiang just before seven. We had a new dish at dinner, peanuts and onions, and a horrible sweet pink soup, but good rice, a large fried fish, green beans, champignons, etc. I still cannot forget the wheat fields, surely one of the most entrancing sights I've ever seen, and those scenes remain fixed in my mind.

So far, our fears about the hotels have not been substantiated. We have seen various standards by now, and there have always been clean sheets and towels, though not changed every day, good toilet paper and soap, very hot water, sandals to wear in the room, and, of course, the hot thermos, cups and tea. There are very few mirrors, and a small one in the bathroom has to serve all purposes. Public toilets, on the other hand, are sometimes difficult.

We are disappointed that everything seems standardized. All the markets in all places sell the same clothes, blouses, skirts, pants and pretty children's clothes. Often the same material sold by the meter reappears in different towns. All craft shops sell the same scrolls, pictures, jewelry, embroideries, lacquer ware and ceramics, with larger or smaller selections. Art is supposed to be "traditional," so one wonders what the new artists are doing. We did see some artists painting nature scenes at the Lovely Dusk Pavilion in Changsha, but otherwise we are offered the usual flower scenes, horses, etc.

Thursday, June 9

We left the Linxiang Guest House at 7:30 after a very nice breakfast. The specialty of the area seems to be very long, sausage-shaped fritters, and we also had a variety of sweet cookies. Very feeble coffee, but a big soup bowl of hot milk was very welcome.

Just before reaching Anyang we turned off to visit the ruins of the Yin Dynasty, as the latter half of the Shang Dynasty is called. They date to about 1,300 BC. We saw a small exhibition of artifacts, which included lots of ceramic cooking pots, bronze wine vessels and their heating containers, stone chimes, seashells, which seem to have been used for currency, and many skeletons of animals and humans. The most unusual items were the “oracle bones,” the shoulder blades of animals inscribed with characters, which were used for reading the future or for solving problems. The Chinese considered these findings extremely important.

This was a slave period during which human sacrifice was practiced. The slaves were killed and buried, or even buried alive with their masters when they died. Miniature arrays of pottery figures were retrieved from tombs, rather like the Egyptian *ushupti*. There were very small sling stones, a rather large bronze cauldron, lovely jade ornaments and sculptures. We also saw an ancient chariot in the process of restoration. We did not see the excavations themselves. It seems that the Chinese cover them up after completing their research so that the ground can be re-cultivated.

We had a very poor lunch at the guest house in Anyang, and then went for a walk to the Chinese department store. When we passed a hairdresser, I was very tempted to have my hair done but there wasn't enough time. We saw another little reading library on the steps of a building. In the store we caused a sensation and were followed about by the crowd. Suddenly

one young woman stepped up to me and delivered a harangue, which was decidedly unfriendly. The people around tried to quiet her down. I apologized that I only spoke English but she continued for another minute or two, then smiled and turned away. I would love to have known what was bothering her.

Soon we were on the train for another five-hour trip to Luoyang, where we finally arrived at our hotel at midnight. The guide book says that it was the most run-down hotel in China until it was renovated in 1980, but that it has an excellent kitchen.

The entrance hall indeed looked very elegant and spacious, with many shops, but we hurried upstairs to shower and bed. To our surprise we had a suite — bedroom, sitting-room and very small toilet and shower. The furniture, very old-fashioned, included high beds, a wardrobe with a long mirror, sofa and chairs in white slipcovers as usual, but also a color TV and radio. We even managed to hear the BBC at last, and were glad to hear no news of Israel. Though there was hot water and towels, the plumbing didn't seem very efficient, and the toilet ran all the time. The Chinese carpets would be lovely if they had been cleaned, but I guess that symbolizes the many contradictions we see in this country. Several others of the group also have suites, while some have enormous bathrooms with small bedrooms.

Our local guide is Mr. Chin, a very handsome young man, tall for a Chinese and very athletic looking.

The train journey today was a bit unusual. Our long walk to the dining car — we are always in the last carriage, hooked on after the baggage car — seemed even longer than usual, which meant this was a particularly long train. All the carriages were third-class and filled with

men, with an occasional family here and there. It was quite something to be inspected by all those eyes as we filed through the open corridor. Then suddenly we came to an air-conditioned car. We gasped in amazement. We thought we had the most comfortable car of all, but here was an even more superior class. Even the slipcovers looked cleaner, and the car was full of Chinese who made a sharp contrast to those traveling in the “hard” class, which had only six thinly padded bunks in each section. We were very curious as to who would be traveling in such comfort, but of course that also remained a secret.

In the luggage car there was a whole consignment of day-old chicks traveling in open cartons. They looked cute and indicated that somewhere chickens were being raised and eaten.

Dinner on the train was excellent and pleasantly served, but too plentiful. Beer and orangeade, of local manufacture, were provided as usual. Some of us are beginning to skip meals or eat less, since ten courses twice a day is really too much. Today, we had sugared tomatoes to start, stewed apples for dessert, good vegetables, fresh beans, tinned champignon and fried fish. Soup always comes in the middle of the meal, and the rice sometimes at the end, sometimes in the middle.

The train journeys are becoming a bit trying, largely because we always have to walk so far with our hand luggage. Several hundred meters to and from the train, to and from the dining car, and the trains are always very long. Still, it is interesting to see the “ordinary” people and get a glimpse of another facet of Chinese life.

The guide said it would be about 34° C tomorrow, but dry. Some guides have asked us for comments about the service. They say that they are new to tourism and want to learn. At one

of the museums, too, Rivka was asked to write down her professional opinion. The guide always makes a sentimental little farewell speech at the end of our stay, especially if it has been a longer one than usual, and asks us to convey his greetings to our family and relatives. This must be Chinese custom. We sing *Hevenu Shalom Aleichem*. Actually, we've had some nice sing-songs on our long journeys, and the guides are always happy to hear *Frère Jacques*, which they also sing in Chinese.

Friday, June 10

We drove out to Longmen, or the Dragon Gate Caves. This is a whole cliff face of Buddhist carvings and sculptures several kilometers in length, dating from the 6th century. Again, the art of Egypt's Abu Simbel came to mind. It was a very busy place with lots of visitors, foreign and local, and lots of workmen working on the river, using small carts, tiny trucks and hand carts. This is another big project to raise the riverbed and divert the waters. The Red Flag Canal passed nearby. Needless to say, we had our usual "briefing" here in the usual visitors' room and the usual tea.

Thank God for our present driver! He rarely honks and drives more carefully than the last one. It makes a big difference to our enjoyment and I didn't have a headache today. We visited to the old section of town on the way back.

Sunday, June 12

We awoke before five by the alarm clock and the noise of jogging and gymnastics outside. We were at the station by 6:15. It was deserted except for women sweepers in blue uniforms carrying big Chinese brooms. In fact, we were so early we found the sweepers lined up for inspection before starting work. Chinese music blared from the loudspeaker.

The train from Shanghai came in a few minutes later, and again we had the last carriage. Another long walk to breakfast. This time the baggage car really smelled. There were about five third-class cars, and this time there were many families, some even taking their pots and pans with them. Many were still sleeping and the blinds are down, so it seemed they had come a long way, perhaps even from Shanghai. There was laundry hanging up to dry, everyone had food supplies and thermoses. They didn't go to the dining car. Now we understand why there is a separate room across from the toilet; it was a laundry room with two basins where passengers can wash on long journeys. There was also a large furnace for heating water, where travelers could refill their thermos flasks. Later in the day, they even washed down the floor. They were amazingly quiet and composed.

We wondered where these people were going, in view of all the stories we had heard about lack of freedom of movement. On other trains the men had looked like work brigades, but perhaps these families were going to a new town. When we asked Mr. Wang, he said they had been visiting their families in Shanghai and were now returning to their own town on the Sino-Russian border. That is certainly another couple of days travel.

The countryside was very beautiful as we climbed into a hilly region with mountains in the background. The wheat harvest was just beginning here, so the scenes were familiar, but still lovely. We saw many haystacks, also many vegetable gardens. The mountains and wadis were completely terraced, and the heavy soil needed no retaining wall. The whole landscape looked as if it was actually sculpted and every centimeter was cultivated. There were many trees, even small forests here and there. The main attraction was the large cave dwellings, looking very elegant with stone facades, doors and windows, often with a fenced-off garden.

The entrances were arched, and at one spot we passed a row of caves with blue doors, so perhaps a familiar Muslim tradition from the Middle East was expressing itself in this largely Muslim area. I found the landscape most attractive.

Now we were moving toward the foothills of steep mountains, not cultivated but quite green, while plains stretched away to the right. Villages and factories, large housing developments, trees and more trees dotted the countryside. Young cypress saplings had been planted on the mountainsides and brilliant sunshine accentuated the colors. Marvelous craggy peaks were silhouetted against the skyline.

I am writing this on the train to Xian. Last Friday evening, since the hotel was quite full with Japanese, French and Australian tourists, we decided to have our Kabbalat Shabbat in the Bittermans' suite and most of us gathered there for Kiddush. Everyone was very conscious of the fact that Kiddush was probably being made in Luoyang for the first time ever, but Rivka says there were probably Jews here in other periods. After dinner, we also had *zemirot* and *benchen* (grace after meals) in the room and it was very enjoyable. The dining room in this hotel is in a separate pavilion at the back, across a garden. The cook is quite a character and believes in the personal touch. He comes around during every meal to ask in broken English, if everything is satisfactory. He takes his profession very seriously.

Part of the group went off to the theatre, but unfortunately Sylvia Feller had a bad fall and had to be taken to hospital. Luckily, nothing was broken, but she had a beautiful black eye, a sprained ankle, and suffered from shock. She said that the hospital was very primitive, but the lady doctor was very kind and gentle and she didn't feel the tetanus shot.

We woke on Saturday morning to pouring rain, and for those who would have to walk to the museum, a great disappointment. However, it cleared in the afternoon, and they eventually all got there.

The museum is a fine newish building in Chinese style, which opened in 1953. Though not very large, there are five halls with relics from the primitive or Neolithic period up to the end of the Sung Dynasty in AD1280. There are a large number of artifacts from more than 60 village sites, and from research on about 10,000 graves. The early historical periods are called Primitive, Slave Society (2100–500BC) and Feudal Society.

We looked mainly at the bronze vessels and stone chimes and at a visiting exhibition of imperial furniture from Beijing. The atmosphere was very pleasant, but there were no other visitors.

As in most other places, the guide was a young woman, who spoke no English, and again there were no English signs in the showcases. She complained that some of their best pieces had been taken to Beijing.

Then, in pouring rain, we went to the park to see two Han tombs, with many chambers, and stone carvings. The similarity to Egyptian tombs is amazing, but here the color has not kept well!

In the afternoon I went unwillingly to the Taoist White Horse Temple, while Alex stayed at the hotel. In fact, it was one of the nicer places, having been recently restored and repainted,

and was very well kept. There was a large hall with red columns and side pavilions with many stelae and stone figures found in the area, some of them enormous.

Then we visited the arts and crafts center, which seems to be the main center for the production of the ceramic Tang horses in the traditional three-color glaze. It was interesting to see how they finish off the mass-produced horses by hand. I bought a bronze reproduction of a mounted guard.

We made *Havdalah* in the Bittermans' room at 8:15 p.m., packed, watched the Royal Ballet on TV performing *Sleeping Beauty* in Beijing, and then went wearily to bed.

Monday, June 13

This was a day which was ostensibly to be devoted to archaeology but turned into an orgy of shopping — not entirely our fault, but because the tour is so arranged that we often have too much free time. Or are the people of Xian shrewder business people?

The archaeological sites, interesting as they were, did not take up much time. The Quin Shi Huang excavations with the life-size pottery warriors and horses were fabulous, but such a small section is displayed that we finished in about half an hour. Another half hour was enough for the museum souvenir shop. We then had an hour or more for the free market, which was really a riot, firstly of color and types, and secondly of noisy bargaining. About 25–30 women and members of their families were congregated in an open square in front of the excavation site, selling brightly colored padded and embroidered vests, old clothes and embroideries, animal decorations and various bits of junk. All were vying for the customers. It was really the first place where we've seen any "local" color or folklore. The stall owners

on the right-hand side, where we were told to shop, seemed more restrained and careful, while those on the left got quite out of hand if we approached them, and it was very difficult to extricate oneself. We were quite caught up in the excitement. A good time was had by us, and a good profit was made by them. The guide said that all this sewing and commerce is put in after the regular working day.

On the way home we stopped at the famous Mauquing Hot Springs where Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped by his officers in 1936. He was forced to put an end to the civil war, and mount a united front against the Japanese. Now it is just an ornamental park with lakes and many pavilions, a lovely spot that may eventually be restored to its original purpose. Some of the group were disappointed in not being able to swim.

We visited a cloisonné factory in Xian where we saw just one part of the production process. I don't really like this ware, unless the patterns, coloring and shape are simple, so I didn't find anything especially attractive, and portable enough, in their showroom. Again, we were finished before the allotted time. Most interesting was to see how the forms of ancient vessels that we saw in museums are still being copied today. Once again, "tradition."

In the morning we visited the Banpo Neolithic Museum, which was most unusual and very impressive. Unusual in that such a large site has been exposed and maintained in an enclosed, roofed-over area, and impressive because of the clear and simple way the finds themselves are presented. This is the only place so far where we had English translations. The Quin Shi Huang excavations were also enclosed in a large structure.

I experienced a rather unpleasant incident here. On my way to the bus, while admiring a small palm tree, I bumped into a man who was watering flowers with a triangular-shaped wooden pail. He accidentally splashed water all over my skirt and legs. The people nearby laughed, but I didn't pay much attention. However, after a minute or two, I became aware of a terrible smell emanating from me, and so did the others on the bus. Remembering the perfume carts and the "night soil," I quickly came to the conclusion that I had been doused in horse urine, if not worse, and realized that I couldn't remain like that for the rest of the day. I asked Mr. Wang if we could stop wherever there was a tap nearby, and after about five minutes I saw one of the other Chinese come out of a pavilion with a basin of water which he placed on the ground.

I couldn't take off my skirt, as I wasn't wearing a slip, so I knelt down and rinsed it out as best as I could. Then I also washed my feet in the basin and everyone had a good laugh. We resumed our journey, with me sitting in a wet skirt! Suddenly Dita produced an extra skirt she was carrying with her, so I could wriggle into that, and take off my own, which I held out the window like a banner. It dried after a half hour, just in time to go to the pottery excavations, and then I reversed the exercise. I remained conscious of the smell for the rest of the day though no one else complained, but it was so good to get out of those clothes and into the shower when we got back to the hotel!

Xian has the largest Muslim community in China, and we visited the Great Mosque, which was built in the 7th century. In the briefing room we were told the history of the community and of the impending fast of Ramadan. We had to take off our shoes to enter the mosque, but mostly we were impressed with the minaret, which was in the shape of a pagoda. We felt strangely at home in this distant spot.

We stayed at the Renmin Mansion, which is a very large estate containing five buildings in a spacious garden. It was opened in 1953, having been built for the Soviet advisors of that period, and was turned into a hotel when they were expelled. It was a good example of bombastic Soviet architecture with decorative Chinese elements.

Our rooms had been newly renovated and were most comfortable, with air conditioning and lovely modern bathrooms. There is even a chime at the door, and of course the laundry service is excellent as it was everywhere. Good shops with a large selection of items, including pure silk dress material.

The large dining room has a decorative ceiling, copied from nearby Tang tombs, and we discovered a separate dining room for Muslims, kosher no doubt, but no one was there at the time.

Tuesday, June 14

We were out by 6:30 this morning to see the exercising in the streets. I had expected to see mass organized PT, but in fact it was more of what we saw yesterday. There were large and small groups practicing the traditional martial arts, *taijiguan*, mostly senior citizens of both sexes. Others individually or in pairs, were doing warming-up exercises, or using a set of bars. Many played shuttlecock/badminton (without a net) on the pavement; others were jogging, etc. All this took place in and around the big square, against the background of bicycle traffic and people going to work. A water truck driven by a girl was washing down the streets. Old men were taking caged birds for an airing, while others sat under the trees playing a kind of board game, on paper.

One car drove by with only two little boys in the back and we wondered how important their fathers could be?

The people in the streets have been very friendly, offering hellos and smiles. Even little children waved spontaneously. I suppose they know that tourism is good business. Xian is probably the most visited town in China because of its pottery army.

This morning we went to the Shanxi Provincial Museum where there are more than two thousand inscribed stelae, but Alex and I decided to forego the trip to Quianlung, the Tang Emperors' Tomb, which is some 60 kilometers away.

Tuesday evening, June 14

We had a leisurely day after the fascinating visit to the museum, shopping, walking, repacking, and we slept in the afternoon. During our walk, we saw a wide range of livelihoods being practiced on the pavements: barbers, basket weaving, dough-kneading, noodle-making, dressmaking, and so on.

There was excitement at dinner with Arthur, who'd lost his camera, or had it stolen while shopping. This entailed visits to the police station and much running around by Mr. Wang, but the camera was not found, and I don't know if Arthur ever got his police note for customs and the insurance.

There was even more bad news and aggravation. It seems our flight tomorrow has been moved from the morning to the afternoon, which means a half-day wasted here and precious

time lost in Beijing (formerly Peking). It has been interesting to observe, although our schedule was planned in advance, that we never knew where we would stay or what we would do until we arrived at each place. On arrival, only then would our national guide and the group leaders get together with the local guides and settle the details. It meant at least that with Rivka's help we had some say in the selection of tours.

Wednesday, June 15

At breakfast we discovered that last night's grumblings had born fruit. The Klines, our group leaders, informed us they had arranged a visit to the Xinjao Buddhist Temple, a two-hour drive to the mountains. All groaned at the thought of another temple, but in fact it was a lovely morning. The landscape was slightly hillier and very green, with grand mountains in the background. Once again we found ourselves in the midst of wheat harvesting, and at one stage drove for several miles along wheat-covered roads, where village after village was using the main road as a threshing floor, even though they had proper threshing floors inside the village. Perhaps the harvest has been especially good this year. It looked very abundant, with haystacks piled up, some round, some stacked between trees, some in the usual house-shaped style. Everyone seemed to be out at work — men and women, young and old. The village scenes, in slightly better conditions, were picturesque; the old people were more numerous than in the towns, and each one was a "type" to be photographed. The dirt roads were beautifully tree-lined.

The Xinjao Temple is one of the eight remaining monasteries of the Tang period, and important as the burial place of Xuangzang, a monk and pilgrim, traveler and scholar. A large stupa marks the tomb of the famous monk. He lived from 600–664 and was a friend of the third Tang emperor. He spent seventeen years in India studying Buddhism, and devoted

himself to translating Buddhist writings into Chinese. He also built the Great Wild Goose Pagoda to house these manuscripts, and the monastery also holds a large collection of Tibetan Buddhist writings. This temple seems to be very popular with the Japanese, since many Japanese banners decorate the walls. In the well-kept and obviously frequented temple, we also noticed a small Jewish-looking seven branched candelabrum on the altar but we couldn't get any information about its meaning or origin. The Klines, leaders of the group, were excited about this visit because it was the first time it was permitted; it is not a usual tourist site.

We arrived at the airport after lunch, and our hand luggage was checked with a fine-toothed comb. Every little package had to be opened! We had a good flight and got to Beijing, at five in the afternoon. The drive into town took about 45 minutes along a beautiful road lined with poplars and pines, behind which we saw new orchards and groves of saplings. The guides told us that they planted about 150 million trees after the "liberation" (from Chairman Mao) and since then, have planted about a million trees every year. The Chinese observe a tree-festival on March 12, and much of the planting is done then. We couldn't help comparing this with our own Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees, which falls in January and is marked by mass plantings.

The main road leading to the hotel is typical of others we have seen. It is 50–60 meters wide and remnants of old villages can be seen alongside enormous new apartment blocks. Again, the bulk of the traffic is bicycles, but there are many taxis, buses and trolley cars.

Hotel Beijing really took us by surprise, as we didn't expect to be staying here. It is the leading hotel, situated on the main road, close to the famous Tiananmen Square. It occupies a

whole city block, and is comprised of three wings of various origins, colonial, Soviet and modern. The connecting lobbies are filled with souvenir shops, cafés and bars, and myriad tourists from all over. The whole atmosphere is completely different, and we could almost be in New York, London or any big city. We have a huge bedroom with bath on the fourteenth floor, air-conditioning and color TV, but the same plastic slippers and hot water thermoses remind us that we are still in China. After three weeks of our travels, we are no longer used to such luxury and it comes as quite a shock, but I suppose we will readjust fairly quickly!

I wanted to call my brother in London but the time was not appropriate. Since there is no direct phone link with Israel, we will have to get our news in this round-about way, after three weeks without any contact.

Thursday, June 16

We called Alec and Aliza at 6 a.m. We had a wonderful connection, and asked them to call the kids and wish Varda a “Happy Birthday,” and then let us know by return call if everything is well at home.

Today, the Great Wall!

We left at 7:30 for The Great Wall, a two-hour trip by train, and then another ten minutes by bus. We saw fantastic mountain scenery, with glimpses of parts of the wall and towers here and there. The morning mists finally cleared away and we were able to enjoy warm sunshine and cool breezes. The mountains were very green with underbrush, but not actually cultivated.

This turned out to be a very entertaining journey. After the girl attendants served tea, they reappeared with a trolley of postcards and other small souvenir items. After a suitable pause they came back with embroideries, and then again with scarves and T-shirts. It became quite hilarious, as we never knew whether the sales were over, or whether they had another surprise for us. The time passed very cheerfully, and we enjoyed socializing with a group of Australians who were sharing our carriage.

We had a short walk to the main entrance, passing many souvenir stalls, and then began to climb the Wall, together with thousands of other tourists. One could hear many different languages, but Europeans were very much in the minority. And I really mean “to climb,” alternating with many breathing stops. Though it took great effort, we finally made it up the steep incline, and last, almost vertical flight of stairs. It was reminiscent the climb up the Tower of Pisa. Everyone was huffing and puffing in their own language, but it really was an experience and the view was well worth it. Going down was even more difficult because the stones were very smooth and slippery, so the handrail proved to be a lifesaver.

Parts of the Wall are about two thousand years old, having been built with slave labor by the same Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who was buried at Xian with his pottery warriors. In later periods the early sections were joined up. At its best period it was 10,000 kilometers long, but like similar fortifications in our time, this “line” couldn’t keep out the invaders. After the 6th century, China was often overrun and the Wall fell into disuse until the Ming emperors tried to restore it. Now the Chinese are restoring it as a national monument and tourist attraction. It is about three meters wide on the top, wider still at the base. The old city wall in Xian was even wider.

After we negotiated the descent, we felt entitled to buy the T-shirt inscribed, “I climbed the Great Wall,” and we decided not to give them away as gifts. We felt that only those who had actually climbed the Wall should wear it!

We had a box lunch on the train during another long journey, by rail and road, to the Ming tombs. The guide made us get off the bus and walk along the Sacred Way to the entrance. This avenue is lined with enormous stone statues of horses, elephants and dignitaries, an excellent location for photographs. The tomb we visited, the only one of the 13 tombs in the valley which has been opened, is really a vast underground palace, four flights down. It was extremely cold. We saw the three red-painted caskets, which had fitted one inside the other, large chunks of jade, and carved marble thrones, but the main exhibits, gold dishes, crowns and jewelry, in a style similar to Bukharian work, were exhibited in the pavilions on the grounds. Of course, there were also souvenir shops, where we were taken, ostensibly for a free drink of cold Coca Cola.

We returned by bus to Beijing just at the rush hour. There were literally thousands of bikes, trolley cars, buses and trucks, and many taxis and private cars belonging to government cadres or foreigners. Most people looked a little more citified but the markets were the same markets, and the traffic seemed only slightly more controlled.

We went out for a duck dinner with the Fellers, Zipora and Martin, but didn't get it because the guide had ordered something else! Zipora and I were very disappointed after being vegetarians for three weeks. At 8:30 p.m. we couldn't get a taxi, and had to walk back to the hotel, trusting to our own intuition, and help from an American girl we approached, who'd been studying in Peking already for a year. Many people were out on the streets, it being a

hot night. The street lighting is brighter than we have seen in other towns but the side streets were dim.

After we managed to locate the hotel, we found a lovely antique shop close by, and although they were obviously preparing to close up, the proprietors allowed us to look around. It was a very large shop, with several rooms, and in one of them we saw some modern Chinese paintings which had been exhibited in Europe. They were mostly street scenes in realistic style, not abstracts, but still with traditional elements. The rest of the merchandise was similar to what we had seen in other places.

Then, toward the end of the evening, we walked along the brightly lit boulevard to Tiananmen Square. We noticed the double row of trees along the northern wall of the Forbidden City, where the Gate of Heavenly Peace is situated. The trees provided deep shade for the small benches placed there, all of which were occupied by young couples. Rivka says it's the official Lovers' Lane.

I still find it pathetic to see the one-child families, and I can't help wondering how this and the next generation will grow up, without any extended family. I haven't mentioned the large billboards we saw in other towns, showing happy one-child families. These billboards were also used to educate the public on road safety by showing a family crossing correctly at a pedestrian crossing, etc.

The Beijing hotel also differs from previous accommodations, in that the car park in front is full of Mercedes, and big black Russian-made limousines with lace-draped seats and waiting chauffeurs. Inside the hotel, scales and ironing facilities are found near the service desk on

each floor. In addition to the color TV and air conditioning in the room, there is a digital clock, a small refrigerator, and to our amazement, electrically operated curtains. It is very comfortable but not typically Chinese!

Friday, June 17

In the morning we first visited the zoo to see the famous pandas, and then drove out to the Summer Palace to see its many pavilions and beautifully decorated, covered promenade known as the Painted Gallery. We had lunch in the Listening to the Orioles Pavilion (nothing like the Chinese language for hyperbole), then went for a boat ride on the enormous artificial lake, and heard an anecdotal account of how the Empress Ci Xi had built the estate and of the lifestyle there, until the emperor was deposed. The pomp and luxury then was certainly a far cry from the drabness and uniformity of life today, but in contrast now, the common man's lot seems to be much improved. Our assistant guide, Miss Pan, then took us to the Temple of Heaven, which is a very large compound of prayer halls and piazzas, dominated by the most exotic-looking, splendid circular building: the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests. It is a breathtaking sight, from the enormous red pillars within to the brilliant blue-glazed tiles without. Not a single nail was used in the construction, we were told, which dates back to the 16th century.

It is time for shopping of course. At Alex's urging we went in the evening to an acrobatic show, half of which turned out to be the magicians' acts. It is very popular entertainment and very good, but also very hot, in spite of the electric fans.

Saturday, June 18

It was 6:30 in the morning and we were up again. This was actually our last day in Beijing. I felt utterly exhausted, and we hadn't even begun. We had to go to the Forbidden City in the morning, to the Historical Museum in the afternoon and to our farewell banquet in the evening. Touring is really very demanding here. The temples always consist of many courtyards and pavilions, and there is always a lot of walking. Not to mention the shops, which are on every corner; everywhere you turn there's a shop, and of course, one must go in to see if there isn't anything special that one might miss.

But we have *done* the trip to China. It has taken almost three weeks, and although we have learned a great deal of its history, and seen a great deal of the country, its urban and outlying areas, and many facets of Chinese life, we felt that there is still much to come back for. I would certainly like to come back and do a little more leisurely the things that we haven't had time to do on this trip.

This morning we have to visit the Forbidden City, which means a lot of walking. Let's hope we survive it. The Forbidden City wasn't very far from the hotel, and from our window we could see the roofs of the pavilions and the palaces, but the atmosphere was so hazy in the morning that it was difficult to take a sharp picture. It doesn't really clear until 10 or 11 o'clock, when the sun comes out and the visibility is much better.

Saturday evening, June 18

[N.B. I had thought to reproduce here the exact words of our guide, transcribing from my tape recorder in order to recreate more tangibly the "tone" of our travels. However, the Chinese have a habit of repeating the last words of a sentence, or of a thought, which doesn't make good reading when put down on paper. I don't know if they do this when speaking

Chinese or if it is a problem of coping with a foreign language. So I have condensed the descriptions of the Forbidden City into proper English, and foregone the authentic touch.
E.R.]

We started our two and a half hour tour at the South Gate working our way through to the North Gate, which is situated on Tiananmen Square. The south or Meridian Gate was also called The Five Phoenix Pavilion in former times, because there are five buildings on top of it. Each one symbolizes the phoenix. In earlier era in China, the dragon symbolized the emperor and the phoenix symbolized the empress. Construction of the pavilion city began in 1406 during the third Ming Dynasty and was completed by 1420. Hundreds of thousands of slaves, artisans and craftsmen were forced to work on the construction of this new capital, which had been moved from its previous location in Nanking. Actually, additions and improvements went on up to 1911, by which time there were more than 9,900 rooms and 72 palaces, and many courtyards. About 24 emperors lived in the Forbidden City, until the last emperor was overthrown in 1911 by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, during the Democratic Revolution. The emperor was only six years old at the time and he continued to live in the inner court until 1924.

The Forbidden City consists of two main parts, the front court, which was used on state or ceremonial occasions, such as receiving foreign envoys or celebrating the emperor's birthday. The second part served as private residential quarters for the emperor, empress and concubines. One emperor had two empresses and 72 concubines, and they all lived in different courtyards. The last emperor was driven out in 1924, and the city was then converted into a museum. It is also called the Palace Meridian, or the Imperial Palace.

Restoration began in the early 1950s, after the liberation, but some pavilions have not been touched for more than 100 years. Of course, we could not see everything in the time at our disposal, but the guide showed us the main features of the palace and the ceremonial and private areas and regaled us with many stories. He pointed out the Golden Water River, which runs from east to west through the palace, and which is spanned by five marble bridges. These bridges represent the five virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity, and they also symbolized five arrows on a bow. The emperor, who called himself “the son of god,” would shoot these arrows into the air and the arrows would tell the god what the emperor was doing on earth.

As we walked along we were very impressed by the vast squares, which were devoted to the ceremonial aspects of imperial life, and equally impressed by the number of Chinese tourists, who were also “doing” this now accessible historical site. Several hundreds, if not more, local tourists were to be seen everywhere.

The Hall of Benevolence or Supreme Harmony is the largest palace in the compound, the next in importance being the Hall of Perfect Harmony and the Hall of Preserving Harmony. The Hall of Supreme Harmony was used for state occasions and for the coronation, which was always a grand occasion attended by the high officials and military officers. The emperor would sit on the throne inside looking out at the assembly which was arranged in the square according to rank, from the first to the seventh. White lines mark the traditional divisions between the ranks.

The military officers and high officials would kneel down, kowtow, and say “longevity” many times. The emperor sat on his throne, while all the musical instruments, bells, drums,

etc., were sounded. A great deal of incense was burned in the enormous incense burners standing in a row in front of the palace. There are 18 of them altogether, because at that time China had 18 provinces, and they were each represented by a burner. Sandalwood, which has a very pleasant smell, was used for the incense and created a very agreeable environment for the great ceremony.

In former times, Peking (now pronounced Beijing) consisted of four cities, the Outer City, the Inner City, the Imperial City and the Forbidden City, one within another. The Forbidden City was located in the center. The whole city was heavily guarded, with a watchtower and a city wall more than ten meters high. There was also a moat. The emperor still didn't feel secure enough, and was afraid someone might tunnel his way inside. So he ordered this area to be paved in a special way, seven layers lengthwise, and eight layers crosswise. Thus, this square consists of 15 layers of brick. The other squares of the Forbidden City have six or seven layers, but here there are 15.

Besides the incense burners, there are also two statues of dragons, which belched forth smoke and fire to impress the assembled public, a round sundial divided into twelve *devetas* (hours?), and two enormous water cauldrons for fighting fires. Since all the pavilions were made of wood, these cauldrons were always kept full of water. They date from the Ching Dynasty, which began in the middle of the 17th century and were originally gold-plated, but the invading forces of the 19th century scraped away the gold in their looting and destructive campaigns. These containers stand about a meter high and have a handle on each side in the shape of a lion's head with a ring in its mouth. We also saw this motif, which looks so Italian to us, on the doors of the Han tombs, dating back 2,000 years.

The Hall of Perfect Harmony served as a kind of antechamber to the Hall of Supreme Harmony, and here the emperor performed minor ceremonies such as examining the seeds and implements before the planting. Here he also donned his ceremonial robes before entering the main hall, and the sedan chair used to carry him about in the Forbidden City is kept here. In China there were many very young emperors, who were only five or six years old when they ascended the throne. The high officials would tell them what to do and say during the coronation.

Next we visited the Hall of Preserving Harmony where the Imperial Examinations were held. These examinations, the most important in the country, being the springboard to high position at court or in administration, bestowed on the successful candidates the title of Scholar. The Palace Examinations were the final stage in the three-phase countrywide tests. The number of entrants, and their ages, varied from year to year as there were no age limits. Old men as well as young could apply. The exam lasted three days and three nights, the results being announced in this Hall. Sometimes those who failed committed suicide from shame.

Some of the side rooms of this palace display birthday gifts and household items of the imperial household — table services, wine bowls of jade and gold, jewelry, imperial robes. One of the most unusual items was a mat woven of tiny uniform slivers of ivory, alongside an enormous jade carving weighing five tons. Other jade carvings featuring dragons in ocean waves and mountains represent a Chinese saying: “May your happiness be as wide as the Eastern Sea and your age as high as South Mountain.” Also many statues of Buddha are on display because the Ming and Ching emperors were Buddhists.

We were also impressed with the Dragon Pavement, an enormous marble carving in the middle of the staircase. We saw this form of decoration in many places, but this particular one was outstanding because of its size. It was 16 meters long, three meters wide, and almost two meters thick, and weighed more than 200 tons. The motif was nine dragons in many clouds. Nine is the highest odd single-digit number, and nine also symbolizes longevity, so the dragon not only symbolizes the emperor, but also his supreme power.

The single slab was transported from Fonshan County, about 100 kilometers away, over ice. In the winter they dug a well and carried the water every 500 meters. They spilt the water on the road and when it froze, they could slide the stone over the ice despite its weight.

In our walk through the grounds, we couldn't help noticing the beautiful pebble paths, which were laid out in intricate designs and a variety of colors — much finer than those we saw yesterday in the Summer Palace. We visited the private quarters of the Empress Dowager, and heard how this tyrannical Empress Ci Xi rose from being a concubine of the fifth rank by virtue of bearing the emperor his only son. This son became the emperor but died quite young. Ci Xi shared imperial power with the emperor's wife, but eventually she poisoned her, thus becoming the sole, formidable ruler of the country for over 40 years. She died in 1908.

Finishing our tour at the residential palaces, we came out at the South Gate and returned to the hotel.

Well, we survived two and a half hours in the Forbidden City, sightseeing, listening, and looking. There's a great deal to look at. It must have been most splendid judging by

everything that we saw. Back at the hotel, we gazed window looking across at the view again. The weather had cleared, the sun was shining and we could see the red roofs of the Forbidden City. Now we could say that we had indeed been there and I thought that brings our visit to China to its formal end. The rest of the day would be anti-climactic. Tomorrow at one we will be off to Hong Kong. Everyone was quite exhausted.

Sunday evening, June 19

Just a few hours in Hong Kong and already our trip to China seems like a dream. It is incredible that we actually did it. Perfect timing, because I don't think the group could have held together much longer. Also, we were quite sated with sightseeing, museums and temples, not to mention shopping. And finally, the weather broke. Absolute torrents of rain fell in Peking this morning, and we felt lucky that we didn't have to do any outdoor sightseeing as we had done yesterday. In fact, we only had two days of rain during the whole trip.

We spoke to the boys at home and were glad to hear that everything is OK. We instantly felt relieved.

To recall the rest of our last day in Beijing, on Saturday afternoon, we visited the Historical Museum, situated on the left-hand side of the great square, opposite the Great Hall of the People. The Mao Mausoleum stands between these buildings, opposite the red reviewing standard, and is flanked on each side by an enormous Soviet-style sculpture, a realistic portrayal of the Chinese struggle for freedom. A pillar monument in front of the mausoleum honors the Chinese martyrs of all wars and revolutions. We were not taken to the mausoleum in spite of our requests, which definitely gave us the impression that Mao is being

downgraded. The presentation of modern history in the museum is slanted, of course, but even so, the exhibits from all periods, especially of ceramics and wooden machines of Chinese invention, were beautiful. The building is very grand and spacious, but again Rivka said that the very finest pieces had been taken away to foreign museums by the invading powers of the last century and to Taiwan by Chang Kai-shek.

In the evening, our last night in Beijing, we had our farewell banquet. It was a Peking duck dinner, but many other dishes were served as well, and everything was delicious. Although we shared a room with another group, divided by a screen, we had a very gay evening, with many speeches, much toasting and singing. Altogether, it was a very enjoyable conclusion to our Chinese adventure. We were only sorry that our assistant guide Miss Pan did not join us, which only proved to us that in modern China too, some people are less equal than others. We all felt very sympathetic toward Miss Pan, not only because she was a pleasant young lady, but also because we had discovered that her and her fiancé were not permitted to marry. Although they were the right age, 26 and 27, they were both still students and not yet independent.

One afternoon in Peking during a free hour, my husband made a brief foray to the Foreign Bookshop, which was just around the corner from our hotel. We have found such shops, larger or smaller elsewhere, when we have stopped, but (he told me) the one in Peking is really impressive. He returned with a big grin on his face. "Look what I found!" he called, and waved a book at me. I looked up and had to join in his laughter. *My First Sixty Years in China* by Sam Ginzburg, published in 1982.

So there were still Jews in China, in spite of the exodus in 1947–1948, and here was one telling his own story and the story of China in its most recent upheavals. How many more like him could there be?

It was some time before I actually had time to read the book. It is not great literature, but it is interesting because of the light it sheds on the life of Russian Jews in that part of the world at the turn of the century; because of the light it sheds on Europeans living in the international zones of China; because of its closeup view of daily life and historical events in China in the last forty years; and because it is the story of a Russian Jew who threw in his lot with the Chinese, married a Chinese woman and begat a Chinese family. But if Sam Ginzburg thinks he became completely assimilated, the title of his book belies this. A “first” 60 years portends a second 60 years, which together adds up to 120, and that is the span of the life of Moses and the traditional Jewish blessing, “until 120.”

It takes a while to readjust to “big city” life. We treated ourselves to a long-anticipated cheese platter and fruit for lunch (fresh pineapple salad) and it tasted fantastic. We slept in the afternoon, and then gave films to be developed and wandered a bit. We had a fish supper and real ice cream, again in the hotel. I then had a long, hot, relaxing bath, phoned the kids, and headed to bed.

The luxury of the Holiday Inn was welcome, but we missed the hot water thermos and tea of China. Who said Israelis are the world’s greatest tea drinkers? They can still learn from the Chinese. We also got used to seeing the people there up at 5:30 a.m. doing their gymnastics, and cycling to work at seven. Here nothing opens before nine and sometimes even ten. It was good that we started in Canton and left Peking to the last. We could have used another day or

two there so that we wouldn't have been under such pressure, but of what we saw and did before, there was really little that we could have given up. That day and a half we lost due to changed schedules on trains and planes would have been much appreciated.

Now that our trip to China is over, we have a feeling of satisfaction that we have seen all these wonderful places and that it all went so smoothly. We feel we have achieved something, something which seemed so problematical and difficult before we set out, and we're looking forward now to starting on our way back; we have a short break in Hong Kong, a visit to Katmandu, then Frankfurt and Jerusalem.

Thursday, June 23

We arrived in Katmandu, Nepal, yesterday lunchtime, after getting up at 4:45 a.m. Zipora traveled with us also, for this last week. We and many other people were astonished to find that Hong Kong Airport doesn't function before 7 a.m., and we barely had time for coffee before boarding. We'd stopped over at Dacca but were not permitted off the plane. In Katmandu Ruth Kariv and her driver met us at the airport.

It was very hot, about 33° C, and there was a drought. We checked in at the Sheraton and drove on to the Israel Embassy where Shaul Kariv, our neighbor in Jerusalem, is serving now as ambassador. It was very odd to sit down to lunch with Shaul and Ruth in Katmandu, yet altogether the atmosphere was very homey and pleasant. They were very solicitous, and Ruth appointed herself our official guide. In the afternoon she took us to the Swayambut or Monkey Temple. What filth! There were monkeys, dogs, chickens and raggedy children all over the place. Even the temples were dirty and neglected; though from the distance the stupa looked picturesque and was already familiar to us from China. One difference here was the

large eyes painted on the outside walls, which reminded us of the Eye of Horus in Egypt. We had dinner at the embassy and were early to bed.

This morning we woke up at about four but got up at 5:15 in order to make the Mountain Flight. The weather looked very dubious. It had rained during the night, and the sky was still overcast, but we had to go to the airport anyway, because of the regulations about cancellation. It was a very mixed crowd of mostly Indian, Chinese and Japanese. We hung around in the very simple waiting room until 7:30, when the powers-that-be finally decided that the skies were clearing up. When I saw the plane, I nearly changed my mind. It was an "Avro," a small two-propeller airliner for 40 passengers. In fact, the hour-long flight was quite comfortable; a bit too cloudy for good viewing, but we did see the Himalayas and Mt. Everest, and marvelous cloud formations.

Ruth joined us for breakfast and then we drove to Bakhtapur, or Badgheon. This is a very old village being restored with German help. The main parts looked clean and very picturesque, but the side streets and people are very dirty. Little girls carrying babies on their backs wanted to be paid for being photographed, and they were quite persistent in their efforts. This came as quite a shock after the cleanliness of China, particularly as there was no begging there and we were never pestered in the streets.

The government is trying to develop and re-establish cottage industries. We saw woodcarving, which copies old patterns from the fantastic windows and screen decorations on old buildings. There was also clothing from local textiles, but only a few shops were pleasant to enter. I saw a nice ivory-colored horse, but the shopkeeper wouldn't give a

reduction, and it was too expensive. Some bargaining is expected here, but it is not as bad as in Hong Kong.

There were many wells in the village squares, where laundry was being done, and people were washing themselves. One lady we saw was bare to the waist and quite oblivious of those around her. Suddenly we came into a crowded street, and heard music from a brass band. We found ourselves involved in a noisy wedding procession, in which the groom was going, in a highly decorated car, to fetch his bride to the ceremony.

There were Hindu carvings and brasses all over the place; Tantra art was different and new for us but so far we hadn't seen anything particularly new.

We visited the bead market in the old quarter of Katmandu, very colorful and attractive.

There is also a special Indian section which catered particularly to tourists from Pakistan, and that seemed to constitute the major part of their trade.

By now, we were all feeling very tired, certainly not as fresh as we were three weeks ago.

Friday, June 24

We left early for Pashatpatur. Ruth said we must get there before they performed too many cremations and the stench became too strong. Indeed, when we arrived just after nine and walked down to the river, we found one cremation in full progress, and the ashes of another already being strewn on the water. The river is a tributary of the Ganges, and therefore holy.

Every 20 meters or so, there is a concrete platform or *ghat* jutting over the river, and this is where the cremations take place. It was a rather shocking sight, as we could see the body clearly in the fire, and it took me quite a while before I could bring myself to look. We felt quite relieved that we didn't have to witness half a dozen or more such ceremonies. Not far from the burning pyre, children were swimming, women were doing laundry, and others were filling pitchers to take home.

Ruth explained that such cremations are not accompanied by religious rites, and indeed only one person attended to each pyre, probably the closest relative. Altogether, death is not a very sad occasion, because it is seen as a release of the spirit into another form of life.

Many stupas stood on the opposite bank, where we walked to get a view among the many monkeys, beggars, dogs, cows and crowds of people. Many were making a pilgrimage to the Hindu temple nearby, which we were forbidden to enter. Lots of family groups, very nicely dressed and in holiday spirit were carrying flower offerings to the temple. Altogether, it was quite an incredible sight.

We went on to visit the Tibetan refugee camp in Patan, which is well known for carpet making. They had a wide selection of rugs, traditional patterns worked in beautiful colors and designs, but strangely enough the workshop itself was in semi-darkness. We really wanted to buy, but we had too much overweight as it was to take anything more with, and air freight was too expensive. The people we spoke to were very anxious to hear about China.

We bought some batik pictures in a nearby craft shop and returned to the hotel for a rest. I had an upset tummy after last night's Indian dinner and the heat was quite wearing.

We went out to see the old town center, then on to Erev Shabbat dinner at the Karivs.

Saturday morning, June 25

The old town, which we saw yesterday, is full of temples and historic buildings and markets.

The narrow streets were crowded with shoppers and very noisy and colorful. Then we continued to the embassy where we met other Israelis serving in Nepal and had a very pleasant dinner.

In answer to our surprise at seeing the swastika and the Star of David used here so frequently, in temples and on buildings, Ruth made inquiries and was told that for the Hindu the swastika is a symbol of prosperity. Financial reports carry the symbol on the front page, and accountants use it on their statements. Later in New Delhi, when we visited the Birla Hindu Temple, we heard the same explanation and saw it also prominently displayed on a special pillar.

This six-pointed Star of David, or Magen David, symbolizes the goddess of learning, and is therefore used to denote schools and also as a decorative element in temples. The six points symbolize the points of contact man has with the world (through which he gains his knowledge), and some even see in the star a sexual symbol of perfect union. It would be interesting to know exactly how their star became the Jewish Star of David (which only dates back to the late 17th/early 18th century), but so far no one has succeeded in clarifying the connection.

This morning Ruth took us out to Dhulikhel, about an hour's drive. I had thought I should stay in the room and rest, but began feeling better as the day progressed. It was a beautiful drive up into the mountains, very dramatic scenery, and very sparsely populated, and we saw several families by the roadside washing in mountain springs. The little resort was new, built in motel-style, with a commanding view of the mountains on the Chinese border. It would have been very soothing to stay a day or two.

We returned to have lunch with Avi and Maggie, who live in a very nice little house. They are both at the embassy. Maggie also happens to be the sister of our chief distributor, David Marciano, so we brought special greetings to them. She prepared a very good meal but I was afraid to eat too much homemade pita, humus, fish and wonderful rice. After a long visit, I felt very weak and tired. We returned to the hotel and I slept three hours till 6:30 p.m. Then I discovered that Alex was sick, with very bad diarrhea and a temperature. Alex refused to let me call the doctor. I hoped he would feel better by tomorrow so we could continue as scheduled.

Frankfurt, June 28

We had thought that breaking up our return trip from Hong Kong would make for easier traveling. In fact, boarding planes in the middle of the night, and spending so much time and effort getting to and from airports was more tiresome than a long flight. Our visit to Nepal was marred by our tummy problems and similarly in New Delhi we suffered with insect bites and sleep deficit. In Frankfurt we made the mistake of feeling that we had to exploit the opportunity to see the town and we did not rest as much as we had planned. By then we were also anxious to get home as soon as possible, so real relaxation was impossible. At the same

time, I knew from past experience that there would be no chance to rest at home and one must pick up immediately where one left off — if no worse complications were waiting.

Nevertheless, it is with a feeling of great satisfaction that we look back on the travels and experiences of the last month, and wonder how long it will take before we will be ready to go off again! Even to China!