

Nov-1987

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## Recommended Citation

Street, Nancy L. (1987). Due to the Special Circumstances of China. *Bridgewater Review*, 5(2), 7-10.

Available at: [http://vc.bridgew.edu/br\\_rev/vol5/iss2/6](http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol5/iss2/6)

# Due To The Special Circumstances of CHINA...

BY NANCY LYNCH STREET

I first read the above title in the exchange program contract between Shanxi Teacher's University and Bridgewater State College. I pondered it for awhile, then dropped it. I would find out soon enough the "special circumstances of China." First, I had to get ready to go to China. Ultimately, the context of the phrase would enlighten me. During the academic year 1985-1986 I taught at Shanxi Teacher's University which is located in Linfen, Shanxi Province, People's Republic of China. Like the Chinese, I would soon learn the virtues of quietness and patience. I would listen and look and remember. Perhaps most important of all, I would make friends whom I shall never forget.

## FROM BEIJING TO LINFEN The Setting

The express train arrives in Linfen from Beijing in the early morning, around 8:30. One is always met at the train station if one is a foreigner. At least, during our tenure there we (the three exchange students and I) were met. This was in part a courtesy and in part because Linfen was, until February of 1986, a "closed" city. Closed, that is, to foreigners. Thus, it was not until we had family and friends visit from home that we saw other foreigners in the city of Linfen. On a daily basis, we were the only westerners in the city. To many of Linfen's 250,000 inhabitants we were curious creatures, too pale and with big noses. Shanxi province is in central China and prior to liberation (1930's and early 1940's) had been occupied by the Japanese. Following Liberation in 1949, the Chinese people in Shanxi had seen a few Russians, but prior to 1980, very few Westerners had entered the province. Linfen cannot be reached by plane and foreigners do not generally drive outside of the major cities; when traveling by car, foreigners hire Chinese drivers, for reasons which become obvious when one is in China. Thus, Linfen is primarily accessible by train. Located in a basin surrounded by mountains, Linfen housed a rather large community of political and academic exiles during the

Cultural Revolution. Seventeen hours by train north to Beijing, eight hours south to Xi'an (home of the clay warriors found in the tomb of the Emperor Ching Shi Huang, first emperor of China), Linfen is thought to be an ancient capital of China (Yao Dynasty). In the twentieth century it is a thriving industrial city and agricultural center in Shanxi province. Currently, Linfen is also the site of the only teacher's university in the province, Shanxi Teacher's University.

In this article, I want to focus on my understanding of "the special circumstances of China" as they relate to the evolution of education from the late 19th century to Liberation in 1949. I have attempted to discuss this aspect of Chinese life/history elsewhere and found it largely unintelligible to audiences unless they have some knowledge of certain demographic and political considerations. So it is with demographics and a general history that I will begin. I will briefly review the social, political and military chaos in this century in China prior to liberation. Following this, I will develop the educational perspective, utilizing Wang Shiqings' *Biography of Lu Xun* and the oral history given me by Shanxi Teacher's University Party Secretary Guo Pu, as well as data collected from my students there. This approach is created through the historical-critical method,

from personal observations here and abroad; and finally, from days and weeks of talk and gathering oral history from students, colleagues and friends.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SETTING The Land and The People

China is slightly larger in land mass than the United States. This includes, in addition to mainland China, the territories of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Mainland China has a population of well over a billion people (approximately 1,038,000,000). Population density is 280 persons per square mile. There are fifty-five minority groups but the primary population group (94%) is the Han.

Only a small percentage of the people (approximately 50 million) live in the seven major cities. This is important to note as much of the information we receive from China regarding its living conditions, political developments and other vital data occurs and arises out of these cities—where only a small portion of the population dwells.

Thus, nearly a billion persons live outside of these cities—and outside of these cities life is considerably different than what we view on the nightly news or in documentaries, from which we tend to glean our impressions of China. Real life in China is not in the "living color" of TV. In my experience, China tends to be dusty

brown, dotted with green terracing in the countryside. In towns and cities, the blue, army green and black clothing of the citizenry dominate the landscape.

Outside the cities, two-thirds of the land is mountainous or desert land dotted with tiny villages and small towns devoted primarily to agriculture. The cities are fed by these communities. Traveling by train from Beijing to Linfen or from Linfen to Kunming, one is overwhelmed by the vastness of the land, the scarcity of good soil and the clever, tenacious development of the land through the endless and circuitous terracing which utilizes every inch of ground to feed China's one billion plus people.

Looking at the map, you will see that China has many neighbors. To the north is Mongolia; to the northeast and northwest, the USSR; to the west are Afghanistan and Pakistan; to the northwest is North Korea. To the south, China is bounded by India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Laos and Vietnam. The geography and proximity of neighbors suggest, at least in part, why both China and the USSR have strong standing armies. During the university's five-week break I traveled to Kunming, a lovely old city in the South—and just a few hours from the on-going border war zone. According to an army officer with whom I shared a train compartment for awhile, Kunming is the last supply center for the front lines. In Kunming itself, there was no hint of this. Instead (China is always ambiguous), I saw the Buddhist faithful from Nepal and Mongolia come to worship at the ancient Buddhist temples of Kunming, which I too had come to see.

## GOVERNMENT AND IDEOLOGY

Mainland China is divided into twenty-two provinces, five autonomous regions and three cities: Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin. These cities are directly under the central government. The central government is located in Beijing (formerly Peking). China is a socialist country under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The country has operated under this system since the liberation in 1949. The organs through which the people exercise state power are the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at various levels. The National People's Congress is elected for a term of five years. Under normal circumstances, it holds one session each year. Power in Chinese society is vested in a number of offices and the Communist Central Committee. As I write this, the

Chairman of the People's Republic of China is Li Xiannian, Zhao Ziyang is Premier and Deng Xiaoping is head of the Military Commission and Chairman of the Consultative Committee for the CCP.

The General Secretary of the Party has changed in the past few months in response to the student demonstrations in December 1986. Formerly the General Secretary was Hu Yaobang. Premier Zhao

## The odyssey of Jian Zhen, eminent monk of the Tang Dynasty, is captured in these woodcuts brought back from China by Professor Street



*Jian Zhen, with his followers in Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province. At the Daming Temple.*

Ziyang now acts as both Premier and General Secretary. (His actual title is: The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party).

As to ideology, the Chinese remain committed to Marxist principles. During his 1982-1983 African tour to enhance Sino-African relations, Premier Zhao Ziyang announced the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" first articulated by former Premier Zhou Enlai. These principles serve as the basis for Chinese foreign policy. They are as follows:

First, we all oppose imperialism, colonialism and racism; second, we all oppose big power's domination over small countries and their power politics; third, we all stand for the preservation of world peace; fourth, we all stand for strengthening unity among the third world countries; fifth, we all deem it

necessary to reform the unjust, unreasonable old international economic order...; (*Beijing Review Foreign Affairs Series*, 1983, p. 10).

In addition, Chinese policy, as formulated by the CCP asserts, "We shall never seek hegemony, not in any circumstances." This viewpoint is not merely for international consumption, but is the view articulated by the ordinary Chinese layperson, discussing China's past and future over tea in his/her home in Linfen or Beijing.



*Although the monks had earlier persuaded him to remain at home, the monk Jian Zhen thought it over and decided he must try once again. In 748 A.D., together with the Japanese monks Rong Rui and Pu Zbao and thirty-five sailors, Jian Zhen set sail for Japan. Hoping to avoid the perilous waters encountered in other voyages, they first sailed south, rather than north. Reaching Hainan Island near the south of mainland China after drifting for fourteen days, Jian Zhen and the others thought they had reached Japan. They realized their mistake, but travel being difficult in those days, were forced to remain on Hainan Island for one year before setting sail to China.*

## HISTORIES Literary and Oral

### *The Biography of Lu Xun*

*The Biography of Lu Xun* (1880-1936) aids one in understanding the educational system prior to the revolutionary twentieth century. In *The Biography of Lu Xun*, author of *The True Story of Ah Q* and other famous literary works, we learn the following about education in China.

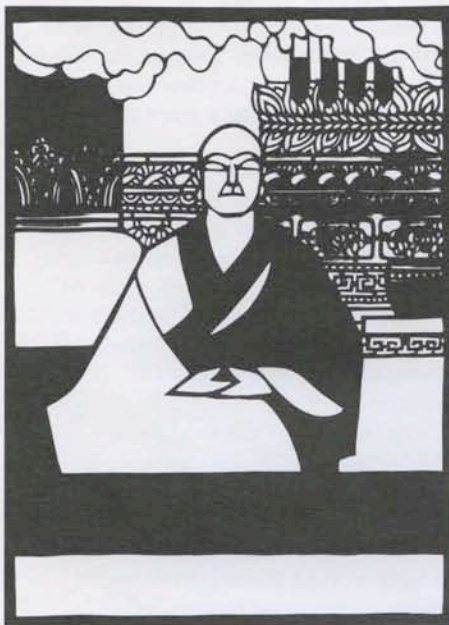
Children fortunate enough to go to school learned the works of Confucius and Mencius. Small children also read and memorized a small book called the *Rhymed History* (written by Wang

Shiyun in the Qing dynasty). An example of primary school material:

In the beginning was Pan Gu,  
Born of primeval void:  
He was the first to rule the world,  
The chaos to divide.

This is the Chinese version of the creation myth. In addition, students at the Three Flavour Study would also study the *Hundred Surnames*, *Poems on Child Prodigies* and the *Five Confucian Classics*:

*I Ching* or *Book of Changes*;  
*Shu Shing* or *Book of History*;  
*Shih Shing* or *Book of Odes*, or *Book of Poetry*;



Jian Zhen spent several months in Canton. Finally realizing that his task was hopeless, he decided to return to Yangzhou. However, before he could return to Yangzhou, he contracted an illness. Jian Zhen's grief over the death of his faithful companion, coupled with the blazing heat of China's southland caused him to become prey to this illness. Developing difficulty with one eye, he sought doctors and medication. Despite diligent treatment, Jian Zhen lost his eyesight in both eyes.

*Li Chi* or *Book of Rites* or *Rituals*; and  
*Chun Chiu* or *Spring and Autumn*  
*Annals*.

Students would also study the *Four Books of Confucius*: the *Great Learning*; the *Doctrine of the Mean*; the *Analects of Confucius*; and the *Book of Mencius*.

At the Three Flavour Study where Lu Xun studied in the latter part of the 19th century, boys started school at age six. In those days and prior to Liberation, the position of women in China was none too good. Most were not educated and of course, women of a certain class had bound feet—a phenomenon which one

can still see in the streets of Linfen as very old women struggle to and from market on once-bound "lily" feet.

There were ten boys in Lu Xun's class at the Three Flavour Study. Tuition fees were set at two yuan (about 66 cents in 1986) a solar term (about a fortnight). Passages from the texts were memorized and recited aloud, as they are today to a certain extent. This would then be followed by a lesson in calligraphy. A fortunate child might study at such an institution for six years. Following this, if



Then Jian Zhen and his followers spent over a month adrift in the sea. Finally, they reached the southern coast of Japan. From there they proceeded to the capital of Japan, where they were greeted with delight by officials and monks. These official welcomers put up thousands of lanterns to welcome Jian Zhen as the Chinese envoy of the Buddha in Japan.

monies and/or influence were available, the deserving child might be admitted to the middle schools primarily run by westerners/missionaries. At these schools, students were taught a mixture of classical Chinese curriculum and western thought, to include other languages. Graduation from middle school might mean that the child could go on to university. I should point out that Lu Xun went to school in a relatively more stable time than the early 20th century when Mao and other revolutionary leaders were in school. Then and now, books from the west were in short supply in China, so if one wanted to learn western ideas, one had to go to a western-run school, or go abroad to school as did Sun Yat-sen, Zhou Enlai, Den Xiaoping, Chen Yi and others.

The mixed bag of influences which ran

amok in China for the first half of the twentieth century created confusion, violent disruption of ordinary life, chaos, and ultimately, new directions in educational curriculum.

Intellectuals/revolutionaries had a powerful effect on the course of China's evolution to liberation. Looking back one sees that two distinct and opposing western ideologies contributed to the general confusions exacerbated by the Japanese occupation, the warlords and remnants of the Qing Dynasty. Nonetheless, during the long struggle in China, lasting for nearly forty years, Chinese students fortunate enough to attend school even sporadically, were educated utilizing many of the materials studied by their fathers before them. Depending upon which force was occupying a person's village or province at the time, e.g., Japanese or CCP, the curriculum was adapted to incorporate the prevailing ideology of the occupying force. The following case study summarizes for me "the special circumstances of China."

While at Shanxi, I asked for permission to interview the leaders in the University's hierarchy. I was given permission and interviews were set up and interpreters provided for me. What follows is the interview I conducted with Party Secretary Guo Pu, shortly before he retired from his post at Shanxi Teacher's University. The story which he told me illustrates, better than I can state, the impact of the social, political and military struggles upon education during the Party Secretary's lifetime. This oral history also demonstrates what I heard everywhere I went: the strong commitment of the Chinese people to education and to the material and spiritual prosperity of their country.

#### GUO PU: SECRETARY Shanxi Teacher's University

As one Chinese remarked to me "Guo Pu is a living legend—my story cannot compete with his." Guo Pu was born in 1918 in Lin Shi County, Shanxi Province, just two hours from Linfen by train, and started school in 1924 (during the short era of cooperation between the Goumindang and the CCP). He attended school intermittently from 1924 to 1936. Under the Nationalist government of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, he studied the books of Confucius and Mencius, as had his ancestors before him.

In this period, western influence was clearly felt in the education of an ordinary Chinese boy. After the Japanese invasion,

he had to give up school and had no middle school. He began teaching primary students and continued his studies on his own. From 1936 to 1939 Guo Pu worked as an elementary school teacher, studying and teaching in a normal school. In this enterprise he had the aid of two other young villagers. They worked at such subjects as psychology for elementary students, pedagogy for normal school teachers and teaching methods. With the full force of the Japanese invasion and occupation in 1937, education turned into national defense education. Students were urged to join the battle against invaders for love of country.

In 1939, the Communists urged people to join the 8th route army which grew out of the Red Army and was under the leadership of the CCP. Guo's role as an educator was needed by the Red Army as they set up schools wherever they went. At that time, China was divided into three distinct areas: Bases for revolutionary people (CCP), Guerrilla areas, Enemy occupied areas.

The Japanese were short of manpower and tended to occupy the cities. The Communists, following Mao Zedong's plan, occupied the countryside. Eventually, they would surround the cities and take them. Guo joined the Red Army and continued to work as an educator. Now his employer was not the Guomindang but the Chinese Communist Party. He worked for the revolution. In addition to teaching his regular classes, he taught revolutionary cadres at night.

From 1940 to 1945 Guo worked in this capacity. He was a section leader in charge of education in the Lingshan area. He taught courses in politics and in the fundamentals of guerrilla warfare. The aim of the education was broad. It was meant to educate the people and make them more politically conscious. The education was for young and old alike. The schools were also moveable schools. Everyone carried guns and when they left an area, they left land mines behind for the approaching enemy and also captured spies as they moved. Guo's students who finished in this school (some 300 persons) often went on to school in Shanghai and in Sichuan province. Many later became party leaders.

Guo Pu was then assigned to Yuancheng where there were two regiments of enemy soldiers. The Communists were short of manpower in this area and had only a few guerrilla fighters. His job was to train more. (Note: the Red Army was fighting its way

through China during this period of time. Most of the "guerrilla fighters" were peasants who joined the Communist forces and many were uneducated. One of Guo's tasks was to train them as best he could in literacy in a short time, while also turning them into guerrilla fighters.)

From 1945 to 1947, Guo Pu was a Political Commissar. With aid his area was finally liberated (from the Japanese and the Guomindang). In Party Secretary Guo's opinion, the "democratic revolution" aimed at two things: "to drive the invaders out of China; and to be rid of semi-feudal institutions." The Party Secretary says, "On the whole, leadership has been and is correct, and what's more we don't deny we have taken a twisted road in the process. In 1978 (following the Cultural Revolution), at the 3rd Plenary Session, we came to realize the appropriate road is Chinese type socialism. Under the guidance of this principle, production in agriculture and industry has been developed and people's lives have been improved and things are politically stable."

Asked his personal views of the Chinese direction, Guo responded: "Forty-six years ago I joined the party. I am only an ordinary party member but also a Party Secretary and of the same rank academically as a Chancellor (in the university system). At 21 I joined the party. To tell the truth, I joined only after learning the theories of Marx and party practice. With revolutionary practice I came to believe in the party fundamentally. I believe that without the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party there would have been:

1. No anti-Japanese Party;
2. No victory over the Guomindang;
3. No new China;
4. No modernizations; and
5. No Guo (me) in such a position.

(Laughter)

He then added, "Before 1936, I did not really understand the Party. But I saw with my own eyes that the CCP cared about people."

Discussing the role of the party in the university system, Guo Pu asserts that the party pays more attention to the ideological education of the students and to the cultivation of political consciousness. This is to help bring about correct ideals and cultivate discipline. "We try to help them be conscientious and disciplined ideologically and in their studies." I then asked the Party Secretary about the aims and goals of this institution. He replied "the main task is to reinforce

the middle schools in this province."

Continuing, Guo Pu said, "Education is the key to the four modernizations\*. The key to success lies in our fine faculty members. We realize the close relationship between the achieving of the four modernizations and education for our youth. We are aimed at raising the whole nation's cultural level. To be more exact, if we have enough qualified teachers our educational program will be a success and that success will aid in achieving the four modernizations. The task is a strategic one."

With time running out, I then inquired what the Secretary was most interested in; what were his personal goals? He replied, "I believe in communism, patriotism and internationalism. I expect that we will achieve the four modernizations and that this success will make a great contribution to the entire world.

We think that there are three steps in achieving our goal: 1. By the end of this century, our national agricultural output will be twice what is now. At that time, our people will be better off. 2. By 2020, the standard of living will be the same as that for middle level persons in developed countries. 3. By 2049, the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, our nation will be classified into the highest level as a strong socialist country with a high culture and high material status."

Concluding, the Party Secretary said: "I have worked in accordance with a quotation from our famous writer Lu Xun: 'You should have a deep hatred for the enemy and should work as an ox for the people.' " ■

\*The comprehensive modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology before the end of the century.



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