

鐵
樹
開
花

Ross Terrill

**Flowers
On An
Iron
Tree**

FIVE CITIES
OF CHINA

AN IRON TREE

Five Cities of China

ROSS TERRILL

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To my mother

FLOWERS ON AN IRON TREE

The Chinese saying 鐵樹開花 conveys the idea of a rare or marvelous happening. Kwangsi province produced a short, purplish tree, with very hard wood; it was known as an iron tree. People said it bloomed only once every sixty years, so a flower on an iron tree was a remarkable thing.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

We have shaken off the idea of China as a threat to America. We can look at Chinese life on its own terms and for what it may have to offer. One-quarter of mankind, perched on the earth as we are, grappling with problems that bother many lands.

China's solutions to problems are often novel. We finally learned that because China is different from us does not make it a threat to us. But because the Chinese are no threat does not mean their way of life is the same as ours.

Flowers on an Iron Tree offers work and play in five cities of an elusive land which has two of the world's seven most populous cities.

There are nations, like the United States, which have depth, with numerous cities of substance widely scattered. There are other nations, like France, where each nerve seems hooked up to a key center. On the whole China is of the first kind; it has depth. After a visitor thinks he has seen the essence of the nation, China can throw before him a dozen fresh cities. Even urban China is a rainbow of diversity.

Why do I give you these five cities; not others, not the countryside? Urban China is the cutting edge of tomorrow's China. And I happen to be an escapee from a village boyhood who feels at ease in cities. I went to these five and liked them. I found that the face, style, and business of each differs in intriguing ways from the others.

Shanghai is China's New York. Dairen is a kind of Seattle, damp and sparse and on the fringes. Hangchow as a pool of beauty's self-indulgence might raise a bid from San Francisco. Wuhan is an inland giant that answers to Chicago. In the mirror of Peking an American might make out the features of Washington.

These cities are big. Their combined population exceeds that of the five U.S. cities mentioned. But they are not "advanced"; their fine points are not ours. China is poor as well as vast. A Chinese home has

no phone, car, fridge, TV, or washing machine. Gadgets stop at an electric radio and a bicycle. A Shanghai family may be saving up for a transistor radio, or have its eye on a second bicycle as a U.S. family eyes a second car.

The monthly income of a couple is around a hundred yuan, one-third of which goes on food. It is hard to put a real value on the yuan, which can be changed for just over fifty U.S. cents. A family of four need spend only twelve yuan (U.S. \$6.25) for a month's rest, school fees, health care, entertainment, and transportation. Yet in the pursuit of luxuries the yuan is a snail. A TV would take four months of the couple's wages, a car just cannot be bought, nor may goods be ordered from abroad.

The United States used to bare its fangs at China because Peking was the sponsor of an "unstable" world. Today China seems an island of stability in a post-1973 world of energy crisis, monetary mess, shaky morale. China has no inflation, exports oil, feeds herself. She leans on almost no cultural resources other than her own, has no troops abroad to snarl her up in far-off fights.

China has its tensions, mainly different from the kind we have. People are not gnawed by economic insecurity, but personal hopes and values come up against Communist Party priorities. Where the United States is strong — its political system allows for change within settled rules — China is weak.

I give you five exposures of the Chinese people in their setting. No balance sheet is drawn up. I am Australian enough to be oblique rather than frontal. I try to show you China rather than aspire to tell you what to conclude about China.

I have found that to learn more about the diverse universe which is China is to become cautious about summing up the whole. This book is not a bullhorn, but a window; here are glimpses, facts, conversations, which will speak to you for themselves.

TERMS AND NAMES

CCP	Communist Party of China
CYL	Communist Youth League
catty	one-half kilogram, about 1.1 pounds
<i>dong bei</i>	northeast China (once known as Manchuria)
fen	a hundred fen make one yuan
Five Anti Movement	campaign in early 1950s against businessmen who practiced bribery, tax evasion, stealing state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing economic secrets from the state
the “four olds”	traditional customs, habits, culture, and social thought, against which the Cultural Revolution was aimed
Great Leap Forward	accelerated drive toward socialism begun in the spring of 1958, only partially successful
July 21 College	factory-based school named after Mao’s statement on education of July 21, 1968
Liberation	the revolution of 1949
May Fourth Movement	nationalistic cultural and political upsurge started by students in 1919
neighborhood	subdivision of a city district

TERMS AND NAMES

PLA	People's Liberation Army (all branches of the military)
PRC	People's Republic of China
residents' area	a section of a neighborhood
revolutionary committee	standard term since the Cultural Revolution for the administrative leadership of any unit, from province down to factory or school
south China	generally means south of Yangtze River
<i>taipan</i>	("big boss"), foreign businessman in treaty ports
yuan	about fifty U.S. cents

CHINESE WORDS

Most Chinese place-names are translated into English, to give the reader a sense of the name as it rings in a Chinese ear.

Chinese words are sometimes given in parentheses after the English, to enable a reader who knows Chinese to check my translation, or to help identify a name or saying.

In romanizing Chinese words I use *pin-yin wen-zi* (the PRC's phonetic system) for common speech and local place-names; Wade-Giles (an older system) for historical names, people, and places already well known in their Wade-Giles form; Wade-Giles also in the note on sources, since most libraries use this older system.

In a few cases the name of a local interviewee is fictitious, either because it was not recorded or because permission to use it was not sought or granted, and in one case the name of a neighborhood is fictitious (pp. 179 ff.).

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SHANGHAI

上海

AMONG GREAT CITIES OF THE WORLD Shanghai is not blessed with beauty of setting. Its name means "to the sea" but the city is not within sight of the sea. It is built on a mud flat close to the estuary of the Yangtze River. No hill or dale gives Shanghai an angle on itself; no nearby forest lends respite from the urban array. Its only natural wonders are a couple of dirty rivers. Shanghai owes little to nature, everything to quirks of modern history, and to a key location at the edge of the Yangtze Valley.

Come to Shanghai from another part of China, and the pulse quickens, for here is the hubbub of the biggest nation's biggest city. The measured ways of Peking are absent from this metropolis of action. By China's standards the Shanghainese step briskly; few traditions from a distant yesterday intrude upon the rhythm of today. There is none of the languidness of serene Hangchow; the Shanghai smile comes and goes with shutterlike speed. The city lacks the spaciousness of Dairen, for inner Shanghai alone packs in 5.7 million people. At the same time, external bustle has not robbed the smooth and voluble Shanghainese of style.

Approaching the city by water you leave the quick yellow waves of the Yangtze and turn south into the Whangpu River, Shanghai's muddy path to the Pacific. You meet Shanghai at its vital entrails, the docks. Gliding past the outskirt town of Woosung, your ship comes upon a geometry of wharves on both sides of the Whangpu.

Railway yards and belching chimneys lie in the background. Fewer farms are visible than when tourist ships called at old Shanghai, giving well-insulated European passengers glued to their portholes the nearest thing to a sight of a Chinese village on their itinerary. Industry's tentacles have taken a grip on the Whangpu. The low old straw ice-houses of the fishing organizations remain — ice taken off creeks in

winter is stored in them and used on fishing boats in summer — but they are dwarfed now on either side by hulks of steel and concrete.

Tankers, cargo boats, and bulk carriers of several dozen nations ply the water, though a good proportion bear the red and gold flag of China. What makes this port unusual among world ports is the endless scatter of sailing boats, emerging from side creeks to take advantage of the Whangpu current, nipping around the liners like minnows among pike.

Coming from the airport at Rainbow Bridge (Hong qiao) — to which French, Pakistani, Japanese, Swiss, and Ethiopian airlines now fly — the visitor sees first the flat lush market-garden suburbs to the west. Before the revolution the Rainbow Bridge area was an aristocratic hideaway, and the site of a golf course for foreigners tired of the clatter of the “Chinese” city.

In those days — when Pan Am and Northwest Orient airlines flew into Shanghai — the commercial airport was at Dragon Brilliance (Long hua), a southern neighborhood named after Shanghai’s one Buddhist pagoda. For a while Rainbow Bridge field was used exclusively by General Claire Chennault’s money-spinning airline, Civil Air Transport.

Rainbow Bridge became a battlefield when Communist forces reached Shanghai from the Yangtze in 1949. The Kuomintang commander suddenly withdrew from his artillery emplacements and pillboxes at its outer rim. He built a wooden fence at its inner rim — with timber sent from the United States — that would have been excellent had the Communists been armed with bows and arrows. When fighting erupted the nice foreign villas suffered so much ravage that few are now recognizable (government officials live in them). But Chiang Kai-shek’s concrete pillboxes still dot the vegetable plots of what is today a people’s commune.

Leaving the cream brick and glass airport building, you head downtown by crossing Sun Yat-sen Road, a ring road thrown around the city during the Great Leap Forward of 1958. The urban honeycomb of gray buildings and white-shirted crowds grows denser by the block; no surprise that this is now one of the world’s three most populous cities.

Abruptly one's course is halted at Shanghai's cool and open veranda, the Whangpu River. Here colorful boats replace dull buildings. White shirts no longer dart about but lean on the parapet, bent toward the yellow ripples.

A passenger may come in by train, either on the Nanking "Passenger Rapid" (*ke kuai*) from the northwest, or from the south via Hangchow. He arrives at what used to be Shanghai's slum area, North of the Watergate (Chapei). The gate was in Soochow Creek, which empties into the Whangpu from the west. North of the Watergate, sardine-packed, stretches in a long strip north of the creek. Adjacent on the eastern side is another crowded district, Mouth of the Rainbow (Hongkew).

You step off a train at Shanghai Station (formerly North Station) and sense the bubbling of a riot, so raucous and teeming is the panorama. Arriving travelers laden with bundles, babies, and birds clamor to get out of the ramshackle terminal, as those who have come to greet family or friends clamor to get in. There is always tumult and sweaty confusion.

Often there are tears as well, because the Chinese family is still a close-knit affair: tender partings when middle-school graduates depart for "reeducation" in the remote countryside; ebullient scenes when they return for a break or to enroll at college.

In North of the Watergate tens of thousands used to live under oil cans, matting, even newspapers pasted into a roof. Thousands had nowhere to live but the dirty alleys which punctuate the winding streets. Hundreds by the month died on the stinking pavement where they had battled to live.

Today parts of North of the Watergate are still a slum, but a cleaned-up slum. There are lanes which are mournful with flimsy houses of bamboo and boxwood. (These shacks have a picturesque name: "Dragons rolling on the ground.") But young trees sprout, water and gas are piped into the meanest home, children squat in the gutter studying books — all this is new since the Liberation of 1949.

Not all new are the scramble of street noises which grate on the foreigner but go unnoticed by most Chinese. More bicycle bells and radio loudspeakers echo in the street than before Shanghai turned red.