中國之路

CHINESE JOURNEY

The Republic Revisited

by

LESLIE HAYLEN

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CHAPTER I

THE BORDER

I FOUND myself shaking hands with a young Chinese man aged about twenty-six. He had a pleasant smile and strong white teeth in a porcelain-smooth and sun-tanned face. Despite the intense heat he was bare-headed. His black hair shone. His simple blue uniform—the cadre dress of a Chinese official—was spotless.

"Welcome to China, sir," he said. "Take the lower path and keep in line—it's easier for you that way. It's quite a walk to the station. Your train to Canton leaves in an hour. You have plenty of time for lunch."

It was as professionally calm and polite as that. I was inside the Bamboo Curtain. In China—New China. The young man carried my small brief-case and we chatted amiably as we went along. A grey bird with a black face, picking lazily at the wood on the railway sleeper, shouted something to us and flew back into China.

We toiled up the incline in the heat. The humidity was liquefying.

I began to probe, and felt a heel at making the gaffe common to all tourists who hear good English, well spoken, in unexpected places: "Cambridge," I said, nodding towards him and indicating his accent. "Shanghai Mission School," he replied—slowly, in the way the Chinese have of thinking three times before replying to a foolish or impertinent question. But his eyes were amused. "My teacher was a Cantabrian," he said.

I began to sweat. For some reason I thought of the joke about the two university men who met in darkest Hong Kong. They had an idea they had been at the same college of their Alma Mater back home. "Excuse me, old boy, aren't you 'Jesus'?" . . . "No, old chap, I'm 'Magdalen' myself . . . but haven't we met before?"

It was all so irrelevant. So was this manner of crossing the border at Hong Kong into China. I felt badly let down. Surely there should have been a rumble of thunder . . . a border skirmish at least! The propaganda against Red China was cracking up at the start. If this was the gateway to Gehenna it was extremely well organized—and exceptionally well mannered. Crossing from one world to another was like changing trains, and nothing else. This was like going from New South Wales to Victoria, but considerably less trouble. I had so hoped for an "incident". There ought to have been at least a whiff of grape-shot to mark my entry into China.

Back home in Australia, I remembered, not so long ago, a visit to China had been called a "pilgrimage of shame" by some excitable and ill-informed people. Against the day when I should need it, my great-aunt Louisa had begun a novena for me. At the airport, in a loud and penetrating voice she had stilled the noise of the propellers by shouting a final warning as the plane took off: "Don't eat a thing before you wash it in permanganate of potash—Condy's, you know! We have a well-informed press on China!" Auntie subscribed to a magazine called *China's Teeming Millions*—or something resembling that. She knew the score! Louisa would hold off the Reds with all the resources of religion and the family medicine-chest. B, for Bowels, was the first letter in Aunt Louisa's alphabet on travel.

As we crossed into China I felt that now I must drop the Aunt Louisas of the Australian scene and see what I could for myself, without any preconceived idea of what constituted sin—and what conversely was the "blood of the lamb".

An Indian professor—dark, austere, and dedicated—joined us. He was explaining to his wife some point which didn't seem to interest her at all. A Burmese Buddhist priest marched beside me, head down, hands clasped, praying. His yellow habit was like a well-washed buttercup.

"I told you to get yourself a fan," said the professor's wife to her husband. "You'll have to come to it sooner or later." She fanned herself vigorously.

I thought, Doesn't anybody speak Chinese here?

The gold thread in her black sari burned in the heat, like

the sputnik in a dark sky. She was still chiding her absent-minded husband about not getting a fan when another figure loomed up beside me. It was the unmistakable bulk of Richard Hughes, Australian journalist, war correspondent, and a ruling and competent authority on China since the liberation. Against his height and size the small black fan he was threshing in front of his face looked like a humming-bird in flight.

"You really must get one of these," he said. "Indispensable." He passed on with the sure and certain tread of the Old China Hand in his natural and proper setting. He was on his way to Peking and the opening of the National Congress.

The whole affair began to look like Back to King's Cross Week—there were so many people one knew. I saw a famous Australian athlete, and learnt that he was on his way to Moscow for a youth festival. He wore white shorts, and his red head towered above the crowds. A pretty Chinese girl with an emphatic slit in her skirt passed by him modestly, with a quiet smile, indicating in the most pleasant way imaginable that he wasn't the only one who could show a leg. A Sydney parson, a padre I knew well, was taking movies. Nobody seemed to care, though taking photographs was forbidden, we had been told. A group of women from Sydney and Melbourne, a peace group, mostly workers' wives, seemed to have dropped in from nowhere. It was as if they had just picked up their shopping-bags and set out round the world looking for peace. There was something pretty grand about them. One of them, whom I knew, shouted to me, "*Ho ping wan sui!* (Ten thousand years of peace!)" "Or properly," said the Indian professor, leaning over my shoulder, "ten thousand years of non-war."

The reason for the home-town atmosphere at the border is the generosity of the Chinese Government in inviting delegations to China. Peace delegations, Church delegations, trade delegations, union delegations, press delegations, medical delegations, writers' delegations, all flock into China and all come in through the Hong Kong door—that is, if they do not come in through the Ulan Bator door from Moscow, the Delhi door from India, the Peking door or the Shanghai door.

China has many doors. They are all open. Wasn't it Chou

En-lai at Bandung who said, "Come and see"? We might not trade with China, but plenty of us seem to be dropping in for a chat.

The Chinese constitutionally couldn't sustain an Iron Curtain. The idea would amuse them. As it is, the Bamboo Curtain is tied back tastefully with two pieces of red ribbon, and there is the Chinese equivalent of "welcome" on the mat. For people with something to hide they seem to be extremely careless. Delegations are everywhere in China. In Peking "delegation" is a recognized collective noun in any language. One European delegate reported excitedly that he had just seen a delegation of dromedaries outside the Forbidden City. A delegation of doves—the Picasso dove of peace—is a common sight in that fair city.

While I was in Peking I came down to breakfast at the Peking Hotel with a delegation of living Buddhas from Lhasa. I also had breakfast at the same hotel with a delegation of young Indonesian workers who wore red fezzes and multicoloured Japanese shirts. They hadn't heard of the problem of West New Guinea. They were as friendly and cheerful as my local Rugby League club on visitors' night—and as boisterously young.

Back to the border. The big friendly English officer who handed me my passport as I left British territory had set the main. "You are going to have an interesting trip, sir. Quite an itinerary." He sounded wistful. His assistant sergeant, with Wigan written all over his homely face, said nothing, but he eyed me with a certain remote distaste—I was just another bleedin' tourist. The Chinese boy on the bridge over the creek which is the border held a Bren gun. His opposite number, on the other side of the creek, a Britisher, also held a gun—apologetically, as part of the scenery. The Chinese soldier looked bored and wore sandshoes. The English boy was sweating in the heat. Moisture dappled the jacket of his drill uniform. Even his eyes were sweating.

Everything seemed well organized. Special attention was paid to inoculations, and if these were not in order there were medical officers on the spot to do the job. Many people wore

gauze masks over their mouths, for Asian flu was raging. Subsequently I found no trace of it in China, the largest part of Asia.

People were conversing in a variety of languages. Suddenly the welkin was split by the most English voice outside of television: it was the English colonel—in mufti, of course—who was going back to see the China he had served in thirty years ago. I'd met him on the train from Kowloon.

He addressed the world in general: "My luggage! I shouldn't have trusted those coolies with my luggage! Those red-caps made off. I shouldn't be surprised if they have gone off with it or something. Didn't tip them, either . . . didn't give me time: off like a shot with my big cabin trunk. Hardly lift it myself. . . . Extraordinary!"

Our guide said, "Your luggage is all right, sir. It's already at the station. No one steals anything in China. There is no need to tip the porters—they are paid wages, and tips are forbidden by their union."

The colonel took it on the chin. "I see what you mean. Haven't heard of anybody being paid wages in China. The coolies, I mean. They just sort of scrambled for it. I only hope it's all right." Then apologetically, "Always seem to be leavin' my luggage."

The colonel's wife, a tall blonde Englishwoman, smiled at us all with the don't-mind-him smile of the dutiful wife. "Don't fuss, Lionel," she said. "It's too damned hot." She threw a tired look at her excitable little martinet of a husband and toiled up the slope beside him. "And don't call them coolies, dear. It's forbidden."

The colonel snorted.

She spoke a word or two to the Chinese boy, who replied, "We speak Mandarin officially. But in Canton it is hard to be understood. I'm a bit of a foreigner there myself. I come from Tientsin."

"Never spoke anything but Chinese myself," said the colonel. "Everybody understood what I wanted. All this dialect business is a lot of bosh. You compree *hun cha* (red tea)?" he said belligerently, addressing our escort.

"Yes, sir," the lad said obediently. "Very soon now. It will be waiting for you at the station."

"You see," the colonel said triumphantly, looking at his wife.

I began to like this Chinese boy. He was definitely holding his own.

The milling tourists were gradually brought under control. Passports were checked and given back to their owners. Cameras were found. "Me little black bag" or "the big tan-coloured portfolio" were located and put back into the hot and eager hands of their owners. The procession moved on into China.

I looked back the way we had come. The train which had brought us to the border was filling up with people who had come from China by the train which was to take us to Canton —over one thousand people a day cross the border on various errands and excursions. A European or two who had come out of China was talking to the boys of the Hong Kong press.

We were now climbing the gentle incline that leads to Shumchun station and China 'cross the bridge. Alongside us flowed the stream of Chinese people, most of whom were returning from visiting Hong Kong. All the wars of China have never been able to intimidate the Chinese and prevent them from their national pastime of visiting one another. So it was in Hong Kong. The authorities in China didn't think much of this occupation at first, but at last the government gave in, and under proper checks a permit isn't hard to get these days. Warlords, revolutions, floods, and earthquakes may ravage the face of China, but still the Chinese will throng the roads, jam the railways, crowd the river boats, take the air—if the money will stand it—to visit father, mother, brother, sister, cousin, uncle, or Auntie Liu. It's part of the social custom of a family worth a ten-yuan note to see how the other half of the family lives, wherever it lives. They visit at all ages, in all places.

It was a colourful group on Shumchun station. An old lady, brown as a lychee nut, squatted on the ground, resting beside two enormous baskets. The load was one to stagger a strong man, but this little brown crumb of a woman carried it fiercely, independently, and with pride.

"You can't 'liberate' some of the old ones," said our interpreter. "There are plenty of porters ready to help her."

The old lady smiled at the boy as though she understood his words. She was too far off to hear him.

"Patience and persuasion is necessary," he continued, as though reciting a lesson. "Everything she owns she has with her."

The old lady smiled again, and popped a lolly into her mouth from a store she had brought with her from Hong Kong.

The Chinese are short of sugar. Formosa was their big sugar province.

I moved closer and lifted the rush mat covering of the old lady's basket, the one nearest to me. Curiosity is not a crime in China. How true it was—what our interpreter had said: her home on her back. The basket was full of clothes and pots and household gear, and there was a brand-new enamel washing-dish with big pink lotus-flowers painted on it. A bolt of silk, a pair of strong boots from God knows what shop at Kowloon, and three pairs of plain black Chinese trousers with matching coats, the traditional garb of the respectable Chinese woman of 1900. There was also a red comb and a packet of American chewing-gum (contraband, sister, contraband!). I saw, too, a tiny image of the kitchen god, and the inevitable book of Chinese "comics".

I felt like a spy.

The old lady smiled and nodded towards the other basket. It was packed with what appeared to be parcels neatly wrapped and tied. Maybe they were presents for those back home. On top of the goods, which were covered by a straw mat, was a tiny bantam hen, bedded down in a small straw-filled box fixed firmly in position by the parcels. The bantam was sitting on a dozen tiny eggs, and protested at the intrusion as the old lady lifted her gently to let me see the hatching eggs. Beside the hen was a bantam rooster. The old boy's legs were tied neatly and firmly with string so that there should be no overt act before mother and the expected babes were safely back on the farm.

The inevitable Chinese boy came up, observed the scene.

He was eating something out of a paper bag. He laughed and walked off.

"Will China go Russian?" asked a leading article in a Hong Kong paper I had read at breakfast-time that day.

The old lady popped another lolly into her mouth and smiled at me again. I'm not sure she didn't wink.

The Chinese interpreter had been talking to the old lady. "She comes from a village outside Canton. She lost her husband and two sons in the war against Chiang Kai-shek or the Japanese war. She is not clear. There have been so many wars," said the boy wearily.

I offered my sympathy.

"When the heavens fall everybody gets crushed," said the woman simply, accepting my words with great dignity when they were translated to her.

It was then that I took my first good look at New China. The province of Kwangtung at this point is like a Breughel landscape. The green fields danced in the heat-haze of June. The small peaked hills stood up like a green gnome's castle in a picture-book. Away in the distance the mountains were smeared on the landscape with a smutty blue finger—indefinite, insubstantial, faintly unreal. In the fields close by the station, peasants ploughed behind their buffaloes without a glance at the scene round them. The new rice must go in as soon as the old crop ripened and was gathered. China needs more food—always. The land was waterlogged. I watched one man squelching behind his beast, the black mud turning sluggishly under the wooden plough. The buffalo reached the headland and turned tiredly to the next furrow. It was up to its hocks in soil and water, the black blood of China.

The soil tumbled reluctantly to one side. A quick shower of rain fell. Man and beast ploughed on. The sun came out again and the steam rose. The distant mountains disappeared in the mists, reappeared, faintly blue and unfinished, like a painting an artist had left for the time being. Nobody in the field had looked up. The ploughman spoke once to the buffalo when it stumbled. He could have been the original of Roy Campbell's poem "The Serf":

The timeless, surly patience of the serf
That moves the nearest to the naked earth
And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.

That's what I had come to see: how they had ploughed down palaces and thrones and towers and what they had put instead.

The interpreter was at my side explaining. The farmer worked the same way as his forebears had done for a thousand years. But he was now a member of a co-operative. He was expecting a new plough from the factory at Wusun any time now. Next year there would be a three-year-old buffalo to replace poor old Shensi, who was getting past things now. There was a basket of the new fertilizer which set the rice-stalk firm and solid and plumped the grain better than ever before. It also killed the water-mite which spotted the grain in the bud.

Meanwhile the farmer ploughed and ploughed. Ploughing rice into the bellies of his children; rice into the barns and the godowns; rice into the hungry north where there had been a famine; rice into the south-west where there had been a flood; rice into the economy of China.

In another field the ploughman's wife sowed the young rice—plant by plant—with infinite care and patience. Close-planting was the new technique. More rice for more hungry mouths. Her young son grazed the buffalo calf on the grass verge between the rice-paddies—sitting well back on the animal's rump and flicking it idly with a green willow stick when the young animal craned its neck and shot a hungry tongue towards the forbidden rice near by. The kid—like kids everywhere—couldn't have cared less!

"In this area we grow seven crops of vegetables and two crops of rice a year," said our guide. "The province of Kwangtung is very fertile."

We were still standing on the station waiting. "What name belonga you fella?" the colonel asked. He appeared to have shifted his ground and his geography somewhat after the *hun cha* episode.

"My name is Ho Sung," the young man said. "The Chinese always use the surname first."

"Yes, I know. Damned good practice," said the colonel. "Always do it at the club myself. Stops people becoming too familiar!"

By this time we were ready to entrain for Canton. The crowd was vast. China is full of people. There is no such thing as a lonely road in China, or a deserted railway station. If you want to be alone you must go into a monastery. The train was being loaded in sections, and crowds surged into it while others waited their turn. The platform was a mass of organized, patient, slowly moving humanity.

The colonel addressed me directly for the first time: "I say, old boy, are *all* these people Communists?"

"If they are," interposed the Indian professor, who had moved alongside us, "we have only ourselves to blame. I am talking now as a member of the British Commonwealth," the professor went on, rather pontifically. "I repeat, speaking as an Asian who has lived most of his life with Europeans, that we have only ourselves to blame! We didn't give them much help to decide otherwise. Mao Tse-tung didn't finally decide he was a Communist until he was twenty-five years old. We did nothing for China but exploit it. The socialists of the world couldn't have cared less." The professor moved into the train.

The colonel looked nonplussed. This sort of stuff wasn't in the guide-book. He looked as if he had heard someone swearing in church.

I should add a note here about the people who visit China. They are not all Communists, by any means. It is the policy of the Chinese Government to "let all flowers bloom" so far as the visitor is concerned. It is pretty wise. The Communists from outside are already convinced—it's the other people who have to be shown. The only prominent personality from Australia I know of who was refused entry into China after a visa had been granted was an Englishman, Lord Lindsay of Birker, of the Australian National University in Canberra. He and his Chinese wife were stopped at the border. Lindsay, a personal friend of many of the Chinese leaders, had prior to this spent some time in Formosa (Taiwan). The Chinese in Peking felt his articles on Taiwan were too enthusiastic—

they believed they were untrue, and hurtful to China. They thought Lindsay should know better, and they felt he behaved in the subsequent controversy with all the arrogance of an Old China Hand. Lindsay had been in China for many years, and had returned there with Clement Attlee in 1954. He was expected to know the score.

The Australian Labour leader, Dr H. V. Evatt, intervened on behalf of Lord Lindsay. He asked the Foreign Minister to reconsider his decision—it was important that Australia should know all there was to know about China. But no, he would not—China had been hurt by one of her friends. It was a very human reaction.

Lindsay, never a Communist, had been attacked in Canberra as "too friendly to Red China" in the past. Recently, it was stated, he had been much more guarded in his approach. Chinese eyebrows were raised at this statement.

His exclusion was a pity. Lindsay's would have been another voice worth hearing on China. But the sword in the heart of China is Formosa. It is a touchy subject.

In fairness one must say this: The lost province of Taiwan is a burning issue in China. It could cause trouble any time. From Taiwan comes ceaseless and merciless criticism of continental China. Newspapers, magazines, costly tomes by experts on China who left their homeland with Chiang Kai-shek pour out of Taipeh, the capital, for world circulation every day. There is never a good word, a grudging word, in favour of China. This mass of material is reported to be heavily subsidized by the American State Department through its various agencies. That Chou En-lai has purged a few right-wing members of Congress and sent them back to the villages gets banner headlines, cabled to the world outside. That the Prime Minister of Formosa is indicted for squeeze and peculation and misuse of public funds gets a paragraph—too insignificant for the cable editor's attention. No wonder Peking hits back.

Hong Kong is as bad. It presents to the newspaperman an amazing contradiction: in the Hong Kong newspapers the reports are fair, sometimes even favourable, to China; interviews with visitors are competently and truthfully handled; with China just across the way, editorials are not written to