

6 – NANJING

After an early breakfast this morning, we were brought to the nearby Nanjing Radio Factory at about 8 a.m. The factory was large and rather run down – the walls could have done with a few coats of paint. However, the main offices and reception rooms were in good condition; the main colour scheme consisted of biscuit-coloured walls and brown fittings. First of all we attended a briefing session over mugs of tea. We received a long and somewhat tedious introduction that included many dates and figures; we were told that they made the Panda brand of semiconductors and various types of radio transmitters. Naturally, the notorious Gang of Four were mentioned: they had encouraged the workers to strike and had tried to put the factory into a state of disorder. But of course, after the Gang had been ‘smashed with one blow by our great and wise leader Chairman Hua’, the factory had got back on its feet once again. Our hosts were proud to tell us that Chairman Mao had visited the factory on 11 January, 1956.

The briefing session over, we were then shown into a small room, where there was an exhibition of all the different types of radios that they had made over the years, ranging from the old and rather ugly models to the slick modern ones. We were then brought around the factory proper, where we saw the staff at work. We were told that forty per cent of the workforce were female. Here we found the workers much more open and relaxed; they smiled when we stopped to watch them. The youngest members of the staff had just left college or university, and the oldest were middle-aged. In two workshops we saw students observing and helping the workers or studying technical manuals. We were told that this was part of a scheme called ‘open-door schooling’, meaning that a certain portion of the academic year was spent doing practical work in a particular field of study, such as working in a factory or toiling with peasants in the countryside.

When we were being shown a portable transmitter for use in the army, Paddy Brennan made a formal speech into a microphone, which was translated into Chinese and commented on by the person who received the speech. Paddy was then told that the receiver was located at the other end of the factory, and that his speech had been transmitted to all the workers there!

After our tour of the factory, we got back into the bus and were driven to the workers’ on-site living quarters. However, before we arrived there, we

were taken to the kitchens of the factory canteen. We found the place full of steam and appetising smells. Rice was being boiled, dumplings were being steamed, and a large amount of food was being prepared on long tables. We saw an astonishing amount of different types of fish, meat and vegetables. Chopsticks were handed to us and we were invited to sample whatever took our fancy. Although it was not long after breakfast, we felt obliged to try out the various dishes and not offend the good-natured cooks. As my stomach was not completely back to normal, I did not eat too much. We had great fun and laughter here; the workers and cooks were all good humoured, and quite intrigued by us. They stared at us out of curiosity, but smiled when eye contact was made. It was such a pity that there was a language barrier.

Back on the bus, our factory guide remarked on how young I looked. I was able to tell him my age in Chinese, that I was working in our national television station, and that I had used the radio to learn Chinese. At the workers' quarters we were taken to a kindergarten. In the first few rooms we saw very young children who were very well behaved; they never cried or made a sound. The older ones put on a little show for us. In one room the children did exercises while sitting on tiny stools, to the accompaniment of a badly-played harmonium, and another group sang songs.



Kindergarten, Nanjing Radio Factory

In one of the rooms, the minders produced cardboard targets depicting the members of the evil Gang of Four in cartoon form. These were arranged in a line on the floor and the children, lying on their stomachs, aimed at them with toy popguns that shot arrows with rubber suckers. Their aim was perfect, and in no time they had them all knocked down. We were then

challenged to have a go, and so Christopher, Mrs Jones and Mrs Gallagher lay down on the floor and took aim. The loquacious Christopher made some wise cracks about 'smashing the Gang of Four', and proceeded to do just this with great vengeance using his toy gun, though he just missed Mao's wife Jiang Qing by inches.

Although amusing, I was becoming aware that there was something quite sinister about all this, for it was obvious that children here were being inculcated with government propaganda from such an early age. It was so obvious that yesterday evening's concert was full of such propaganda. It seemed to me that children were being treated like adults, and – perhaps – adults were being treated like children as they were expected to believe everything that the government told them, including false information, deliberate lies, and crazy about-turns in government policy.

In the last room that we visited, some older children gave us a colourful song and dance performance that looked rather primitive in comparison with what we had seen last night. However, despite the tedious revolutionary themes and the execrable harmonium playing, it was fairly enjoyable.

As we left, the children ran down the stairs after us and so, by the time we had reached our coach, there were hundreds of tiny tots jumping up and down, waving, and shouting 'zài jiàn!' ('Goodbye!') at the top of their voices. Many of them allowed us to shake hands with them. No doubt visitors from abroad made a welcome change from the daily grind.

We then drove to the workers' housing area, which was not really up to the standard of the flats that we had seen in Beijing. Here we split up into three groups, and each one visited three families. We were all very warmly received and, as the atmosphere was relaxed, conversation came easily.

The first place we went to belonged to the Wang family. As far as I could make out, they had five children. They lived simply and had standard furniture in their rooms, similar to what we had seen in Beijing. While we chatted, they offered us cigarettes and handed round a box of sweets, which were wrapped in thin rice paper and were quite tasty. (No doubt these had been supplied by the factory!) The family's second son was in school, where he was studying Chinese, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, history, geography, music, painting, and physical training. For hobbies, the youngest son liked to read – novels mostly – and play sports. We were also told that the second girl was in a boxing team!

When I asked where boy meets girl, or where friends are made, I was told that they meet in school, in the playground, in public parks, in cinemas, and in each other's houses. There was no mention of dances or discos! I was also told that women retire at fifty-five, and men at sixty.

In the next household, where we also were offered sweets and cigarettes, the husband explained that he was an engineer in the factory, and that he

started work at 7 a.m. Both he and his wife seemed to be pleasant people. They had three children; the eldest one was in the army, the younger one in secondary school, and the youngest in junior school. They were all good swimmers and liked playing basketball. Here we discovered that the husband and wife shared household chores such as sewing, darning, mending, and washing. We, and especially Catherine and Patricia, were fascinated to hear this.

I asked them how people spend Sundays or whenever their days off occurred. They laughed and said that they would rest in bed on Sunday mornings. The usual procedure, they said, was to do whatever they liked, such as to go out for walks in the nearby parks or go to the cinema. They liked to invite friends to their house in order to play chess. The wife's hobby was keeping a tank full of goldfish, which we saw beside the door and window that led to a small balcony. The magnificent goldfish were of a type that we had not seen before.

The last apartment that we visited belonged to a Mr Ping. We all met here and crowded into his small living room. Once again we were offered cigarettes, sweets and, this time, peanuts. Mr Ping insisted on giving me lots of peanuts, probably in the belief that they were good for a 'growing lad' like me. He was particularly interested to meet Frank Cahill, as he himself was a runner. They had a good laugh together; Mr Ping was amazed to discover that Frank was seventy-seven years old. Ping had three good-looking daughters, who made an appearance and shook hands with everyone. I thought that they were about fifteen or sixteen years old, but it turned out that they were in their twenties. They were certainly very fresh and young looking for their age.

When we left the apartment block, a large number of people and children gathered to see us off and, when we drove away, they waved, applauded, and smiled at us. I told the manager of the factory, using our guide Mr Cui as interpreter, that I found these people delightfully friendly and open. Before the manager got off the coach, he thanked us for coming and told us that if we ever returned to China, that we would be welcome to visit the factory once again.

We returned to our hotel by 12.30 p.m. for lunch. Although I had not been very enthusiastic about visiting a factory this morning, I had found the tour to be quite interesting.

At two o'clock we were brought off in the coach to see the famous Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge, and stopped at the bridge's supports at the bank of the wide river. Here, housed in one of these thick concrete supports, were several large rooms. A great door formed the entrance; inside was a massive hall housing a huge statue of Chairman Mao made of white stone, similar to the one that we had seen in the airport. Around it were draped the

usual red-and-white banners. Here we were met by a group of pleasant girls, who looked younger than they really were. They spoke English remarkably well, despite having studied the language for just two years in Nanjing University. They made a beeline for the ladies in our group and escorted us to a lift, which brought us up to a room containing a scaled-down model of the bridge. In front of this were armchairs and tables. When we sat down, mugs of hot tea were served.

A young lady who told us about the bridge spoke in Chinese, and one of the students translated for us. However, the student (who spoke with a very strong Chinese accent) frequently got mixed up when translating numbers, and made a great show of apologizing afterwards. We put her at ease by telling her that her English was not at fault, but her mathematics were! (Large numbers in Chinese are difficult to translate into Western languages because the Chinese use an extra unit, *wàn*, meaning 'ten thousand'.) Any time she made a mistake, she attempted to cover up her embarrassment by giggling behind her hand.

During the briefing we learned that the building of the bridge had begun in 1960. Originally the steel was to be made in the USSR, but when Russian aid was withdrawn, the contracts were torn up and the Chinese produced their own steel. The Gang of Four somehow made its way into the story, which was totally ridiculous, for they had only been active for a short while the previous year, as far as we could tell.

After the briefing, our charming hostesses brought us up in the lift to the top of the support, from where we looked down at the highway section of the bridge. Patricia told one of our hostesses that she thought that Irish students did not work as hard as the students here. The Chinese girl told her that in the university she got up at 5.30 a.m., did physical exercises before breakfast, that her lectures began at 7.30 a.m., and that she went to bed at 9.30 p.m. She told Patricia that she listened to the News in English, either from the BBC World Service or the Voice of America. (I would have thought that those radio stations were either blocked or forbidden here.) The English course that she was attending seemed to be quite an intensive one. She told Patricia that she liked to read stories in English (I saw an English book sticking out of her jacket pocket), and play sports.

After this, we were brought down to the second floor, from where we saw the railway section of the bridge. As a train very conveniently crossed the bridge beneath us, I filmed it with my cine camera.

As we walked down the wide staircase to the entrance hall, Peggy called over a tall girl in a red check jacket, pointed to me, and jokingly asked her if she would like a nice fellow like me to stay here with her. The girl's face dropped and she looked at Peggy quizzically. It was immediately obvious that these sort of jokes were not appreciated here. Although the girl was

puzzled and could not understand why we were smiling, she talked to me as we continued walking down the staircase. I found her to be a very pleasant young lady.

Back at the entrance, we wished the girls goodbye and drove off in the bus. We went up to the highway section and crossed the bridge. We then stopped at the other side and were invited to take photographs of it. Strangely, when we had crossed it in the train yesterday, we were not allowed to photograph it, but we were told that we could take shots of it when we formally visited it today.

Our next stop was Xuanwu Lake and the park that surrounded it. This was outside Nanjing's north-eastern gate in the old wall, which bears the same name. (The wall was enlarged during the Ming Dynasty, and is now 33 kilometres in length.) Here, in the park, which had been laid out during the Song dynasty, we were brought to a zoo. When the bus stopped, hundreds of people raced from all directions to get a look at us. When we got out, the people who had milled around the bus, staring and smiling, moved back to make a pathway for us. As we walked behind our guide, they began to follow us. I greeted many of them in Chinese; they smiled and returned my greeting.

We were then brought into a converted pavilion and shown two pandas. It was very dark inside and most of us only saw one panda, which was lying on its back, chewing some bamboo shoots. We then went outside again and walked around in a circle, viewing various other animals. We were followed by the crowd, who now found us far more interesting than the animals! We stopped to admire a fine view of the lake, passed a small pagoda, and had a look at an aquarium, which was quite interesting. The scenery in the park was very pleasant, though it was somewhat spoiled by the afternoon's dull weather conditions. When we returned to the coach, more people gathered around it to stare at us. Somebody on the bus wondered if they would start throwing peanuts to us through the open windows!

We then went on a lightning tour around the rest of the park, driving along the pathways. In the distance, across the lake, we could see the old city walls. We passed many beauty spots, islands, and bridges, but too quickly to take everything in.

Mr Yao and the lads had a good laugh in the bus as we journeyed around. Christopher, at the top of his voice, was telling Yao about our very 'bourgeois' sports, and how people bought expensive racing cars and raced them in order to win large sums of money. He described all this with great relish. Mr Yao's retort was that, in his opinion, the bicycle was more proletarian because, while using it for racing, one could get plenty of exercise. And, he added, the money paid for it would go to the State.

This evening we were taken to a modern version of Peking Opera. I was not particularly looking forward to this as I had heard that it was rather hard on the ear and quite tedious. However, as I was determined to see and experience everything, I joined the others in the bus, and we set off at 7.45 p.m.

The theatre was large, old, and badly in need of several coats of paint. When we entered, with some officials who had arrived in state cars and also with a group of Canadians who were staying in our hotel, the ordinary Chinese were held back while we were shown to our seats. These proved to be quite comfortable, and were in the centre of the theatre, a few rows back from the stage. I noticed a cable running along the backs of our seats and earphones for us attached to it, so that either Mr Yao or Mr Wei could convey a translation of the dialogue or the words of the songs.

The theatre was packed and the Chinese audience was very talkative and noisy. They even kept the chatter going during the performance. High above the stage were six large spotlights in small balconies on either side, with operators behind them all. In the pit, the orchestra was divided into two sections: Chinese instruments on the right, and Western instruments on the left. While we waited for the show to start, a projector was switched on, and Chinese characters appeared on a screen to the left of the stage. The operator pulled a length of film slowly through the gate, so that the members of the audience could read an introduction to the play. Using our earphones, we listened to Mr Yao translating the text for us.

A sudden, loud noise then assailed our eardrums. It was the percussionist, who was not very far away from us, letting fly at his cymbals, clappers, blocks, and drums. This deafening racket filled the hall, and when the music started, we could hardly hear it. The percussion dominated during the rest of the performance, for every dramatic occasion demanded a long and loud burst of crashing and banging. Needless to say, this became rather bothersome and hard on the ears.



'Sister Zhang', Nanjing

The curtain finally rose for the beginning of the evening's show, entitled 'Sister Zhang'. Immediately the shabby theatre was transformed into an idyllic scene, with a background of valleys, misty mountains and sky. The lighting was superb, the costumes were very colourful, and the acting was very energetic. The singing, which was very dramatic and quite Chinese in style, was easy enough on the ear. The words of the songs were projected on to the screen, in the manner of surtitles. (As Chinese is a tonal language, and as the tones cannot be used when singing, a printed text can be of great help in understanding what is being sung.)

The plot of the opera was somewhat convoluted and tricky to follow, simply because there was so much going on at the same time and because our earpieces continually gave trouble. Essentially it was about a girl – Sister Zhang – who lived up in the mountains during the troubled times before 'liberation', under the rule of the Guomindang (the Kuomintang or Nationalists). Having heard about the communists and how they could be the nation's saviours, she left her home and braved many obstacles, including imprisonment, to join them in their fight to expel the evil Nationalists. The acting was highly dramatic and included stylized fighting, with the actors hurling themselves about the stage in time to the music. Whenever Sister Zhang and her comrades were victorious, which was often, they struck up dramatic poses, with their eyes looking off into the distance, their right arms outstretched, and their fists clenched. Any time this occurred, a large red rising sun appeared behind them. This impressed the Chinese audience as much as it amused us. The Chinese people laughed uproariously when the Nationalists made fools of themselves, and cheered when they were defeated. However, despite the noise of the percussion, music and singing, several of the ladies in our group fell asleep!

During the short intermission, one of my companions and I had a look at the Chinese instruments in the orchestra. As I was unfamiliar with some of them, I spoke to one of the players and asked him to name them for me, which he kindly did. I was fascinated by the music scores, which looked very strange, for they were filled with numbers and unfamiliar signs. I later learned that the numbers referred to the notes of the tonic sol-fa; e.g., 1 stood for doh, 2 for re, 3 for mi, and so forth.

When the opera ended and we had applauded long and loud, we were escorted out through a side door while the whole audience stood and waited until we had left. We were quite fascinated by this VIP treatment!

Outside, we jokingly began to imitate the dramatic poses that we had seen, and gave each other clenched-fist salutes. When we clambered aboard our coach, Christopher, who was laughing to himself, roared at us, 'Now, hands up those of you who have been converted!' As usual, we lads had a

good laugh with Mr Yao on the way back to our hotel. However, the more serious Mr Cui (our local guide) asked us if we had understood the plot and the essential meaning of the opera. Indeed we had – it could not have been more obvious!

Before bed, Christopher and I went for a quick walk around the gardens of the hotel before turning in for the night. I climbed into bed, went out like a light, and slept like a log.

At eight o'clock this morning we set off for the house where Zhou Enlai used to live, and where he had had important talks with Chiang Kai-shek when the Japanese had left China and civil war was about to break out between the Nationalists and the Communists. The American soldier and statesman General George Marshall had tried to mediate between the two sides in 1945 for a peaceful solution, but it only caused a wider rift and escalated the bitter civil war. However, a communist delegation, led by Zhou Enlai, followed the Nationalists back to their capital here in Nanjing, and Zhou continued to have talks with Chiang in the house that we were about to visit, in the faint hope of obtaining peace.

The house, situated in the suburbs, was Western in style, and situated at the opposite end of a small courtyard, surrounded by walls that had been enlarged during the talks. Guards had to be posted around the place for protection. The house itself, painted brown and cream, was small and rather scruffy. It was full of very dated furniture, most of which was in bad taste. Everything had been preserved, including moth-eaten books and unimportant pieces of *bric-à-brac*. We were shown the hall, the living room, the study, the bedroom, and even the garage, in which we saw Zhou's large black and rather pretentious-looking Buick car. This, we were informed, was not regarded as being a luxury, for it had been provided as 'defence against the enemy'.

As the morning was dark and murky, and as most of us were half asleep, I was certain that very few of us wanted to be here. I did not care for the atmosphere in this gloomy place; it was full of earnest-looking students, and one was not inclined to smile. The young man who translated for us in the garage spoke in a loud, staccato manner. Politics and propaganda at this early hour of the morning certainly did not agree with me.

From here we were taken to a nearby hall. It was dark inside; the walls were painted in light green, and there were photographs and maps on the walls. We collapsed into some dark brown chairs and were given a long, boring talk about the photographs, which were of various leaders who had attended conferences here during the civil war. One of the ladies in our group later referred to them as 'the Stations of the Cross'! Indeed, there was a religious intensity about all this scenario; there had been a hushed silence

in the house not unlike the atmosphere encountered in a Western church, and the party leaders of the past seemed to have been elevated to the status of saints, with Mao and Zhou above them like modern-day gods. By now I had lost all interest and paid little or no attention to what we were being told.

When we returned to our coach, there were crowds of friendly young people milling around us, watching and waving. As we drove off, Christopher, who was in a window seat, bestowed mock blessings on the people, in the manner of the Pope.

We now drove out of the city and into the surrounding countryside, as we sped towards the mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the 1911 revolution, which overthrew the remains of the tottering Qing dynasty. The sun very kindly came out for us, and when we arrived at the southern slope of what is known as the Purple Mountain the weather had changed for the better – though it was still rather hazy. Ancient writers had referred to this wooded mountain as a ‘curling dragon’ and the city as a ‘crouching tiger’.

Dr Sun Yat-sen, a Christian, had died in Beijing of cancer and, in accordance with his wishes, was buried here in 1929. Construction of the mausoleum, built in a curious style that incorporated traditional Chinese and Western styles, began in 1926. It was very large and grand; long, wide pathways and many flights of wide, steep steps led up the side of the mountain, passing through several stone buildings with blue roofs, and ended at an impressive mausoleum that housed Dr Sun’s remains under a marble statue of himself in lying posture.

Most of us walked up the steps to the top in the boiling heat. Unsurprisingly, the place was packed with Chinese people, most of them having their photographs taken with the buildings behind them. When we reached the mausoleum at the top, several of us – including ‘comrade Cahill’ – went in with Mr Cui to see the tomb. The main room was circular, and the marble statue of Dr Sun was at the bottom of a circular vault. We viewed it by leaning over the railings and Mr Cui told us about the great man in a hushed voice. Again, the atmosphere was like that of a church or cathedral, for everyone moved around quietly here. The lobby of the building, which we passed through when entering and leaving, was decorated in an extravagant manner.

Outside, in the bright sunshine, we leaned against one of the stone balustrades, and Mr Cui spoke to us earnestly about revolution and other related subjects in connection with Dr Sun Yat-sen. We then made our way back down to the coach, laughing and joking.

We returned to our hotel at 11.30 a.m. and had lunch at noon. This was our last meal in Nanjing, for we left for the railway station at one o’clock and drove in through the same iron gates, which again were opened for us the

moment we approached them. After a short wait, a smart green diesel train arrived. Mr Cui shook hands with us and wished us goodbye as we clambered inside with our hand luggage. When I wished him goodbye and thanked him in Chinese, he held on to my hand with both of his and told me that when I would return to China, I would have improved my Chinese. (In fact, everyone we had met here so far had wished us to return some time in the near future.)

When the train pulled out of the station, Mr Cui waved to us by holding his arms high above his head and grasping his two hands together. Although I had found Nanjing a rather dull, industrial and revolutionary city, I had enjoyed it in a strange way, and was sorry to leave it.

This time we shared a long carriage with some Chinese people. As we were not travelling overnight, we just had comfortable grey seats with luggage racks overhead. As it was becoming warmer, electric fans were switched on before our journey started; they were switched off again when we got moving, as we could open the windows to let in some fresh air. Once again, we were given plenty of tea, which we drank from pale green cups. Every so often a girl would come with a large thermos flask of boiling water to top up our cups, often spilling some of the water on the floor. Then, from time to time, another young woman would come with a mop and clean the floor.

The train was noisy but full of atmosphere; the Chinese people wandered up and down with their mugs of tea, chatting and laughing. The scenery was much the same as before, although it was greener. There were more paddy fields to be seen now.

Our journey eastwards towards the ancient town of Suzhou was uneventful but not boring. I was interested to see this city, known as 'the Venice of China', because of its bridges over canals and rivers. Iron was being smelted there as far back as 600 B.C., and silk weaving was well developed in the city during the Tang and Song dynasties (A.D. 618–1279). It had once been a centre of high culture, where scholars, poets, painters, and ministers had retired and had had beautiful gardens built for their pleasure. The city now had a population of over 500,000, and had flourishing industries and traditional handcraft institutions.

During our journey, I chatted with Mr Wei, and asked him about people's health in the country. We had seen them doing exercises in the streets, and had heard about their interest in athletics. However, we had noticed that many of the older people smoked and had a bad habit of hawking and spitting. Spittoons were to be seen everywhere. On the other hand, we had seen relatively few young people smoking. Mr Wei informed me that every spring a Patriotic Health Movement was set in motion, and that retired people and volunteers carried out checks on hygiene and people's health.

All items of sanitation were checked, such as sewers. Indeed, wherever we went, everything looked clean. People were regularly warned that smoking and drinking were not good for them, and so most people smoked and drank in moderation. Because tap water was dirty, water was always boiled, and people preferred to eat cooked food rather than raw – salads, for example, were simply not eaten.

When I asked about dental care, I was told that children in kindergartens and schools received proper instruction on how to care for their teeth. They were warned about the danger of eating too many sweets, and parents tended to keep a check on their children. We did see sweets for sale here in the shops. I was told that there were not many dentists working in private practices throughout the country, but there were dental departments in all the state hospitals.

In answer to some other questions of mine, Mr Wei told me that designing and printing packages for products was usually done in special commercial departments within the factories, and that this type of work provided full-time work for art students. Obviously, smaller factories would have their packaging designed and printed elsewhere.

As we chatted and the afternoon wore on, the light began to fail; then, as we approached Suzhou, the short twilight fell.