

10 – SHANGHAI

Rather cool and sunless this morning; I awoke with a sore throat and a slight headache. After breakfast we set off for the Yi Ming Foodstuff Factory, which was not very far away. I asked Catherine to ask if it would be possible to visit their commercial department, where they designed their labels. She did, but we were not taken to it.

When we arrived at the factory, we drove into a courtyard where we were greeted by many of the workers, who were dressed in white overalls, and who applauded us. Outside the reception room was a painted sign which, translated from Chinese, meant, 'We wish to welcome our Irish friends'. On leaving the coach, we shook hands with the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee and some of his comrades, and were led into the rather old-fashioned reception room. We were invited to be seated and to drink some tea. The chairman then told us that the factory produced canned goods, sweets and cold drinks, and that 3,000 people worked here. We were then asked to don white overalls, rubber boots, white caps, and face masks, in accordance with the strict hygiene rules. When we were suitably attired, we were brought off on a tour of the place. Like most factories here, it was old fashioned and could have done with a drop of paint, but it was spotlessly clean.

First of all we saw beans being sorted, boiled and canned. We noticed that the cans were weighed and the lids positioned manually. As some of the text on the labels was printed in English, it came as no surprise that this product would be exported.

Next came the sweet making section. Here we observed the sticky raw material being thinned down, then cut and moulded into the right size and shape. We also saw women operating the machines that wrapped the sweets. Going downstairs from this department, one of our guides pointed to a blackboard. He seemed very anxious that I should take note of it and explained that the figures chalked on it listed the number of items that a worker had made in one day. Thus, a worker could observe how he or she was doing in comparison with his or her comrades. The worker who produced the most would be rewarded in some small way and held up as an example to the others. I made great show of noting all this.

We then saw chocolates and chocolate wafer biscuits being made and wrapped. Finally we were brought to see ice cream being made.

Our tour had been mercifully short, but it was quite interesting. We were brought back to the reception room, where we removed our protective clothing. We then sat down for more tea and were encouraged to help ourselves to as many chocolates as we liked. They were quite delicious – especially those with liqueur inside. Tubs of ice cream were then given to us, then choc ices. Although the ice cream had a rather strong taste, it was very good. While we munched, licked and sucked, our host gave us a fuller briefing. We were told about the quantities produced of the various products, and that most of the chocolates were for export. Naturally, the Gang of Four had, at one time, caused trouble in the factory. The workers earned about £20 per month, and generally started here after they had left school. When we were told that the art department for designing the packaging was situated in the factory, but printed elsewhere, I made a face at Catherine and she smiled.

When we were invited to ask questions, we were interrupted by the banging of drums and crashing of cymbals. It turned out that the worker who had made the most products was being paraded around outside as an example to the others. On leaving, a crowd had gathered to see us off, and so we were applauded and waved at when we boarded the bus and drove back to the hotel.

As we had an hour to kill before lunch at 12.30, I went off for a stroll around a shopping area that Mr Yao had told me about. The place was full of life, with people on the footpaths and cyclists on the Huaihai road. Here I found various establishments, such as grocers' shops, department stores, bookshops, clock and watch shops, and clothes shops. I went into a large department store, where I bought a small writing brush for about 9p and a stick of ink for 8p. The man behind the counter and I had a few words of conversation. I then returned to the hotel and joined the others for lunch. Afterwards I treated myself to a short nap.

At two o'clock we set off for the nearby Mo Ming Number Two Primary School. When we arrived, there was a large crowd of colourfully-dressed children waiting for us. They cheered as we clambered out of the bus and shouted, '*Ní hǎo?*' ('Hello!'). Some of them came forward and shook hands with us. Those who had shaken our hands held on to them, making us understand that they would escort us around the school. The little girls made for the ladies and the boys made for the men, and so off we walked with a newly acquired little friend. A pleasant tubby fellow latched himself on to me. Many of us felt disappointed that we could not communicate with the children. Being able to speak a little of their language, I asked my pal his age. Believing that he was about six, I was surprised when he said, '*wǒ shí yī suì*' ('I'm eleven years old'). I hoped that he was not offended, for the word that I had used for 'how old' implied a number below ten. Having spoken to

the lad, he assumed that I was fluent in his language, and proceeded to talk to me at great speed. All I could do was smile at him.



Mo Ming Number Two Primary School, Shanghai (PF)

We were then taken through the playground, where we saw children playing games, and then brought into a classroom where a long table had been set for us. The children escorted us to our seats and invited us to sit down. When we were seated, our little guides sat in chairs arranged around the walls. We were invited to help ourselves to tea and cigarettes, and then were introduced to some of the teachers. Thankfully the briefing was short. I shuddered when we were informed that the curriculum included politics and singing. The children were given three weeks' holiday in the winter and one and a half months in the summer. During the holidays, various activities were organized, such as visiting and working in communes, and watching films.

When we rose from the table, I was sure that many of us wondered whether we would be able to identify our young guides. We need not have worried, for each child quickly returned to the person they had selected. My little lad was behind me, pulling back my chair in double quick time.

We were now brought back outside to the playground. A whistle was blown and the children who had been playing formed themselves into rows, facing us. Suddenly a loudspeaker over our heads came to life, and blared out spirited military music at top volume. The children began to do carefully rehearsed exercises to it, following the example of a girl dressed as a Little Red Guard in a green uniform with red trimmings. The spectacle was rather chilling, as many of the children did the exercises like robots, with expressionless faces. However, some of them seemed happy enough to do them, though a few looked fed up and were just about summoning up enough energy to keep up with the others.

When the music eventually stopped, the children split into groups and marched into the school building. We then went upstairs to a classroom, where we found about forty young children sitting at tiny desks. Our little hosts insisted that we squeeze ourselves into the desks and sit with the students. A spirited reading class was in progress. The young lady teacher was asking the children to read and putting questions to them. There was a continual show of enthusiastically waved hands. Children jumped up to read a few lines and then sat down when others took over.

My little friend absented himself for a moment, took a book from another child's desk, and returned with it. He then placed it in front of me and pointed to the characters as the children read. As I quickly got lost, I pretended to follow the text. The book contained drawings of Little Red Guards and various scenarios of a revolutionary nature. Propaganda, the Chinese substitute for religion, was being inculcated at a very early age.

We left after a few minutes to the chanting of 'zài jiàn' ('goodbye') over and over again, then walked down a gloomy corridor to another classroom, where we witnessed a mathematics class. When the teacher held up a large card with a fairly simple sum written on it, hands shot up and a selected child shouted an answer. I joined in, as I was quite familiar with the Chinese numbers.

The walls in these classrooms were painted in institutional green, and the paint had faded and worn away in places. Everything looked the worse for wear and there was no sign of any heating system. The children were being taught in the official Beijing dialect of Mandarin Chinese, and not in the Shanghai dialect.

In the next classroom we visited, several boys and girls delivered dramatic recitations that were all very revolutionary. In one of these, the fifth volume of the Selected Works of Mao Zedong was brandished. The children frequently struck up stylized dramatic poses of the sort that we had seen in the theatres.

In another part of the school we saw tiny children expertly playing ping-pong. Some members of our group attempted to play with them, but were always beaten. After this we were taken to an art class, where a group of children were crowded around a boy who was posing for them. Although the pencil drawings did not bear much resemblance to the model, some of the attempts were reasonably good, considering the age of the children. Others were practising Chinese characters, using writing brushes and ink. As I was very interested in this, I watched carefully as they copied printed characters very accurately on to paper with printed squares. It was very refreshing to see this, as I had noticed that most people used pens and biros.

In an adjacent classroom we stopped to look at children learning to cut hair. Several of them had volunteered to have their hair cut, and their

companions were quite expertly snipping and combing. In another room, we saw girls sitting around a table, doing beautiful embroidery. They diligently sewed as we peered over their shoulders. The designs were quite simple, but they were pretty and well done.

We then saw tiny girls and boys making decorations with strips of plastic ribbon and various odds and ends in the next room that we visited. While we watched, each student handed us a very well made and pretty bunch of plastic flowers and leaves, designed to be worn as a brooch. Our little guides fastened them to our clothing for us. We were all delighted by this and thanked the sweet little children.

Finally we were treated to a very military song and dance performance in a room close to where we had seen the ping-pong. The accompaniment was played on an old untuned upright piano. A group of little boys dressed as soldiers brandished toy machine guns, ran about, and shouted '*Shā, shā, shā!*' ('Kill, kill, kill!') with very determined-looking expressions and zeal. I was certainly not enamoured with this show of belligerence, and thought it quite inappropriate for such young children.

When we returned to the room where we had been briefed, we were invited to sit down at the table again by our hosts, and asked if we had any questions. This time there was silence, for we had none. Maybe we had seen quite enough of this type of thing or we were simply tired. However, one of the ladies in our group thought that this was a suitable opportunity for her to launch into a long and verbose speech praising everything that she had seen and heard in China so far. She became so carried away that she would not allow our interpreter to translate it section by section, and insisted on getting everything off her chest at once. The poor interpreter was quite embarrassed and had to jot down notes hastily, as best as he could. When it was all over, he translated a condensed version of the lady's impassioned speech, after which more silence ensued.

In order to break the ice, Dave Tyndall invited the teachers and children in the room to ask some questions about Ireland. This time the silence was longer and even more awkward; either our Chinese hosts looked confused or just expressionless. As the minutes ticked by, Dave said something to relieve the silence, but still nobody volunteered. It seemed that these people were not the slightest bit interested in a small capitalist country like Ireland, which they probably had never heard of before, or else they had been brainwashed into not taking any interest in places outside China.

At last, prompted by one of our guides, a small boy jumped up from his seat, fired a short question at us, and sat down, breathless. We giggled and the guide explained that the boy wanted to know what subjects children in Ireland studied. The lady who had delivered the impassioned speech then proceeded to give a long description of the education system in Ireland.

When she eventually finished, Dave answered the boy's question by mentioning some of the subjects taught at home.

During this rather awkward question-and-answer session, a member of our group asked if we could find out something about the children who had acted as our hosts. When the question had been translated, the children rose to their feet, one by one, and rattled off their names, their ages, and what classes they were in. All the children did this, and we found it rather amusing.

We left after this session. I was glad to leave, for I felt tired and my sore throat was bothering me. As well as that, the school was far too regimented for my liking. On the other hand, I was sorry to say goodbye to these delightful children, especially my little host, who had been so good to me. We shook hands with the children before we boarded the coach, and when we drove off they cheered, waved, and applauded us.

In the evening we were invited to join a briefing and discussion session in the hotel lobby about how the authorities had managed to rid the city of prostitution and drug addicts. I was not inclined to go to this, as I wanted to rest and rid myself of my sore throat, but decided to join my companions at the last moment. We were introduced to a man and three women. The man gave us a description of what it had been like in pre-liberation Shanghai, describing the brothels and opium smokers. One of the women then described how work was given to the prostitutes and how they were helped after the city had been liberated in 1949. The second woman told us how treatment had been given to the drug addicts, how they were helped, and how they had been given employment. The third woman, who used to be an opium smoker and a drop-out, not caring for her husband or children, described how she had forced herself out of the habit by simply abstaining from it. She had been very sick for a while afterwards, but never returned to her old ways. The speakers claimed that they had got rid of these vices completely.

In a lively question and answer session afterwards, the man and the three women were quizzed very thoroughly by the younger members of our group, who would not believe these claims. The older members of our group, on the other hand, believed that such vices had been eliminated by the will of the majority of the people, and by the system. The young people wanted to know how there was no prostitution as sailors, who had spent months at sea, were continually arriving in ships. The answer to this was that they were taken off to see the local tourist spots and communes. This certainly did not sound very convincing.

I woke this morning feeling a good bit better. After breakfast most of the others went off to see an appendicitis operation on a patient anaesthetized

by using acupuncture, which I had absolutely no desire to see. I had watched a film of the procedure at home and, being of a rather squeamish nature, could hardly bear to watch the screen. As Paddy Flanagan also did not want to go, we decided to book a taxi and travel around the city. I had worked out a route that would bring us through the areas that my mother's cousin had known, for I thought that it would be good to write to him and describe the places as they were now. My route included the People's Square (Renmin Square) and Park (formerly the Racecourse), the road where he had lived, and Zhongshan (formerly Jessfield) Park, which he used to visit.

I presented my itinerary to the pleasant man at the reception desk, and told him what Paddy and I would like to do. When I mentioned Zhongshan Park, he explained that it was quite a distance from the hotel, at the other side of the city. At this point we were joined by a couple of our local guides, a man and a young lady, who spoke rapidly in Chinese to the man behind the desk. Once again we were asked: did we realize how long our journey would be? Yes, we did. That it would take a long time? Yes, perhaps. That it would be very expensive as we were planning to stop at several places en route? Perhaps, but we did not mind. Would we not be nervous of getting lost when walking around and looking for other taxis, especially as we did not know the language? No, for we were thinking of using just the one taxi and getting out here and there for a few minutes to take a look around. Did we not realize that it would take a long time to reach Zhongshan Park, which was at the other side of the city? Yes, but we did not mind, as we wanted to see it for a particular reason.

More discussions in Chinese followed, after which they asked us more questions and finally gave in. Our guides finally went off to join our group in the coach, and the man behind the desk rang for a taxi. He then gave us the registration number of the vehicle so that we could identify it. We waited in the lobby and after a few minutes a large and spotlessly clean light grey car stopped at the entrance. We discovered that we could not communicate with the driver, who only seemed to speak the Shanghai dialect. Once we had established that all was in order with the man in the hotel, the driver held the door open for us, and we sat down on the very comfortable back seat of the taxi. It was beautifully cool inside; when we moved off we discovered that the engine was almost noiseless, and that the car moved very smoothly.

As Paddy wanted to visit a certain department store on Nanjing Road, we drove there first. On our way, we passed Renmin Square. Outside the shop, a large and ugly brown building, we asked the driver (by using sign language and pointing at our watches) to wait about thirty minutes. We walked back to Renmin Square, where we took some photos. It was a huge, empty area. As I photographed and filmed it, a crowd of curious youngsters gathered to

have a look at us. However, in a street nearby, which was full of noise and bustle, we witnessed the first fight that we had seen in China. Two young lads on bicycles had evidently collided; there were angry voices, and one lad grabbed the other and hit him. A large crowd had gathered to see what was happening.



A street and Renmin Square, Shanghai

We moved on and took in everything that was happening around us: elderly men cycling bicycles piled high with goods, people travelling in crowded and colourful buses, and some just walking along, often laden with

shopping. A lady guided a bunch of toddlers across the road – they were presumably on their way to or from a kindergarten.

We then made our way back to the department store, which was cool and old-fashioned inside. Here we bought some beautiful silk scarfs, which cost about £1 each. I also bought some chopsticks for Professor Kiang at home.

When we had finished in the shop, we returned to the taxi. Much to our surprise, the driver drove us back to Renmin Square – he obviously had not realized that we already had been there. Just to please him, we got out and had another look around. At one end of the square was a memorial building, adorned with red banners and a large colour portrait of Chairman Mao. Close by were the stands of the former racecourse, presumably used now by spectators attending official functions or military parades.

Next we were driven to Renmin Park. We did not really expect to be taken here, for all we wanted to do was take a quick look. However, we drove up to the gate and the horn was blown until somebody came out to open it for us. We drove inside and stopped. Indicating to the driver that we would be back in fifteen minutes, we set off to explore the place. Whether we were supposed to pay at the entrance was unclear. It was a fine park, full of trees. In one part there was a small lake with ornamental bridges. The place was full of people; some were doing *taiji* and others were exercising with swords. Groups of tiny children, led by a lady, were also doing exercises or marching to the rhythm of a whistle being blown. Apart from this, the atmosphere was pleasantly relaxed.



Playground in Renmin Park, Shanghai (PF)

In another part of the park we found a children's playground. Here we saw many colourfully-dressed toddlers and children playing on the swings and hurtling down the slides. All of them smiled and said hello to us. Many, in fact, formed themselves into orderly groups, smiled and applauded us,

without any instructions from their teachers. I had wondered whether children had been specially dressed up in colourful uniforms when we visited schools; what we saw here suggested that this must have been their normal attire. Also, we noticed that many of the people here were taking photos of each other, with something of interest in the background.

Our fifteen minutes of walking in the sunshine finished when we returned to the taxi, clambered inside, and gave the go-ahead to proceed. It was proving to be an interesting trip, for we were seeing more things than we had bargained for. I was now interested to be driven along Xinzha street, where my mother's cousin had once lived.

However, there seemed to be a problem about this. The driver produced a sheet of paper with a list of our different destinations numbered and written on it in Chinese characters. He pointed to the place that we had just visited. He then pointed to the next one (the second last one, as far as I can recollect), and began to jabber away in the Shanghai dialect. I told him in Mandarin Chinese that I could not understand. He seemed to comprehend this and looked disappointed. Next he tried hand gestures, which seemed to indicate that our next destination was out of the question. However, he kept pointing to the last place and giving us to understand that there was no problem about it. In desperation I finally pointed to it and gave him a thumbs up signal. At this he smiled. He turned on the motor, we left the park, and drove down the road.



Gymnasium, Shanghai

We had no idea of what was going to happen next. We certainly were not travelling in the right direction for either Xinzha road or Zhongshan Park, for we quickly realized that we were heading back towards our hotel. Was the hotel the last item on his list? Obviously not, for we sped past it and turned up Huaihai road. Were we approaching Zhongshan Park from a different

direction? We zoomed through the suburbs south of the city, passing what looked like quite posh residential areas, and were eventually dropped outside a huge circular modern building. Was this part of or near Zhongshan Park? We got out for about ten minutes and strolled around. There did seem to be a park behind the building and another one across the road. I walked back to the driver and tried to ask him if this was Zhongshan Park, but I could not remember the word for 'park'. He shook his head – he did not seem to understand. I asked him if he had a map; he understood that. No, he didn't.

I gave up. After I had got Paddy to photograph me in front of the building, we returned to the car and were driven back to our hotel. The cost of our journey came to 13.50 ¥ (about £4.30) for about two hours, which came to about £2.15 per person, which we thought was very reasonable, despite the fact that we had not seen everything that we had wished to see.

As soon as we entered the hotel, I went straight to the map at the reception desk. I found Huaihai road quickly enough and discovered that we had been driven to the Shanghai Gymnasium, near South Zhongshan Road. This was just as far from our hotel as Zhongshan Park would have been, and it had not taken very long for us to reach it. It was obvious that we had been deliberately prevented from going to Xinzha Road and Zhongshan Park in the north of the city for some reason, and that nobody was prepared to tell us why. Perhaps the area contained military or state buildings that outsiders were not permitted to visit. A simple explanation could have been offered to us, but obviously our Chinese hosts were not willing to give us one. The way that they had dealt with the situation was very curious indeed.

It was now about eleven o'clock. When Paddy and I were about to head for the lifts, our companions returned from the hospital with wonderful reports of the operation. They had peered through a small window at a young lady who had smiled sweetly at them while the surgeons removed her appendix; she had been anaesthetized using just a few acupuncture needles, which had been electrically activated. When the appendix had been removed, the surgeon had shown it to the young lady, and then it was passed around our companions for them to look at. When it was all over, the young lady, who was still smiling, sat up and shook hands with the medical staff. She then gathered a dressing gown about her and walked out of the operating theatre, back to her hospital bed. I was very glad that I had not gone to see all this happening!

Mr Yao then appeared on the scene. As I had told him that I wished to buy some suitable paper for Chinese calligraphy, he offered to accompany me to a nearby department store, where he could ask for whatever I wanted. As some of the others wanted to buy posters, a small group of us set off down the road. Laughing and joking, we walked to the same department

store where I had bought the brush and ink. Thanks to Mr Yao's help, I bought everything that I needed in double-quick time. I was also able to buy a bag in which I could put my newly-acquired musical instruments.

Afterwards we walked to a bookshop, where the others would be able to buy some posters. En route, Paddy discovered that the small and colourful litter bins along the streets had spittoons attached; when one stepped on a pedal, a lid opened on top. As in Beijing and the other cities that we had visited so far, we could constantly hear the locals hawking and spitting.

Eventually we reached the bookshop where, after a great deal of confusion about which department we needed to go to, we reached the section where they sold posters. I bought nothing here, as all I could see were nasty revolutionary posters depicting workers, factories, and well-known politicians. Noticing that I was not interested, Mr Yao asked me if I wanted to buy books about calligraphy, which were on sale next door. He and I went into the shop, where I selected a few that looked interesting. I then rejoined the others and bought a slim volume entitled 'China Travel Guide'. When everyone had made their purchases, we left and returned to the hotel for lunch.

After our meal, which was delicious, we had to leave our cases outside our bedroom doors, for we were due to depart later in the afternoon. We then clambered aboard our coach and were driven to the nearby Shanghai Art and History Museum, which was situated in one of the many large and drab buildings. At the entrance, a pleasant young man appeared, welcomed us, and brought us inside. We went up a couple of floors in a lift, and were brought into a series of rooms, where we saw a fine collection of ancient artefacts in glass cases. Included were magnificent early bronze pieces of the Shang and Zhou periods, a Western Zhou bell, several *jue* or ritual ewers with four legs, a Shang dynasty axe, several *ding* or three-legged cauldrons, ancient 'oracle bones', pieces of Shang pottery, and weapons, bells and drums of the Warring States period. We also saw ancient mirrors with elaborate ornamentation on their bronze backs, which not only reflected light but also allowed light to pass through them, throwing a shadow of the patterns on to a card. Most of these objects had been excavated from tombs. At one point I recognized something that looked quite familiar to me, and asked our guide whether or not it was a *zhong* or musical stone that had been found in a tomb. Looking quite amazed, he replied that it was. What we were looking at was a scaled-down model of the Great Tomb at Wuguanqun in Anyang, which had once been a very ancient capital of China.

The young man who brought us around was very good. I asked him many questions through our interpreters and received very satisfactory answers. Mr Yao complimented me by saying, 'You know a lot about Chinese history.'

When you return home, you'll be able to give lectures on Chinese history to your friends!'

After we had seen this very interesting section, we were taken to the pottery department. This was fascinating, as we saw examples of pottery from very ancient times up to the present, including colourful Tang dynasty glazed pottery, elegant Song ware, beautiful Ming, and elaborate Qing pieces. The pottery from the last two dynasties was exquisite – I could have stayed looking at it for the rest of the day. While our guides proudly showed us the most recent products, a few of my companions and I stayed to examine the earlier masterpieces in more detail. I quickly walked through the modern section in order to catch up with the others when they left.

Unfortunately the visit to this important museum, founded in 1952, was far too rushed – we had been brought around it in about an hour. I would have relished more time in it, for this was the first time that I had seen many of the objects on display 'in the flesh'; previously I had only seen them reproduced in books.

After we had said goodbye to our museum guide, we drove back to the hotel, where we had an hour to spare. If only that hour could have been spent in the museum...! I found this type of thing quite annoying.

We then headed for the station and clambered into the soft class carriage of a train that left at 4.40 p.m. on the dot, having said goodbye to our local guides. Although I was beginning to get used to Shanghai, I was not at all sorry to leave, as it was just a little too busy and industrial for my liking. We were now heading for Nanchang, a small city that, by all accounts, did not seem to contain much of interest. We considered it to be a rather strange choice, and did not know what to expect there. As we would be travelling overnight, we had been given sleeping compartments like the ones in the train from Beijing to Nanjing.

Passing through scenery similar to what we had seen before, we now travelled south-westwards through the province of Zhejiang, which used to be famous for its pottery, to Jiangxi, where Nanchang lay south of the huge Lake Poyang. In order to while away the time, I chatted to Mr Wei and to some of my companions. Mr Yao sat with me when we dined in the restaurant car.

After our meal, Paddy Brennan came into our compartment to tell us an interesting story that he had just heard. Mr Yao had been chatting to him and had told him, without any show of emotion, a few facts about his family before and after liberation. As he was born after 1949, he did not have to endure the hardships that his parents had experienced during previous years under the Nationalists. Because his parents were so poor, and as all their money had been squeezed out of them by their landlord, they had to sell his sister, who had been born before 1949, in order to procure a sack of millet

seed for food, lest they die of starvation. Because his sister had been sold as a slave, the family lost contact with her. After 1949 they managed to find her; she was living in a different part of China and had become a teacher. After liberation, Mr Yao's parents bought the landlord's house and ran a small farm, where he raised pigs and fowl. Although his parents were now better off, he was the only one in the family who managed to attend university. It was interesting to hear this story; on one level it served as glorification of the communist system, and on another it was a touching account of rags to riches – or, more precisely, of extreme poverty to success. However, a cynic may have pointed out that more trouble could have been in store for the family when the anarchy and craziness of the Cultural Revolution had swung into action, which our guide probably would not have dared to admit. This was the period between 1966 and 1976 when all educational institutions had been closed and Mao's Little Red Guards had run riot, smashing up anything that was old or valuable. People were encouraged to spy on one another, and anybody accused of being a capitalist or intellectual was publicly criticized and thrown into prison or a labour camp, where people were overworked and many died of exhaustion or malnutrition. Nobody knows how many millions of people died during this turbulent period.

As we were passing through the city of Hangzhou, where Mr Yao lived, we all told him that there would be thousands of people out to greet him when we arrived. When we did stop at Hangzhou station during the course of the evening, he got out, strolled up and down the platform, and returned to the train when we set off once again.

It had become pitch black by the time we went to bed at 10 p.m. As we were out in the middle of nowhere, there was not one light to be seen outside. At one stage we suddenly slowed down and stopped. Still awake, I pulled back the curtain and peered out into the darkness. After a moment, men with torches passed by and I could hear voices. We finally began to move again and passed the men with the torches. Soon we were chugging along at our former leisurely speed and I closed the curtain. Somebody thought that we might have changed engines and now were being pulled by a steam engine.

After lying awake for a considerable time, I finally dozed off.