

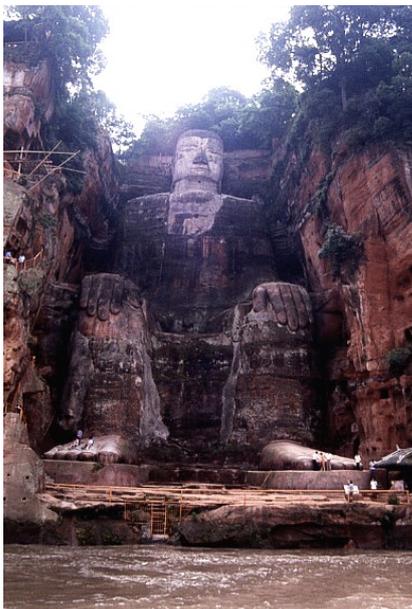
13 – LESHAN, CHENGDU AND HONG KONG

Thursday, 15 June

This morning I woke up early and was quite ready by eight o'clock, the time when Lihua had suggested we wake up. At five past eight I knocked on her door – a rather unusual occurrence – and later she came to my room to wash. We then checked out of the hotel and went to a restaurant in the street outside, where we had a breakfast of rather oily fried savoury cakes served with bowls of liquid tofu which, in fact, was quite tasty.

Afterwards, we walked along the river to catch a boat to the famous seventy-metre-high stone statue of the *Da Fu* or Great Buddha, believed to have been begun in A.D. 715; the statue had taken some ninety years to complete. This, of course, was the main attraction of the town. Unfortunately, we discovered that we had missed the 8.30 a.m. boat and that there would not be another one until ten o'clock.

We therefore had to walk a short distance to another road and wait for a bus. The noise of the traffic here was deafening; horns were constantly being blown and it was quite difficult to hear each other speaking. At last a bus appeared and off we went. It did not take us long to reach the touristy part of the town, which was full of souvenir stalls. To get to the statue we had to climb steps and work our way around a small hill on which various pavilions and temples had been built. We stopped to take a look at some of them.



The statue was huge and impressive, but because of its great age, rather crude and not very beautiful: the pose was very stiff and formal. I took some photographs of it from different angles and a couple of Lihua sitting on one of the big feet.

After seeing the famous statue, we clambered up the steep steps and continued our walk, this time to another hill. En route we stopped to look round a temple, dedicated to a famous poet, where we looked at an exhibition of paintings. We both expressed the same opinions about the exhibits; I was quite impressed by Lihua's knowledge of art and form. Surprisingly, she had admitted to secretly admiring the female nude – a very new and controversial art form here in China.

In general the area between the two hills was not particularly interesting; the temples were relatively modern and the style of architecture was crude – something that Lihua was aware of. We wandered into a few of the temples and finally made our way downhill to the boat. I stopped to buy a large fan made of feathers for Miss Liu's grandmother and, after we had bought the boat tickets, I got something to drink. There then followed a long wait in what looked like a very rusty old boat. We retreated to an empty section and sat close together. Lihua seemed tired and rather quiet today, but now and then her usual good humour shone through.

At last a proper boat arrived and we scrambled on board. We were now able to enjoy a much better view of the huge statue on our way back to the town.

Back on dry land again, we walked a short distance to a bus station and bought tickets for our return to Chengdu. We then followed the advice of a man in the street and walked to a nearby restaurant that specialized in tofu and had a good lunch there. People constantly stared at me; foreigners were obviously a rarity here! As usual, people expressed surprise or laughed when I uttered a few words in Chinese.

When we had finished eating and had relaxed a little, it was time to catch the bus. After a short wait in the shade, we boarded a minibus and, instead of heading out of the city, simply drove to the main bus station. There then followed some confusion as we tried to find the right bus for Chengdu; even Lihua could not get the correct information. We found our way to an office at the front of the building, showed our tickets and waited for a short while. We eventually boarded a bus, which was by no means full and, at two o'clock, drove off for Chengdu.

Although we did pass through some lush green scenery of hills and paddy fields at first, the journey was uneventful except for a few forced stops when the radiator of the bus boiled over. Lihua dozed for most of the time, and at one stage snuggled up to me and made herself comfortable. Later she woke up and we talked about various personal matters. I told her as much as I

could about myself and she did the same. She now proposed that we leave any decision to marry until I returned home. We would then see if we really missed each other, and would have plenty of time to think the matter over. I thought that this was a very sensible idea and agreed to it willingly.

The tedious journey in the noisy bus took a little over four hours and we arrived in Chengdu by about 6.30 p.m. We walked from the bus station round the corner to the Traffic Hotel, where Lihua suggested that I stay for the next couple of nights. I thought that this was a good idea, for we both agreed that I had stayed in Miss Liu's apartment for too long.

I booked in and paid ¥32 RMB for two nights in a reasonably good dormitory containing three beds. After I had left my luggage there, we both went downstairs for a shower. We met again in my room and then went to the restaurant for a good meal. Although it was a little expensive, I did not mind, for the food was of good quality. In a disco nearby, a band was playing dreadful pop music at top volume; a trumpet was wailing when we left. Holding hands when we felt it was safe to do so, we walked through the dark streets to Lihua's home. As before, all was quiet in the city centre.

Just as we approached Lihua's apartment block, it began to rain. She asked me to wait in the street and went into the building with my bag. As it now began to rain in earnest, I put on my raincoat and stood in a shop entrance until she returned with the two bicycles. As usual, she had refused any help and would not even take my torch.

Together we now set off for Miss Liu's home. I moved quickly and we soon arrived there. Because Lihua had a proper bicycle cape, she was dry but I was soaked through. Miss Liu was delighted to see me back again and said that she had been worrying about me. That did not surprise me. Both she and her husband greeted me warmly and I felt as if I was returning home. While Lihua gave them a brief explanation of what had happened to us, undoubtedly leaving out some the details, I changed into some dry clothes, ate some refreshing watermelon, and did some repacking. As it was late by now, Miss Liu and her husband wanted me to stay in their apartment for the night, but as I had already paid for the hotel and did not want to trouble them again, I asked for a taxi. Miss Liu's husband went out to get one from the Chengdu Hotel and quickly came back, having bargained the price down to ¥15.

I quickly got my things ready and the others helped me down with my luggage. I said goodnight to them all and was driven quickly to the hotel in the taxi. I went up to my room with my luggage and knocked on the door; one of two girls opened it. I apologized for disturbing them. The girl then went to bed and the other sat up, reading a newspaper. As the light was on, I took the opportunity to write my diary until the girl had finished reading and turned off the light.

Friday, 16 June

During the night I was woken by one of the girls who got up, went out, returned and switched on the noisy ceiling fan. Although it felt much cooler, I could not sleep because of the racket. Later I switched it off. I finally drifted back to sleep, but woke early with the girls; they left soon afterwards. I went downstairs to use the shower, but as there was no hot water I washed upstairs instead. On my way out to have breakfast, I handed in a pair of trousers to be washed.

Breakfast consisted of an orange that the girls had left behind, toast with egg, hot milk and tea at the Flower Garden restaurant beside the Jinjiang River. After I had eaten, I returned to my room and began repacking my bags, fitting in all the presents and extra things that I had bought; it took a bit of ingenuity to work it all out. I discovered that I was missing the marble balls that I had bought, but there would be no problem collecting them as Miss Liu had invited me to her home for supper this evening.

At half past ten, just as I was about to go down to meet her, Lihua appeared outside my door. As the chambermaids were busy at the moment, they would not let her into my room. She now gave me a homemade bag containing a scarf for my mother and clothes for a friend's baby. I finished what I was doing and left the hotel with her. It was good to be with her once again but, because it was daytime and there were too many people and policemen about, we dared not hold hands.

As we had no definite plans, we just drifted around at an easy pace. First we went to the CAAC office to check my flight on the following day (Miss Liu had given me my plane ticket on the previous evening), but we were sent back to the Jinjiang Hotel. Much to my surprise, the lobby looked its normal self once again. Lihua told me that she had been here the day after the lobby had been vandalized, and discovered that everything had been repaired. She had taken a great interest in the demonstrations, had joined the students at the Chairman Mao statue every day, and would have encouraged me to join her in order to see history in the making. She was certainly a very brave and adventurous young lady – especially as she had travelled and fallen in love with me at her own peril.

At the CITS office I checked the time of my flight – it was 9.15 on the following morning, not 8.15 – and the time of the bus (7.30), which would leave from the Jinjiang Hotel and not the CAAC office. I paid ¥5 FEC for a ticket. When I had finished, Lihua tried to make a telephone call, but to no avail. As I had offered to buy her a present, we left the hotel and walked off in search of a suitable shop. We looked in one or two stores on the main street, but found nothing suitable. When we entered an art shop, Lihua giggled and asked me what I thought about some rather amateurish drawings of naked Western girls that were for sale – she thought that they

were lovely. At magazine stalls she was interested to see my reaction to some pornographic magazines that were available and asked me if I wanted one of them. Her rather liberal opinions about sex and nudity seemed to be quite radical for a Chinese person. By now she had told me about brief acquaintances of hers with two foreign men: an American who wanted to sleep with her (she refused), and a Pakistani lad who had taken a fancy to her along with some other girls.

We now turned off the main street just before the Chairman Mao statue and entered the busy shopping area. Here we went from one shop to another, looking at things in general. We passed the burnt People's Market, which was now being cleaned up in preparation for it being rebuilt. As it had been due for renovation, the government would fund part of the rebuilding. We were stared at everywhere we went, though not as intently as we had been on the mountain or in Leshan.

At last we found what Lihua had wanted: a simple, black hair slide like one that she had lost some time previously. She asked me if I could buy her two: a small and a large one. She laughed at the thought of being a bad girl, cheating the foreigner of his money. The price that I paid for both of them was trifling.

We wandered around more shops, stopping to look at shoes, dresses, materials, and so forth. Lihua looked at everything with a critical eye: she passed judgement on the quality of the material, examined the colours and designs, and quite often decided that she could produce better items herself. One of her ambitions was to be a dress designer.

At about midday we stopped for lunch in a large, grubby restaurant. We tried one or two of the local specialities, but I did not care for them. A stupid fellow bumped into Lihua while she was carrying a dish to the table: the plate smashed and bean sprouts fell all over the floor. The chap never apologized and no replacement dish was supplied. I think that the fellow had to pay for the broken plate.

In the afternoon we continued our window shopping. Lihua asked me to buy her a makeup brush and later I treated her to a pair of white shoes, the best of a bad lot, which looked quite smart on her.

When we eventually tired of ambling around, we headed back to my hotel and reached it soon after three o'clock. This time she was able to come into my room. Although there were people working outside, we locked the door and enjoyed each other's company for a while. Later I went downstairs and collected my clean trousers.

Lest the hotel staff become too suspicious, we moved to a bar nearby and, with the remainder of my money, I bought two cans of lychee juice. Sitting together and looking into each other's eyes, we drank and talked about ourselves. Later Lihua read from her book of Aesop's Fables and I

corrected her pronunciation. We were both sad at the thought that I would be leaving on the following day, but although I was sorry to have to leave her, I was glad that I was leaving China, for I had had quite enough of it. Having sampled life as it was here, with all its rules, regulations and prohibitions, I would be glad to return to my own country.

At about 5.30 p.m. we left and I hired a bicycle for the journey to Miss Liu's house. Lihua came part of the way with me and I said goodbye until the following morning.

I arrived at Miss Liu's apartment at about six o'clock and was introduced to an office colleague of hers: a very attractive young lady whose smile and dark brown eyes mesmerized me. Unfortunately she could speak no English. While the two ladies prepared an elaborate farewell meal, I watched television and chatted a little to Miss Liu's husband, who now displayed a great knowledge of Western classical music and produced several musical dictionaries. It was now apparent that he and Miss Liu were very well educated. The programme on the television was about various European countries.

When the meal finally appeared, Miss Liu proudly presented me with a bowl of boiled potatoes, which she had cooked specially for me – she had obviously discovered that Irish people ate potatoes! They were very tasty and the meal was excellent. Miss Liu's pretty colleague asked me various questions, using Miss Liu as her interpreter.

When the meal was over and a man who wanted to talk to Miss Liu's husband arrived, Miss Liu began to tell me that she was quite nervous about living here in Chengdu and wanted to go abroad. As she knew that a foreigner could become her guarantor, she wondered if I could help her; she would need US\$10,000. Now I realized why she and her husband had gone to so much trouble accommodating me in their apartment. Because such a large sum of money was required to get Miss Liu out of the country, I had to tell her about my limited funds and what had happened to Lihua and me on the mountain, which I had planned to keep secret. The two young ladies were fascinated by this romantic twist of events, giggled a lot and wished me the best. Miss Liu promised to keep the secret. She now revealed that Lihua had borrowed an extra ¥100 RMB from her. Lihua had never told me about this and had either given it to me or slipped it to the policeman as a bribe. (I now cannot remember if she had returned the ¥150 that I had given her.) Miss Liu now tried to pay me for the bicycle that I had bought for her, and which she had considered to be much too expensive, but I refused to take any money from her.

Later we moved back into the sitting room and a young couple arrived. A lively and heated discussion about the student demonstrations followed, which I could not understand. As I would have to get up early on the

following morning, I asked to be excused. I said goodbye, and Miss Liu and her husband saw me off. I thanked them for their kind hospitality and cycled off, only to discover that I had left my money belt behind. Back in the apartment, the farewells were repeated and I set off again. This time I cycled to the hotel in double quick time and returned the bicycle.

As I now had the bedroom to myself, I quickly reorganized my big bag, now that I had retrieved my sets of marble balls. Later two German girls came in and we chatted for a while before going to bed. Tonight we had the use of mosquito nets. I finally went to sleep at about midnight.

It had been a pleasant end to my last full day in China. The seven weeks had passed slowly and I felt as though I had been away for seven months. I had no great wish to return, but if it meant rescuing Lihua from the trouble that might have been caused by our escapade on the mountain, I vowed that I would do so.

Saturday, 17 June

This morning my alarm clock woke me at 6.30; during the night I had been dreaming of home and had woken several times, wondering where I was.

I now got myself ready quickly, but as there was no sign of Lihua at seven, I walked downstairs and waited outside for her. She arrived about five minutes late, full of apologies. She had managed to procure a copy of the banned book and the magazine from the bus conductor, which she now handed to me. She had carried them on the back of her bike, wrapped in a newspaper. I quickly buried this illegal literature in my main luggage.

We then walked quickly to the Jinjiang Hotel in spitting rain and sat in the lobby for a few minutes until the airport bus arrived. We went out to it together and said goodbye as I boarded. Only a few other people got on; judging by how they were dressed, they looked like overseas Chinese people. As there was time to spare, I opened the window and joked with Lihua. As a parting gift I gave her my little travelling alarm clock. She accepted it and laughed, saying that she was cheating the foreigner of his money again. To amuse her, I made farmyard noises at her request.

At last the engine was started and I blew her a kiss. We waved and kept waving as the bus drove over the bridge, until we were both out of sight. Any feeling of regret was now knocked out of my head by the welcome prospect of returning home.

The bus sped along the empty roads in the grey morning light and reached the airport in no time at all. Inside, the formalities were brief and civil. Checking in was a little more chaotic; I now discovered that I had to pay ¥20 FEC airport tax. Fortunately I just had enough money. I then went through security, where my hand luggage was checked after it had passed through the X-ray machine. The lady was curious about all my wrapped-up

presents and went off with one of them. She came back satisfied and all was fine. While I had been waiting, I watched two men with a video camera and lamp filming all the foreigners who were leaving.

After a short wait, during which I drank a glass of free tea and ate some buns that I had bought the day before, the flight was announced. We boarded the plane, then took off at 9.30 a.m.

Because this was a special chartered flight to Hong Kong, the plane was much cleaner than most, and the service was far better. First we were given something to drink and then we were served breakfast. Later we were given a shoulder bag, which would prove to be useful.

The flight went quickly and we touched down in Hong Kong at 11.30 a.m. By now I felt that I was halfway home! The contrast between here and mainland China now struck me forcibly: here the sky was blue, everything looked clean and modern, and the general atmosphere was so different as everyone was helpful and efficient.

Passport control took just a minute, my luggage was ready to be collected, and I quickly changed some money into Hong Kong dollars. At an information desk I was given a photocopied sheet with information about cheap accommodation. I selected the cheapest (a dormitory bed for HK\$48), rang the hostel on the free phone and, much to my astonishment, was told that there would be a bed for me tonight. I was delighted!

I now wheeled my luggage into a spacious lift and went upstairs, where I got my British Airways flight from Beijing adjusted in about five minutes. After I had done some repacking, I left most of my things in the left luggage department until the following day.

Outside I hailed one of the red taxis and asked to be taken to the STB Hostel in Reclamation Street. As the traffic was heavy, the journey took some time. I watched anxiously as the meter ticked away, but fortunately the fare was not excessive. At the hostel, I was directed to the third floor, where a man took down my particulars and showed me to a small, cramped dormitory. Although basic, it was clean.

After refreshing myself, I followed directions to the canteen in nearby Canton Street, just a minute's walk away. This turned out to be a smarter STB Hostel with a small restaurant on the landing upstairs. The food was basic, but good and not too expensive. After eating, I looked through some of the English-language newspapers and read all about the recent turmoil in China. It was very interesting and I now learned far more than I had heard in mainland China. Only now did I realize how brutal the massacre of the students had been in Tiananmen Square on 4–5 June.

When I had relaxed and read enough, I went out for a walk, which soon turned into a shopping expedition. During the afternoon I bought cotton socks, looked at what was for sale in various hi-fi shops, bought an English-

Chinese/Chinese-English dictionary, a copy of the *South China Morning Post* that had articles about the massacre, some silk ties, a silk shirt, pillow cases, and some silk scarves.

I finally made my way to the familiar YMCA building, where I had been two years previously. I went upstairs to the pleasant Salisbury Restaurant and, after I had spruced myself up, sat down in the comfortable air-conditioned area and ordered an evening meal of lasagne with salad. The service was top class and the meal was inexpensive. By now I was enjoying Hong Kong more than I had ever done before.

Refreshed and relaxed, I set off for my hostel, stopping to buy two car adapters for my portable CD machine, then in a clothing shop I bought a white shirt that had been reduced in price as it was Father's Day.

In the hostel I took a welcome shower, then talked to an Israeli chap who, when he was a child, had lived in Ireland. Following this, I went to bed.

Sunday, 18 June

My final day in Hong Kong and China. As I was in no hurry to do anything, I treated myself to a good lie-in and later got up to have a shower. I then sauntered out and walked to the nearby canteen, where I had breakfast. I returned and wrapped up the two adapters like presents (in case of trouble with the customs), cut out the interesting articles from yesterday's newspaper and looked through today's *Sunday Morning Post*. The man at the desk gave me Friday's edition.

Later I went out for a stroll; I tried to buy a copy of the *Sunday Morning Post*, but instead stopped at a couple of wayside stalls, where I bought a white tee shirt and a short-sleeved ordinary shirt. In a street nearby I bought three magazines about the unrest in Beijing; they contained colour photographs of the distressing scenes.

I returned to the hostel for a short spell and checked out. I then walked back to the canteen for lunch, but found it closed. As the food sold in the street looked a little questionable, I opted for a crowded restaurant nearby and ordered a dish by pointing at it. During my meal I chatted to a Chinese lady and a Western man about the situation in China. The man kindly gave me his copy of the *Sunday Standard*. I now discovered that the time here was one hour behind Beijing time, and so I adjusted my watch accordingly.

Back at the hostel I washed my teeth and began to write my diary. I then met a girl whom I had seen in Chengdu and chatted to her for a while.

Later in the afternoon I left for good and slowly made my way back to the YMCA. As today and tomorrow were public holidays, it was difficult to find a bureau de change, but finally I found one in a jeweller's shop. Afterwards I managed to buy a copy of today's *Sunday Morning Post* and got my sandals cleaned by a shoe-shine man.

In Nathan Road I entered a bookshop and bought a little book about the order of strokes used for Chinese characters, which I thought might be useful. Upstairs I found a section selling CDs and bought a set of four devoted to music played on traditional Chinese instruments. Afterwards, I hurried to the YMCA, where I asked about the airport bus, borrowed some Sellotape and parcelled up the CDs like presents. I then cut out all the relevant articles about the turmoil in China from the *Sunday Morning Post* and threw the rest away. In the restaurant upstairs I used the gents, where I gave myself a wash and changed into clean clothes. I then had a good evening meal before leaving.

Later I caught the airport bus, retrieved my luggage in the airport and did some extensive repacking before checking in. Some Indians, who were concerned about their luggage being overweight, tried to book in with me, but this did not work as I wanted to check my rucksack straight through to Dublin. In the end, the Indians had no need for concern, as they were not charged extra.

I then walked to the departure lounge, where I used the remainder of my money on a special *Time* magazine devoted to the trouble in China. There was not long to wait and soon I was sitting in the plane. Many of the seats were empty. We finally took off at about 11.20 p.m. As we soared up into the night sky, I heaved a sigh of relief; although I had had a wonderful trip along the Silk Road and an interesting stay in Chengdu, I was now looking forward to returning home.

POSTSCRIPT

When I eventually arrived back in Dublin airport, I found my parents waiting for me in the arrivals hall. I was quite astonished to discover that Professor Tao Kiang, my Chinese teacher, was with them; as soon as he saw me emerging from the customs area, he cried out and ran over to embrace me! Like my parents, he had been very concerned about me while I was away. During the journey home in my parents' car, I told Tao all the news and gave him the Chinese literature that I had acquired. He had been following every detail of the turmoil in Beijing and the rest of the country.

It was wonderful to return to the peace and quiet of our home after the noise and bustle of China. When I went back to work a few days later, many of my colleagues heaved a sigh of relief on seeing me once again; my colleagues in the RTÉ Television newsroom welcomed me back and wondered why I had not telephoned them from Chengdu to report on the riots there.

Once I had settled down, I began to make enquiries as to how Miss Liu (not her real name) could travel to Ireland. Just as I had suspected, getting her out of China and into Ireland would prove to be very complicated and expensive. However, much to my surprise, she managed to procure a Chinese passport – probably with the help of her father-in-law. She posted it to me in November 1989, and the Department of Foreign Affairs sent me a form that she would have to fill in. I posted it to her, explained what she needed to do, and she returned it to me, completed. I telephoned the Department to ask how I could deliver the passport and form, and was told that hundreds of applications received from Chinese people had been refused. However, I delivered the passport and completed form but received a letter in early December stating that Miss Liu's application had been refused and that the decision was final. Naturally Miss Liu was very disappointed, although my parents were somewhat relieved. This did not bode well for Lihua (also not her real name).

As soon as I had arrived home, I had told my parents about the escapade on Emei mountain with Lihua and my proposal to marry her. They were not too surprised, for they had guessed that we had become more than just good friends. No doubt they had been hoping that their thirty-four-year-old son would soon get married. Soon I began to receive letters from Lihua, assuring me that she was having no more trouble after the incident on the mountain. In her letters she described how much she missed me, how my

little travel alarm clock woke her every morning and reminded her of me, and so on.

However, shortly after I had arrived home, I had been invited to show my slides to a Cantonese couple and some of their friends at their home. After the slide show, the husband got me to tell him the story of Lihua, the incident on the mountain and my proposal of marriage to her. He immediately poured cold water over it and told me that I had walked into a trap that had been set for me – more or less the same words that Mr Gao had said on Mount Emei. Other friends and work colleagues subsequently urged me not to marry Lihua.

I was therefore faced with a dilemma when, in a letter I received towards the end of August, Lihua accepted my proposal of marriage. As by now my ardour had cooled down somewhat and I realized how complicated it would be to get anybody out of China, I had to think about this a good deal more carefully. Lihua had no passport and probably would have had little chance of obtaining one and travelling to Ireland. It was also quite possible that I would not be allowed back again if the Chinese police had a file on me. In the end I sat down and wrote a very long letter to her, explaining the predicament in which I now found myself, and told her about all the other girls that I had met during my trip. I now informed her that I wished to cancel my proposal of marriage. Some two months later, she accepted my decision; it was clear that she was very disappointed, for she had told her friends and family about the romance and my proposal. However, she continued to write to me for some considerable time, hoping (no doubt) that I might change my mind. Slowly the affair fizzled out. Her last letter was a long and slightly bitter one to my mother; in it she revealed that the authorities had intercepted my letters to her and the police had called to her parents' house. In the end I was very relieved when our romantic affair came to an end, especially as another lady had by then stolen my heart.

I received many other letters from the people I had met in China, including Nicole, the French girl whom I had met in Kashgar. Just as I had expected, she had been prevented from entering Tibet. The girl from Taiwan, whom I had met in Kashgar airport, wrote me many letters; Sophie, the German girl I had met in Ürümqi, wrote me one, but the girl I had met on the first train journey never contacted me after she had kissed me goodbye. The person who sent me the most letters, however, was the young lady who had worked in the little restaurant beside the river in Chengdu. She very much hoped that I would return to China and woo her, but I never did - my three trips had been quite enough.

Using the tapes and CDs that I had bought during my trip, I devised and presented a radio programme about Chinese music, which was broadcast by RTÉ's classical music radio station in November 1989.

Interestingly, the Tiananmen massacre (which by now has been written out of Chinese history) turned out to be the catalyst for several events that shook the world and contributed to the collapse of communism in other countries: the breaking down of the Berlin Wall, the uprising and change of government in Czechoslovakia, the shooting of Ceaușescu and his wife on Christmas day, 1989, and the beginning of Perestroika and Glasnost in the USSR.

There have been many terrifying developments in China under the iron rule of President Xi Jinping, who in 2021 celebrated one hundred years of communism with great pomp and ceremony – despite the fact that the country had allegedly been steering towards socialism rather than communism. Although standards in general seem to have improved throughout the country and religion is now tolerated to a certain degree, there is still little freedom of speech; as a Chinese lady said on a BBC documentary programme some years ago, ‘You can think, but you can’t speak’. A branch of the communist party sends young spies to universities abroad, where they steal information and keep their eyes on other Chinese students; missile silo fields have been built in the provinces of Gansu and Xinjiang; there are constant threats of an invasion of Taiwan, the rule over Hong Kong has become very heavy-handed and, as everyone knows, there has been despicable treatment of the Uighur people in Xinjiang province, which brings to mind the appalling treatment of Tibetans in the past. The power currently exerted by The People’s Republic of China on its people, its neighbouring territories and the world in general is very worrying indeed.