

## *The College Study Tour of the People's Republic of China, March–April 1985\**

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For the fortunate few who participate in College study tours abroad, an added bonus—and a not inconsiderable one at that—is the opportunity to abdicate all responsibility. From the moment of take-off on the way out to the moment of touch-down on the way back, the tour leader takes over as a sort of surrogate father. On this occasion our father, ironically enough, may not have been the youngest among us chronologically speaking, but he was nevertheless the youngest in heart. He was irrepressible, imperturbable and ebullient, and on his, admittedly, broad shoulders fell the onus of caring for a mixed bag of psychiatrists and their spouses, mixed, that is, in terms of age, sex and, in particular, temperament. We, with little respect for his status, chose to call him 'Cyril', whereas our Chinese colleagues with their traditional sense of propriety and respect for parental status, gave him his due and saw fit to address him reverentially as, 'The Honourable Dr Cyril Davies'.

But if we were lucky in our surrogate father, we were doubly lucky in our surrogate grandfather, the inscrutable, unflappable and all-wise Mr Liu. He it was who had been chosen as our guide, mentor and, as it turned out, our good friend, by the Chinese Medical Association; and Buddha, or whatever other deity, be praised for the choice. Mr Liu is an English graduate of Peking University who had suffered intolerable privations and humiliations during the lunatic years of the Cultural Revolution, but had risen above them. His command of the English language and idiom was excellent, as excellent, indeed, as was his familiarity with the literature. Because of him the insuperable language barrier was breached. Never before, incidentally, have I experienced the same degree of frustration at not being able to communicate verbally, and never before have I appreciated the crying need for the re-introduction of a universal language, an updated esperanto, with nowadays, a pagoda stuck on top—to speak.

Mr Liu it was who throughout our tour of the People's Republic of China watched over us all day, and, indeed all night when there was a hiccup in our travel arrangements. 'Hiccup', on reflection, is perhaps too mild a word: perhaps 'belch' would be more appropriate, so disastrous were the upsets on at least two unforgettable occasions.

The first was the overnight journey by train from Beijing to Nanjing in a sleeping coach that had been added to the train and was especially reserved for our party. We were most impressed; but we would have been better pleased had the powers-that-be succeeded in connecting the said coach with

the train's heating system. As it was, a sleepless and grimly uncomfortable night was passed in sub-zero temperatures. Never before had I had occasion to count my toes as I did the next morning and feel relief to find that I had retained a full complement, even if one or two were a trifle blue.

And the second relates to what should have been a relatively short train journey from Nanjing to Shanghai. Shepherded by Mr Liu we arrived at the station in good time and we waited, and we waited, until well past the time of departure. This was the one occasion when our good shepherd visibly shed his imperturbability. He eventually felt obliged to seek further information and returned shaken to tell us it was 1 April (there was no significance attached to that particular day in the Chinese calendar, as far as I am aware) and on 1 April the schedules were changed. Our train had accordingly departed more than an hour before!

Trains (and planes) in China, we were fast coming to appreciate, move in mysterious ways if, that is, they move at all. Even so, we were more than a little put out to learn that there wasn't another available train to Shanghai that day, the next day, or the next week for that matter. There was no alternative but to complete the journey, a mere 200 miles, by coach. We began in good humour about midday, but progress was sadly hampered by the nature and quality of the road, the only road-link between Nanjing and Shanghai, both cities of first-class importance. At best it was narrow and poorly surfaced and at worst it was reduced to a track which was either undergoing construction or re-construction. Added to which there was the customary hazard arising from the usual mix of vehicles—trucks of every sort, an infinite variety of carts drawn by an equal variety of four-legged animals, either alone or in curious combinations; and last but not least, the ubiquitous hordes of old-fashioned sit-up-and-beg, slow-moving bicycles. The unscheduled stops had at least one virtue, they allowed opportunities for the relief of our frustrations and our bodily needs, functions carried out with more attention to the direction of the wind than to the accepted proprieties.

The journey, not perhaps the worst in the world, but certainly in that league, ended about 10 pm. Our mood had changed and the self-evident, travel-weary fractiousness was not improved by a take-it-or-leave-it meal of noodles in soup and the prospects of spending three nights in a sleazy, run-down hotel, in downtown Shanghai. Such was the volume of protest made to our long-suffering 'father', and transmitted to 'grandfather' next morning that he somehow, somewhere, turned on the heat and saw to it that we were transferred forthwith to a spanking new and most elegant hotel on the outskirts of the city. The contrast was sharp: the only factors common to both hotels (indeed all hotels in China) were the remote-controlled TVs in the bedrooms and the telephones in the 'loo', a luxury we could have well done without.

\*These jottings are meant to complement a paper by Dr William LI Parry Jones who concerned himself with the more specifically psychiatric aspects of the same Tour. His paper will be appearing in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

**Beijing (Peking), 25–30 March**

It would have been impossible not to have entertained prior fantasies about Beijing, one of the world's great capitals; but whatever they may have been, my own did not include the wretched weather. Here, in what should have been Spring, the cold was biting, all-pervading and so numbing as to dull the senses and so lower one's appreciation of the glories that abounded. As a protection against the inhospitable temperatures, the Burberrys sported by so many of us that they served in effect as an identifying uniform, were hopelessly inadequate. The Pekinese are only human and not impervious to the cold, but they have the good sense to protect themselves with layer upon layer of clothing, the most visible of which was a thick roll-neck sweater. Alternatively, but only very occasionally, venerable old men could be seen wearing the traditional, and eminently sensible, quilted coats reaching from chin to ankle, together with padded skull caps and felt slippers. The children—one per family is all that is permitted by law—are similarly padded out. The boys for the most part wear a military type uniform with, however, a very non-military slit in the seat of the pants, the purpose of which is all too obvious. The practicality of this device is unquestionable, but it did mean that when perched on their fathers' shoulders, as they so often were, the slits were inclined to open exposing their behinds to the biting wind so producing a change in colour which reminded one of the rear end of a barbary ape.

Beijing itself must be the ugliest city on the face of the earth. It is not only drab, a drabness not improved by the awful uniformity of the clothes of the inhabitants, and as flat as a billiard table, but it is in addition inordinately dusty. It is particularly so when, all too frequently, a south-westerly wind scoops up vast quantities of dust from the Gobi Desert and then nonchalantly deposits it indiscriminately on Manchu palaces and pig-sties alike. It is little wonder, therefore, that so many Pekinese wear surgical masks as a matter of routine to protect themselves from the polluted air. We had been warned in advance, and a pity it is that we didn't have the courage of our convictions and follow suit so, possibly, avoiding a good deal of the respiratory troubles which plagued so many of us.

If I seem somewhat unenthusiastic about Beijing *per se* it is because I am just that. I exclude, of course, its major attractions—the Forbidden City, the Ming Tombs, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven and the Great Wall, an easy bus ride away. These are treasures beyond compare, and well worth journeying to the ends of the earth to see; which is, I suppose, precisely what we had done.

**Nanjing (Nanking), 31 March–1 April**

Nanjing is one of the main ports of call for those who like ourselves, but in our case for rather different reasons, add to China's burgeoning tourist industry. Our de luxe hotel, the Jinling, was yet another example of the growing awareness of the Chinese to the stark reality that if they are to attract visitors from the West, they must provide western-style accommodation. Neither the Friendship Hotel in Beijing, built to accommodate the hordes of Russian technicians who

flooded into China in the 1950s, nor the hotel in Shanghai in which we spent one miserable night, were good enough by a long chalk. So incredible indeed was the Jinling to local Chinese eyes that at any time of the night or day a solid mass, mainly of Mao-suited men, stood in the street gazing in wonderment at the hotel itself and at those who came and went, in the same way, I imagine, as the hordes of peasants in pre-revolutionary France gazed through the railings of Versailles.

On the Sunday we were scheduled to visit the Eastern Suburbs of Nanking. I for one was filled with foreboding, a foreboding based on visions of a conducted tour laced with political indoctrination to communes comparable, say, to the People's Republic of Hackney, Bethnal Green or Islington.

I couldn't have been more wrong: it turned out to be the most enjoyable expedition thus far. There was more than a faint trace of Spring in the air. It was positively warm, the camellias were in full bloom and the trees were bathed in the first blush of blossom. For the first time we were able to shed our Burberrys and assorted pullovers and leave them behind in the bus.

Nanjing offers a variety of tourist attractions, not on the scale of Peking, but spectacular enough in all conscience. The Chinese themselves are dedicated tourists and our party added an insignificant number to the vast throngs who, in never-ending line, visited in turn Dr Sun-Yat-Sen's Mausoleum, the Linggu Temple and the Xuanwuhu Park. As so often happens it is the unexpected and unscheduled event that delights most. So it was on this occasion when, in the park, we had the good fortune to see three mini-plays performed by professional actors dressed in the old-style costumes of indescribable beauty and intricacy. The performers mimed their parts while the story-teller, who stood on one side, explained the action. Not that much explanation was necessary: the plots were immediately familiar, because they are universal and inevitably concerned with romantic love, greed, envy, and jealousy, for example.

We were entertained to lunch that day in what is now a Government Rest Home, but the elegance of its public rooms and its mature gardens suggested more patrician origins. Although our meal was termed lunch, it was in effect a banquet, and banquets, as we soon came to learn, are the traditional way in which Chinese honour their distinguished guests. This particular feast, sumptuous as it was, differed in two details. Firstly, there were no speeches, not a great loss if the truth be told taking into account the language problems which abounded; and secondly, for the first time in our Chinese culinary experience, chips were served, but chips of such a degree of golden crispness that the more dignified term, 'frites', would be more appropriate. But call them what you will, how were they to be eaten? Chop sticks were the only tools available, and so one was faced with the dilemma of eating the traditional food of one culture with the tools of another. Chop sticks in western hands are clumsy instruments and not designed for anything so elongated as a chip. Failing all else it was possible, without too much loss of face, to have recourse to more antique instruments, i.e. the forefinger and thumb.

**Shanghai, 1–5 April**

When I first visited China in the guise of a ship's surgeon nearly half a century ago, Shanghai was one of the world's most important entrepôts. The major western trading nations enjoyed concessions there and each of them had erected fine buildings characteristic of its own architectural style along the Bund, making it one of the most exciting waterfronts to be found anywhere. In its elegance, sophistication and cosmopolitanism, Shanghai was without compare: 'The Paris of the Orient' was its well-deserved appellation. There was one wholly unacceptable feature, however: the Chinese themselves were virtually excluded. All that has now changed. The concessions and the concessionaires have gone, and the city has long since reverted to its lawful owners.

It was at night that I had my first glimpse of Shanghai as it is now. The lights of the city were full on and it seemed to me that nothing had changed. The unique variegated skyline and the majestic sweep of the Bund were just as I remembered them. It was sadly an illusion. Only in the cold light of the next day did I begin to appreciate how sleazy and run-down the Bund had become. Not only this, but away from the waterfront Shanghai took on the appearance of a vast laundry. There was washing hanging everywhere, from every window, from every balcony and from every conceivable variety of make-shift clothes line slung between any two verticals—trees, lamp-posts, telegraph poles. Nothing was too sacred. Perhaps this is as it should be. The Shanghai of yesteryear was a dazzling artefact. What we were seeing now was today's China. And nothing could typify the reality of the changes more exactly than what we were allowed to see in the following two days.

We toured a commune in Jiading near Shanghai and were shown what appeared to be a well-run dairy and pig farm, and juxtaposed, small factories manufacturing towels and bed linen. The machinery was antique and deafeningly noisy, but what stuck out a mile was that the attention paid to the safety of the workers—seemingly all women—was scant to say the least.

Included in the tour was a visit to the General Hospital of the commune. The wealth of care lavished on the patients by staff, relatives and friends contrasted sharply with the abject poverty of the hospital itself, its furnishings and its equipment. The small wards were packed with an assortment of patients of all ages suffering from Heaven-knows-what, lying on rags, often fully dressed (caps and all) on chipped enamel iron bedsteads. It was impossible to know what treatment was being administered, but it was obvious that cupping, moxibustion and acupuncture are still the order of the day.

An additional, and again unexpected, bonus was a visit to the local free (or was it flea?) market which consisted of booths and stalls, strewn along a street several hundred yards long. There were tradesmen of every variety including the expected vendors of such commodities as vegetables, meat and fish—alive, alive, oh! But there were many unexpected entrepreneurs, not the least spectacular of which was the medicine man whose medicaments were guaranteed to cure anything from impotence and lethargy to chronic cough and piles. Even more, they were capable of holding back the

ravages of old age. Displayed on the ground were the ingredients of these nostras which in their gruesomeness would have gladdened the hearts of all three of Macbeth's witches. Then there was the rodent exterminator with, on display, proof of the efficacy of his poisons in the shape of dead rats the size of cats and mice the size of rats. Finally, should you feel so disposed, you could have your hair cut or your corns or callouses attended to by experts in the field, all *en plein air*.

But for me the most tender and abiding memory is of the Children's Palace, a visit to which I might so easily have missed had I not decided to play hookey and join what was described in the programme as an event for 'the free ladies'.

The 'Palace' was in fact the erstwhile town house of the Sassoon family, one of the many merchant princes who at one time ruled Shanghai. Its present function was to cater for the further education of children specially gifted in the arts of music, painting, singing and dancing.

What was so particularly endearing, however, was the manner in which we were received and conducted round the establishment. As we stepped off the bus each of us was met and greeted by a different little girl, each a pupil of the school. Mine was an enchantress of about eight who sat next to me during the welcoming address while the inevitable endless mugs of green tea were served. After the formalities my diminutive companion grasped my hand and guided me from room to room to be entertained by the prodigious talents of pupils of both sexes.

The visit over, we moved back to the bus still hand-in-hand. As I mounted the step she gave me a heart-melting smile and in impeccable English, obviously carefully rehearsed, said, 'Please come back soon.' I wanted desperately to give her a memento—anything—but all I could find was a cheap and inappropriate biro which I pressed into her hand and which, to my relief, she accepted gleefully.

**Canton (Guangzhou), 6–8 April**

Canton was different. It was perhaps too near to the flesh-pots, the sophistication and the materialism of Hong Kong to avoid its impact. The clothes here seemed brighter, less uniform and more à la mode than elsewhere, but this, of course, might be due to the influence of those who had struck it rich in Hong Kong and were returning to visit relatives in the homeland. There was a spanking new hotel de grande luxe (our hotel, the Dong Fang, next door had its own traditional, ornate grandeur) which compared with anything in the West, or, for that matter in Hong Kong. The Friendship Shop, one of a chain of government run departmental stores, was better stocked and arranged with more of a semblance of efficiency than those in other cities we had visited.

Change is not, however, synonymous with progress. Some undesirable practices had crept in, as witness the 'money-change' touts who accosted one every few paces (black-market currency offences in China are regarded with the utmost gravity), and for the first time we were exposed to the unwanted and unwarranted torment of 'background music'.

As always, a full programme of entertainment had been arranged which this time included a visit to some magnificently kept botanical gardens and to the vast Sun-Yat-Sen

memorial theatre set in a well-maintained park. But what was particularly intriguing was a visit to a jade factory. I had never previously appreciated the expertise that goes into the carving of jade nor, for that matter, the inherent dangers of the work: one slip, one lapse of concentration, when working with those evil looking high-speed lathes could so easily result in the operative leaving the factory with a finger or two fewer than when he entered. All in all, the price asked for the finished product was by no means excessive. The same, incidentally, could be said of the Chinese cloisonné work, the manufacture of which we had seen as part of our Shanghai tour. A pity it is that I don't particularly like either.

#### Reflections in a Chinese mirror

It would be monstrously presumptuous to draw conclusions about a country as vast and as complex as the People's Republic of China after such a fleeting visit. A few reflections are all that are allowed.

China as it is today—and it is patently still in a state of transition following the relatively recent political upheavals, and in particular, the insanity of the Cultural Revolution—is not for the hedonist, the fashion-conscious, the gourmet, the

culture-vulture, the sophisticate, the cold-sensitive, the bronchitic and for those intolerant of a rigid, hide-bound bureaucracy. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to be deeply impressed by the positive host-like qualities of its people; the courtesy and the courtesies; the generosity and the hospitality, as witness the succession of banquets given in our honour. Nor could one fail to be impressed by the warmth of the welcome accorded to us wherever we visited. Prominently displayed, for example, on black-boards in the entrance to each hospital was a message of welcome in English, sometimes a little quaint, such as the one which read, 'Welcome to the Royal College of Psychiatrists'. What, too, was especially touching was the way in which, even in the back wards the chronic patients were capable of lifting themselves out of their psychoses momentarily and clapping our entrances and our exits. For me personally, however, the most poignant experience was the brief encounter with my little Princess at the Children's Palace in Shanghai.

For all of us, I feel sure, it was an unforgettable adventure, one that I, at any rate, would not have missed—not for all the tea in China.

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### *An Appeal for Dr Anatoly Koryagin to the Medical Profession*

Dr Anatoly Koryagin, who was recently elected to the Fellowship of the College (*Bulletin*, April 1985, 9, 80), is still languishing in Chistopol Prison. Recently an appeal for him was smuggled out to the West from a friend who prefers to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal.

'Protesting about psychiatric abuse isn't fashionable in the West nowadays, so no one will intercede for you. I advise you to think about your future and your family . . .' These words have been used by a KGB investigator as a surprisingly primitive method of inducement to recant.

Anatoly Koryagin is a psychiatrist. He was regarded as a good specialist. He practised in a clinic and had a Candidate of Science degree (equivalent to a western PhD), published his articles in specialist journals, and delivered papers at scientific conferences. But could many psychiatrists be found who wanted to check out whether everything was in order regarding their own science in the USSR. I can answer that question: in the last eight years, only two.

One was Alexander Voloshanovich, who has emigrated and practises psychiatry in England. The other is Anatoly Koryagin, who is slowly dying in the strict-regime prison of Chistopol.

Anatoly Koryagin has once again declared a hunger strike. We've already lost count which one this is—his third? Or his fourth? Now Dr Koryagin is protesting against the conditions in Chistopol Prison: against the virtually complete absence of medical care; against the use of the punishment cells for the smallest 'transgression'; against the soup which even the pigs wouldn't touch . . .

So please listen, those who've been lucky enough to be born in democratic countries! Anatoly Koryagin was brutally beaten in prison. He has become bloated from starvation and can now no longer get out of his bed. He has said that he will continue his strike until the end of his prison term—that means until February 1988. Will he survive till then? A 'humane' Soviet law says: 'Punishment must not harm the health of prisoners.' So hunger strikers are artificially (more accurately—forcibly) fed. There are no words to describe the pain and humiliation involved in this. Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov,

according to his relatives' reports, ended his hunger strike last year after one month: 'It was too torturous', he explained. Anatoly Koryagin has been on hunger strike continuously for almost a year and his family is suffering dreadfully in Kharkov.

I appeal to all the doctors of the world, and also to each of you individually. Today your colleague, the doctor Koryagin, is near to death because of his loyalty to the Hippocratic Oath. Today he and his family need your *immediate* help. Tomorrow it may be too late. I ask you to do everything possible to secure the immediate emigration of Anatoly Koryagin and his family from the USSR.

I suggest that as this can't be done by normal means, you make the Koryagin family's immediate emigration an absolute condition of any co-operation with the health organization of the USSR. They'll say to you: 'That's not humane; that's going against your duty as a doctor . . .' Be ready to be accused of 'fascism' and other contemptible things. Our medicine, as everyone knows, is the most humane in the world. Probably that's why the doctors in Soviet 'correctional' camps don't excuse ill prisoners from work. Probably that's why—as 'punishment'—in the same camps prisoners are put in unheated punishment cells and virtually not fed. And doctors sanction this!

Even if I wrote an article long enough to fill a whole page of a newspaper, I wouldn't have room to list all the crimes of these 'doctors'. They couldn't even care less about the health of the 'free' citizen of this country, so is it likely they'll care about prisoners? But let me return to the main point.

You have a real chance to save a human life. Your doctor's duty is to do everything possible to that end, whatever the price.

And please remember one more thing. The fact that I am writing to you now with this appeal is extremely dangerous for me too, and for my family. It would be very sad if I am taking this risk in vain, if I don't succeed in stirring your hearts.

Individual members of the College may wish to write to Dr Anatoly Koryagin at USSR 422950, Tatarskaya ASSR, g. Chistopol, uchr. U3-148/st-4; and also the Governor of Chistopol Prison, Captain Romanov, Tatarskaya, USSR.