

Joint Programme in Communication in Culture

MA Project & Project Paper

Project: 春风吹又生
(spring wind will bring life again)

Student: Amelia Bryne Potter
Date Submitted: March 30, 2007

The project is a film about Beijing, and through Beijing, a snapshot of the present moment: of the relation between China and the United States, fears and concerns, and where the future *seems* to be going. Of a moment where it feels like the order of the world is shifting under our feet, where things are growing and decaying, where things seem to be changing, but it's not exactly clear how, where there is some kind of crisis, one that we can only name pieces of, where everything we do only seems to make it worse, and it's not clear if anything can be done. The project is made from digital video images shot in Beijing in December 2005 to June 2006, spoken-voice stories about the city, and questions about larger world relations. The stories are told from the perspective of a person from the US living in China. She knows Beijing, and speaks Mandarin. Together, these images and words, English, Mandarin, and sounds of the city, form a rhythmic poem, 42 minutes long. In the tradition of Chinese poetry, the film speaks through concrete images and examples. It is dense, and covers many topics: I want the film to lead people to talk, think and ask questions about the world at this moment, and our roles in it.

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Amelia Bryne Potter
March 2007

The Project – Context and Development

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What is the project?

The project is a film about Beijing, and through Beijing, a snapshot of the present moment: of the relation between China and the United States, fears and concerns, and where the future *seems* to be going. Of a moment where it feels like the order of the world is shifting under our feet, where things are growing and decaying, where things seem to be changing, but it's not exactly clear how, where there is some kind of crisis, one that we can only name pieces of, where everything we do only seems to make it worse, and it's not clear if anything can be done. The project is made from digital video images shot in Beijing in December 2005 to June 2006, spoken-voice stories about the city, and questions about larger world relations. The stories are told from the perspective of a person from the US living in China. She knows Beijing, and speaks Mandarin. Together, these images and words, English, Mandarin, and sounds of the city, form a rhythmic poem, 42 minutes long. In the tradition of Chinese poetry, the film speaks through concrete images and examples. It is dense, and covers many topics: I want the film to lead people to talk, think and ask questions about the world at this moment, and our roles in it.

Conceptually, the film is divided into three parts. Each part explores different questions.

Part I: Things Are Changing

Part I is a preface – a space before entering the film and the city, and a glimpse of the Beijing of the present/future. The images are at night, minimal, black and white, black screen. The viewer is coming into the city, slowly, seeing Beijing at night and glimpses of the city's powerful and impressive spaces, of what the city has the potential to become. This section introduces Beijing as the subject of the film. It challenges ideas about the relative standard of living in China and North America, and raises questions about what defines a good standard of living. It also talks about fears about the future of the United States, questions whether our own actions could be, slowly, influencing our futures, and, also, if it is possible to change the future by changing our actions.

Part II: China in America, America in China

As Part II opens it takes the viewer into Beijing itself. It maps out key elements of the city, its roads, people, restaurants, parks, construction sites, grocery stores, bars, sounds, and transportation. Beijing is a metaphor for the larger world. Like the world, it is

changing rapidly, and, in Beijing, this change is constantly and physically evident. This section traces complex and unanticipated ways that globalization takes shape: the ways that China and the US are interlinked through the things we buy, through our militaries, and encounters between people. It also questions mantras of US business and politics, namely, the drive to make capitalism global, and to make the world in our own image. Will these dreams come back to haunt us?

Part III: Acceptance of Change

Part III begins with a sequence at the Old Summer Palace about growth and decay. This part illustrates a specific, and pervasive, aspect of change occurring now in Beijing. As older homes and shops are torn down to make room for new buildings, families are displaced to developments like the large government-built suburb north of the city shown in the film. The benefits and drawbacks of this are not clear-cut. Ultimately, change, in the larger world, may be similarly inevitable, and similarly ambiguous. If so, how should we approach change? This section asks related questions about economic growth, stagnation and decay. What does "growth" mean? What does "decay" mean? What is the difference between the two? Is decay a necessary part of growth? Is there any way to stop decay? Would this be wise? This section suggests that there are not necessarily any easy answers to these questions, and that living through political or economic growth and decline is uncomfortable.

How was the project made?

(For an overview of this process, please see the project timeline, included at the end of this paper.)

Although I officially began work on this project during the summer of 2006, it is the result of a process that began in 2003. The fall after finishing my undergraduate degree in cultural anthropology at Columbia University, Barnard College, I found work, to my surprise, as a market analyst for the automotive industry. Over the period of a year I tracked news stories about manufacturing contracts and plant openings, as well as oil and metal prices. Everyday I read about China. While at first the stories were about the opportunity the China market provided for foreign automakers, this enthusiasm gradually began to shift to worries about an eventual slowdown of the Chinese economy, the growth of Chinese auto companies, and even the possibility of export of Chinese

companies' cars to the United States and Europe: a reversal in the profit chain and a new challenge in business competition.

At the beginning of 2004 I traveled to Beijing and Shanghai, with a company looking to invest in the Chinese automotive manufacturing market. Despite everything I had read about China's growth, I imagined that the China I would see would feel and look *communist*: materially poor and authoritarian. I felt nervous about bringing a video camera, thinking that filming could get me into trouble with the communist authorities, or that it that might be in danger of being stolen as something that would seem materially unreachable to local people. A two-hour walk in Shanghai changed my mind. Next to our hotel, a Marriot with English-speaking staff, there was a complex of shopping malls, the main building six floors high. Across the river in the older part of the city women followed us hawking bags of Louis Vuitton socks and scarves. On the outskirts of the city there was an IKEA, and on television there was the Shanghai version of MTV. I thought again and again, "I've never seen anything like this. China is the epitome of capitalism."

I was intrigued because China itself (the small part of it that I saw) was at the same time so much more different and so much more similar to home than I had imagined. China was surprising and bewildering, even everyday ways of moving and talking were foreign. At the same time, China and the US seemed to share a similar orientation towards the future, and also to have a special relationship towards each other in relation to this future. So much was happening between China and the US economically and politically that was well documented in the news – currency battles, trade relations, presidential talks, human rights investigations. But, I started to wonder: How is this shift in the relationship between these two countries playing out on a human level? Are individuals' lives affected by these changes? What are peoples' lives in both places like? What do people in China and people in the North America think of each other? How do they view what is happening?

I think it was, simply, this sense that *something important is happening between China and the US* that sparked and carried forward this project. After my trip to China, without a specific intention for what might come of it, I decided to learn Mandarin.

I had missed the deadline for registration that term's university language courses, so I began to study on my own. I bought a textbook, met with a tutor once a week, and found a language exchange partner to practice speaking with. When I met Qiang, my first partner, the only words I knew in Mandarin were "hello", "thank you" and "goodbye".

In his small office at the University of Toronto he patiently recorded 20 basic words for me to listen to and learn during the week. Meeting and speaking with Qiang, and later, others, I slowly learned. I also learned from what my language exchange partners and I talked about from week to week. We asked each other all kinds of questions about China and North America, about families, the cost of living, politics, relationships, names, holidays, and places we'd been. How much does university tuition cost? Would parents help their children pay for it? Do North Americans get lonely? How can they sit alone at a café table? What do you learn in school about China? What do you cook your boyfriend for dinner? Have you been to Nanjing? What do you think of New York City? These conversations made me think deeply about North America, something I hadn't expected.

I began my master's degree in the fall of 2005, and continued to study Mandarin. In December 2005 I returned to Beijing. I had arranged to stay with a Chinese family, friends of a high school classmate of my mother's who lives in Beijing. The family had recently moved to the northern suburbs of the city, after their house was torn down by a central-city redevelopment program. Yan Li, my mother's age, was wonderful. She insisted I wear long underwear in the cold Beijing winter, took me many places in the city, made me dumplings, patiently explained the meaning of things I asked about, and taught me how to use Beijing's immense bus system.

In the spring of 2006 I made plans to return to Beijing with the idea of doing a visual social research project for the final project of my masters degree. I intended to capture images relating to Beijing food and food culture, and to use these images as starting point for conversations with women in Toronto, originally from Beijing, about their memories of the city and their experiences of North America. In Beijing itself, my original, broader curiosity, began to seep in. I began to collect video footage not just of food, but of everyday life – how the city looked, what was most noticeable, what visual and aural patterns and surprises it had. That is: city streets, trees and plants, sounds; food; social interactions; gestures, arrangements, colors, textures; homes and their organization, body language, people's daily routines; things that caught my attention, things that were unique and common, typical and rare. To collect the footage I used a small digital video camera. I worked mostly handheld, taking the camera with me on buses, in stores, to parties. Between the winter and the summer I recorded about 30 hours of footage. As I had done throughout the winter, I also kept a detailed written journal.

When I returned to Toronto I struggled with what questions I wanted to ask the women I planned to work with. What memories did they have of Beijing? How did these memories relate to their experiences in Toronto? Was it possible to explain differences and similarities between the two cities more concretely by using visual representations of places like parks, streets, and kitchens? What was their view of North America? And, how did this relate to my view of China? Were these experiences in any way analogous? How could connections be drawn between them without making a simplistic comparison? How could I present all of this visually? I began to realize not only that I was increasingly interested in the creative rather than the social research aspect of the project, but also, that the project as I had initially conceived it, was very large. I needed to narrow my focus.

Eventually, I decided to use my footage and experiences from Beijing for this project, and to leave the Toronto part of the project for later. I decided that I wanted to create a portrait of Beijing – not one that would set out to define the city, but one that would present it from my perspective along with questions that being there raised in me about the United States.

To begin, I watched and re-watched my footage, looking within it for the pieces I wanted to use. I considered using the footage to tell an autobiographical story about my stays in the city, or a story that would incorporate economic facts and news stories about China as they seemed to connect with everyday life in Beijing. During this time I continued to think about how it was possible to define more clearly the thing that made me curious about China in the first place – the sense that something important was happening between China and the US. I wrote a series of observations about this feeling. These sentences developed into a poem.

Later, I began thinking of using this poem as the base for the film itself. The text of the poem, centering on the metaphor of metamorphosis as a way to think about the process of change, was abstract. I was unsure of how to pair images with it. Near this time I had begun re-reading the journals I had kept related to the project, nearly 200 pages over the winter, spring, summer and fall in Beijing and Toronto. I was surprised because the stories I told in the journals were almost visually more vivid than my video images: detailed descriptions of the look and smell of places, a record of the unfolding of relationships, and conversations with people in Beijing and Toronto about China and the US. Using the poem as a core, I began to add in stories from these journals. I edited these journal entries into short form, and took away pieces of the original poem. I then

began pairing images and natural sounds with a spoken voice version of this poem, shifting the text to fit, and creating three layers – a theoretical poem, a poem of experiences, and a visual/aural poem. As the film developed I worked to match the images, sound, and voice rhythmically to create a larger whole out of the about 20 smaller stories and questions of the poem.

Creating the film I thought quite a bit about the relationship of language to the project. Firstly, as I began thinking about the film poetically, I was intrigued by the synergies between film and Chinese poetry. As a language Mandarin is abstract, what you literally say in Mandarin is often very simple. To speak well, you must understand what is implied. This is particularly true of Chinese idioms and Chinese poetry. An example of each is included in the film. Through idioms and poems large concepts can be expressed in just a few characters. The way this is done is often not literal, but metaphorical and even visual. For instance, the poem in the film's epilogue reads:

离离原上草
一岁一枯荣
野火烧不尽
春风吹又生

Sparse grass on a grassland.
Within one year the grasses, grow, and die.
The wild fire cannot burn all this grass down.
The spring wind will bring life again.

The simple image of grasses on a grassland is a metaphor for the process of regeneration, for human life, and its relationship to the cycles of the natural world. In the same way, the power of visual and verbal stories told through film is in what they, in a short time, imply. In this way, film can be used like poetry, to open up a question or concept to think about without stipulating how to do so. Although some of the film's questions and statements remain direct (The world is changing. What is the image of America? What is the difference between decay and growth?) they are told within the context of stories that I hope will open larger ideas for people to think about.

The primary voice of the film is an English voice, my voice. It underlies nearly the entire piece. Conceptually, I felt it was important to use both Mandarin and English. But, incorporating Mandarin was more difficult than I anticipated. I recorded a female Mandarin voice speaking the parts of the poem where it is implied that someone told me something ("I talk with a woman at a late-night restaurant, she says ...", etc.). But, as I worked to put the two voices together I found that the rhythm and speed of the Mandarin

and English were so different that they broke each other's flows – a result that could be useful, but, in this case, seemed jarring. Also, it was challenging to add English subtitles to correspond to the Mandarin words. What was said in Mandarin was said so much more quickly than it could be said in spoken, and especially in written, English. I tried lowering the volume and speed of the Mandarin voice to make the tempos of the two voices more compatible, layering subtitles, and considered leaving the Mandarin parts of the poem un-translated. Ultimately, I decided to incorporate Mandarin differently. The film is both introduced and ended by Mandarin, through the film's title and the Chinese poem. The final question of the film (Is this always so?) is spoken by both the English and the Mandarin narrators in Mandarin. As there is a shift in the world, there is a shift in what voices are heard. In addition, Chinese characters often appear on screen throughout the film, both to accompany the spoken Mandarin and to mark Beijing as the film's subject.

I also thought a lot about the role of natural sound in the film; how the city itself speaks. Beijing is a noisy city. Initially, I had intended to add natural sound underneath the voice throughout the film. But, for two reasons I choose to add natural sound in only specific places. One reason is that as the film developed, I began to feel that the voice was stronger on its own than when combined with other sounds. Secondly, listening to the sounds of the city that I recorded as a recorded image I began to notice that the overall sound of Beijing is very similar: the city is overpowered, night and day by an indecipherable mix of traffic noise, construction, and loud voices. Naturally recorded sound appears in three significant places in the film. One, at the beginning of the second section of the film this overall sound of Beijing (and no image) is the viewer's first introduction to the city by day. Two, natural sound and image are paired in over the four and half minute sequence of the bus ride from the outskirts of Beijing to the central city. Here, the viewer is, for the first and only time in the film, really *in the city*. Bus rides with shaking glass windows, starts and stops, views of construction sites, tall buildings, people getting on and off, is for me, what encapsulates the Beijing at this moment: a place that is growing, changing, moving, going somewhere, hard to keep up with. Three, natural sound appears again in the walk through the old courtyard home, part of a *hutong* (old neighborhood) in the central city. The bird chirps, and man's voice calling out are characteristic of old Beijing, sounds that are still present and frequent, but that are easily covered over by the louder traffic and construction noises. Using natural sound so specifically, I want the viewer to pay attention to what they are hearing. These are not background noises; they are an important part of the city.

What have I learned?

Through the project I have learned about Beijing and ways of conceptualizing the relationship between China and the US, I have also learned about the process of making a film. In addition, this project has led me to work, both new questions and new techniques, I would like to pursue in the future.

RESEARCH

How do we speak intelligently and in a worthwhile way about very big issues?

This question may have always been on theorists' minds, but it seems especially important and necessary now. It is also something that, at this moment, may be difficult to do. Frederic Jameson (1991) writes that our present world, one characterized by transnational capitalism, escapes traditional forms of representation and critique. Its structures of power and circuits of movement are slippery. This world seems to operate with a new form of logic, one that, is itself characterized by a seeming lack of pattern, something that is not quite grasp-able, one where older categories of making sense of the world – right and wrong, in power and powerless, first and third world – become mixed. How do we make sense of the world today?

In this project I wanted to learn about other people's approaches to answering this question, and to develop my own approach. Though there are many ways of doing this, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing pioneers one important method. In her study *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005) she begins in the Indonesian rainforest and from here traces how the goals and desires of various local and international social, political and economic groups came together to produce, through their collaborations and conflicts, the recent history of this region. Similarly, in this project my stories about Beijing and North America can be used not as definitive explanations of a relationship, but as nodes to work out from that can ultimately help us to conceptualize the, complex, relationships between China and the US. The film's stories lead to larger questions about globalization, economic growth, capitalism, US foreign policy, personal responsibility in social change, and the future.

Besides developing a methodological approach to making sense of large issues and concepts, through my research for this project I also learned about more things than I could address directly in the film. They include the following topics, observations, and

questions:

LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER

We live in the same world, complexly.

I stayed with a couple in Beijing who are about the same age as my parents, and both retired. During the day Yan Li took me to many places in the city, I accompanied her to stores, to meetings with friends, parks, and to parties. At night her husband joked and drank *bai jiu* a clear, harsh, liquor similar to vodka, watching American basketball games and Chinese soap opera stories of the royal court on television. Sometimes I sat with him. When I did he would begin to explain what was happening on TV in simpler terms so that I could understand better, or to ask me questions about the United States. If we talked long enough he would start to tell stories about geography and world military history, and would get up to find a globe of the world he kept in another room.

These nights, it was surreal to hear the facts of history I learned in school, and current political and economic events, explained in Mandarin by someone who had learned the same (or slightly different) facts in China. My first night there I used the globe to say, simply, that our airplane had flown over the North Pole to get from Canada to China, and we talked about polar bears, penguins, the weather, America. Later, he told me about the regions of China; about Tibet, the world's highest mountains, a pretty area in the southern part of country where there are few roads and only the tour guides speak Mandarin, locals speak a dialect. And, about China during the Second World War; Japan's takeover of part of the country, Russia's takeover of Mongolia and retreat when Germany attacked Moscow, how the US only got involved in the war after Japan attacked Hawaii, and how Japan surrendered after the US dropped the nuclear bombs. Or, about the US war in Iraq, current global struggles over natural resources, and China's military status – now that it has powerful weapons, he said, the US doesn't want to upset China. While we may have had little else in common in terms of where and how we grew up, we shared a more or less similar understanding of global historical, geographic, and political facts.

Today, how do we understand our own (personal, national) histories? How do we relate this to global history? Where are the points of connection and contention between different peoples' views of this global history?

There is so much I do not understand about Beijing (let alone China).

During the summer in Beijing I noticed that there were many shows on the city's local TV stations about divorce. Between soap operas and serious sitcoms, the shows seemed to focus on the relationship between the father and child after divorce (rather than mother and child or the two parent's relationship); on the father having a hard time after divorce; the child wanting the parents to get back together; the role of outside people in divorce such as the police, people that the parents want to date, and people intervening to help the children. Seeing these shows, more than hearing people talk about divorce – something that happened rarely – made me begin to wonder, is divorce seen somewhat differently in China than in North American culture? I think it must be, but, besides this, I don't know much else: How frequent is divorce in China? What are the legal structures surrounding it? When and why do people marry? How are you seen if you are divorced? What might your family say? What would happen to your children? Similarly, there are so many things in China that I have learned just a tiny bit about, enough to know that I don't know much.

We make guesses in cultural translation. They are not always right.

Knowledge that we might assume to be obvious can easily be lost in the guesses we make in cultural translation. For example, one afternoon in Toronto a language exchange partner and I began talking about US President Richard Nixon. My friend, a university professor who has lived in North America for five years, was saying that Nixon is thought of quite positively in China because he helped to reestablish China-US relations. I began to tell the story of the Watergate Scandal and to describe what the Watergate building is like. When I lived in Washington, DC I shopped at the Safeway grocery store in its basement, which frequently had near-rotten strawberries and always had lots of canned food. At first looking a little confused, my friend listened, and said, "I thought 'Watergate' was a place like a bridge or a river, not a building!" As it turned out, when he had briefly studied the event as a student the professor had said that he guessed that, translating literally, Watergate was something to do with water. I can only imagine the subtleties of Chinese history and politics I have missed and mixed up.

Why and how is the West interested in China?

Last February I heard a recent graduate of the University of Toronto Ph.D. program in anthropology speak about her research. She had lived with and gotten to

know the workers and management in a state-owned company in China. People there, she said, reacted to her both as a Chinese woman, and as a woman returning to China from the West. Workers questioned her reasons for being there, her relationship to China, and how she presented herself in Canada as a Chinese person. Something one of the workers said struck her and me. This man said, "There have been many researchers here. Why are Western researchers always so interested in the dark side of China?"

The question, in a room of Western-based researchers studying China, went unanswered. It is an important question. In what way is the West interested in China? Why are Westerners interested in China in this way? Is the West interested only in the dark side of China's development? What side of China are we curious to see? What stories do we tell about China? How long have we been telling them for? Have they been changing? In what ways? What do we most often hear about China? What do we imagine China to be?

PLACES

Beijing is changing, immensely. Documentation is difficult to find.

The old architecture of Beijing is incredible: the parks, temples, and palace buildings. The best of Beijing's older houses are like the city's temples, beautiful buildings with courtyards, large windows, and high ceilings. Walking through the center of Beijing Yan Li, who has lived here since she was a child, could point out the old wooden gates that marked the different parts of the city, showed me the best and the oldest shops for tea, medicine, and traditional shoes, and described what it was like when bicycles were the main way to travel from place to place. Although the old Beijing can be seen in today's city – delicate wooden roofs hidden behind signs for pharmacies and plastic flower displays, it is difficult to imagine the amount of change that must have occurred in the past 30 years for Beijing to look as it does now.

The history of this change exists in personal stories. For example, one day as we were walking by a small temple Yan Li said, "Let's go in! My uncle used to live here." As we walked through, she began remembering visiting him as a girl when the temple was used as an orphanage and he, its doctor, lived in a little house that still stood under trees in the central courtyard. Before this, Yan Li said, the temple had been a place where the Empress Cixi would rest when she traveled outside the Forbidden City. Now, it is a temple again, open to the public.

Much of the physical evidence of this recent past is lost. I asked in a number of bookshops whether they had books with photographs of old Beijing. Though they must exist, the best I got was a map of the city in the 1950s. I asked Yan Li if she had any photographs of what Beijing looked like when she was young. She said that most of her family's photographs had been lost or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. I asked what her house had looked like, and she said that her and her husband's house had been recently torn down to make a park.

There is a large and diverse Chinese community in Toronto.

When I began to study Mandarin I knew that there was a large Chinese community in Toronto, but I did not realize how large. More than 300,000 people, or about ten percent of Toronto's population is of Chinese origin (Statistics Canada 2003). I have encountered the basic outline of this community: the grocery stores in the Spadina Chinatown, a Szechuan restaurant in Markham, the Pacific Mall, Chinese university students, Chinese women working as waitresses and studying accounting, signs for rooms to rent written in Chinese characters, Chinese websites connecting people selling houses and looking for childcare in Toronto, settlement service English classes, the boy and girl who live next door to me yelling and laughing in Mandarin as they play outside in the summer, a Chinese travel agency.

I have met people who have many different reasons for and experiences of living in Toronto: A friend who tells me he came to Canada not because of the country itself but because he wants to get citizenship in a place outside China in case things become unstable there again; graduate students who say they miss China, but know they will feel strange if they go back, life is quieter here. At home, they say, there is so much competition, so many banquets, a different way of getting ahead, even in intellectual life; a woman who works as a chamber maid and whose husband slaughters chickens in Kensington Market; a woman who lives in an apartment shared with ten other people and cooks me dumplings and chicken, no one speaks English; a girl who has grown up in Canada and who tells me that her sister had a Chinese wedding banquet with traditional dishes for her relatives and extra dishes for her Canadian friends; a woman who talks about the entertainment clubs in the strip malls of Markham and Scarborough where Chinese men are entertained by young Chinese hostesses. There is so much about this community that I don't know.

CHANGES IN GLOBAL RELATIONSHIPS

The world is changing in a way we may not have anticipated

I began university in Washington, DC at the height of the anti-globalization movement: the 'Battle for Seattle', the April 16, 2000 (a16) demonstrations outside the World Bank and IMF, the march at the Philadelphia Republican National Convention expressing concern over George W. Bush's presidential candidacy. Activism was new to me, and I was curious. I spent time with many of the university's left political groups learning about why and how they were concerned about the world, and what they believed we could do to change it: The Progressive Student Union, United Students Against Sweatshops, Students for a Free Tibet. Among these students at this time there was a sense that, put simply, people of the Third World were being trampled by capitalism. People were manufacturing clothes for tiny wages in dangerous working conditions, and living in countries encumbered by debt from IMF loans, and socially ravaged by structural re-adjustment programs, which paved the way for the entry of global corporations to their countries and cities. At this time there was also a sense that people in positions of relative social, economic and political freedom, especially US citizens and university students, had a responsibility to do something about this: to shift the world in a way that things would become more equitable, and where people everywhere could gain power over their own lives within the global economy.

I think that things have changed. Assumptions this movement made about the world then are no longer (if they ever were) true. The anti-globalization movement before September 11, 2001 and on the cusp of the George W. Bush presidency, despite its critique of US foreign policy, and call for social justice within the US, was permeated with a confidence in the future. Things were not perfect, but with the support of people in the US, global capitalism could play out in a healthier way. It was not on our minds then that the negative effects of global capitalism could come back and touch our lives in the US directly.

For example, I have a photograph, taken in 2000. It is from a demonstration in Washington, DC. In the photograph there is a group of young white men and women wearing t-shirts and holding signs that say, "Web Designers for Economic Justice". I remember taking the photograph because the message seemed strange. Why would people protest as web designers? That is, as members of a decently well-paid profession, rather than as citizens, activists, minimum wage workers, or young people?

At the time the image was taken, people were concerned about the social and human rights ramifications of manufacturing jobs previously done in the US being moved to countries with low wages and little legal protection for workers. We were not thinking about what this move might mean for the US economy. Yet, this image eerily anticipates the later emergence of concern – now pervasive in North America – about the effects of off-shoring of not only manufacturing jobs, but also white collar ones, on the US economy and standard of living. Although the young web-designers did not have this in mind, their message strikes at something that was happening under the surface.

The anti-globalization protests of that moment could not happen again: the signs we carried have a different meaning today. What has changed in the world since the year 2000? How has the position of the US changed? What does it mean for the US if the Third World becomes not just economically important, but economically powerful? Does this affect only US corporations, or also US people? As some peoples' lives get better, do others' lives get harder? Is it possible for all of us to live well? What does it mean to live well?

What is a good standard of living?

Living and talking with people in Beijing makes me question what a good standard of living is and how this would be determined. Although it is often assumed that life in North America is significantly more comfortable than in other parts of the world, it is not so simple as this. It is true that it is easy to live well in Beijing with even a very basic North American salary. This is significant because Beijing itself, in the context of China, is seen as a very expensive place to live, and a place where the standard of living is distinctly higher than in the countryside. From a US standpoint, an art student from New York City that I met in Beijing told me that she could never live the kind of lifestyle she was living here back at home. In Beijing she could afford her own apartment, as much food and beer, and as many cigarettes as she wanted, massages, people to stretch her painting canvas, and someone to tutor her privately in Mandarin.

At the same time, many people I have met who have immigrated to Toronto say that it is sometimes difficult for people from large cities in China, like Beijing and Shanghai, to adjust to life in Canada because their standard of living drops. While they might earn more money than they did in China, basic living costs are also much higher. A cup of coffee in Toronto might cost as much as a meal for two at a restaurant in Beijing.

The middle class family that I stayed with in Beijing lived in new and fashionably designed apartment, which they owned themselves, and had bought with no help from loans. While they worried that I would spend too much on taxis (about \$4 for a cross-city ride versus around 20 cents for a bus trip), we could eat fresh fava beans, handmade noodles and meat-filled dumplings any evening, and watched television on a huge new TV. While their son worked long hours, his parents were retired in their early fifties. They, like other people of the older generation had time to spend the day walking with their grandchildren, visiting friends, or playing traditional music or cards together in the city's parks.

What defines a good standard of living? What is it like to live in the US? What is it like to live in China? What is life like for children, for young people, for older people? What lifestyle is it possible for people to live by working a certain number of hours? What it is possible to buy with a certain amount of money? What is considered to be a luxury? Is this the same in both places? How much does school cost? Who has the means to attend? Is it possible for people to buy and own their own homes? Is healthcare available? How do people live after retirement?

Economic facts

In this project I do not look closely at the economic facts of the shift I talk about, but a significant shift could be traced through them. For example, over the past five years there has been a steady and steep climb in the price of gold (Yahoo Finance 2007). Or, it would be intriguing to trace the events leading up to December 2006 when the US Mint passed an interim rule making it illegal to melt down US coins (US Mint 2006). What is the state of the US economy? How have US loan and inflation rates shifted over the last five years? What is the state of the US housing market? How much debt does the average American have? What is the trade balance between the US and China? How does the US dollar compare to the Canadian dollar and the Euro? How much debt does the US government have, and who owns this debt?

Perceptions of the United States

I began this project because I wanted to learn more about China. I have also learned that it is important to ask questions about North America. For instance:

I met a man in Toronto who is from Beijing and we started to talk about what we learned in school as children about our respective countries. He said that in China he learned that the US was a country with two political parties, but that the existence of more than one party did not make things better, as neither of these parties had the best interest of the people in mind. In contrast, he learned that China had only one party, but this party worked directly for the people. I said, really thinking about it for the first time, that in the US I did not learn much about China, except that it was a place that did not have as much freedom as the United States, a place where people were struggling for democracy, but repressed.

Or, in Beijing I had a conversation with an artist who told me that over the past 20 years he had met many Americans. What he said next surprised me. He said that the thing that has struck him about Americans he had met is that they seemed to be very interested in learning about other people and other places. But, paradoxically, he said, "*Americans do not seem to know themselves.*"

What is America? Who are Americans? How and when do we talk about ourselves? How are we seen in the world? Has this changed? When and how? What are we taught about the world in relation to the US? What is it like to travel today as an American? How do people react to us? What questions do they ask? Is this the same as 30 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago?

FILMMAKING

Through this project I have learned about the process of filmmaking, differences between filmmaking and writing, and about the relationship I think is possible between filmmaking and social research. I have also learned about the importance of rhythm to filmmaking, differences between creating shorter and longer film projects, and what kind of filmmaking I want to experiment with in the future.

One of the biggest challenges for me in making this project was to start thinking for film rather than for writing, which I have more experience with. I knew that I would need to focus on a part of what I had learned in this project to make its final product, but I did not realize how much more this is true of film work than writing. I learned a lot through my research for this project: as I began to think about how to put this into a film, I sometimes felt like it would be much easier to do this if I had learned less! As a form of communication, film requires an incredible amount of distillation. Every image, word, and sound chosen for a film matters.

I have literally *said less* with this film project that I could in a written document about the same experiences. But, I anticipate that the effect of this product – a film – will be different, in important ways, than a written one would have been. As I got close to the end of editing the project I showed the film to a room of about ten people. What was both baffling and wonderful was that after 40 minutes this group (students, business people, filmmakers) had so many different interpretations of what the piece was about, and also so many different things that they wanted to talk about. I could not imagine convincing this same group of people to read a written thesis about Beijing, no matter how witty and compelling, nor imagine that they would have such a range of reactions to it. With film I think it is more difficult to guide your audience than with writing; maybe this is good. Maybe film is a tool that is most effectively used, not to argue or inform exhaustively, but simply to open up a space for thinking and discussion.

With the film I wanted to experiment with ways of creating rhythm with voice, image and natural sound. As I worked on this project I learned about the core elements of film rhythm – editing images to words, editing words to images, paying attention to whether the subject of words and images match or don't match, whether the beats of the words and images match or don't match, understanding the flow of smaller pieces within the overall rhythm of the piece, and working to create both repetition and novelty. It was challenging working with a rhythmic project of this length. It was tricky to not only create rhythm within each sub-story of the film, but also within the overall piece. In fact, the overall rhythm emerged in a way that I had not been able to anticipate. Part what I learned was learning to work with, and shape, what came out of combinations of the images and words unexpectedly.

I also realize that by choosing to do the project the way I did I learned less about the technical aspect of filmmaking that I could have if I had done it differently. I think that a project that would have helped me to learn more about film technique would have been one involved less research (since much of my time was spent here), and that involved creating a number of short pieces rather than one longer film. This way I could have experimented more easily with different techniques, including ways of building rhythm and using different amounts of images, natural sound, spoken word, and written text, without worrying about creating an overall coherence for a larger piece. This might have looked something like designer Richard Fenwick's RND# project (ongoing) which will eventually consist of 100 short films related to the human relationship and reliance on technology; poet Clive Holden's *Trains of Winnipeg* (2004), a series of 14 loosely

related film poems; or filmmaker Jonas Mekas' *He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life* (1969/1985), diary-like snippets of Mekas' life in New York City. This is a form of filmmaking that I would like to experiment with in the future.

**How does the project break new ground in professional practice?
Who has influenced me creatively and intellectually?**

This project and my work can be contextualized in a number of creative and research traditions including Visual Anthropology (Taylor 1994), Experimental Ethnography, Avant Garde Film (Sitney 1978; O'Pray 2003), and Documentary Film (Barnouw 1993; Nichols 1991 and 2001). Most broadly, the area where I am working is something that may be *becoming* to be called art with the increasing appropriation of anthropological and other research practices by artists since the 1970s (Foster 1995; Kwon 2004), or something that could be *becoming* ethnography with the 1980s "crisis of representation" in the discipline (see Marcus and Clifford 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986) and recent forays into experimental ethnography (for example, Pandolfo 1997; Stewart 1996; Taussig 2004) ethnographic fiction (for example, Gibbs 2005; Hecht 2006) and experimental ethnographic film (Russell 1999).

I am inspired by the work of people in many disciplines, including: the theory of visual anthropologists David MacDougall (2005) and Sarah Pink (2001, 2006); the ethnography of Kathleen Stewart (1996) and Michael Taussig (for example, 2004); the imaginary ethnography of Susan Sontag (1978); and the life-history research approaches of Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (2001), Cedric Chatterley and Alicia Rouverol (2000), and Stephania Pandolfo (1997). In addition, I am inspired by the essay-films of Trinh T. Minh Ha (1982, 1989, 1991, 2001), Chris Marker (1983), and Chantal Akerman (1977, 1993); the poetic films of Clive Holden (2004) and Stan Brackhage (2003); the ethnographic films of Dennis O'Rourke (1991), Jean Rouch (Stoller 1992) and Jorge Mabel Preloran (1992); the auto-ethnographic (Ellis 2004) films of Jonas Mekas (1969/1985) and Ross McElwee (1986); and the narrative filmmaking of Jia Zhangke (1997, 2004) and Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (2002). And finally, by the perceptive writing of Clarice Lispector (1989a, 1989b), James Joyce (1922) and Thomas Pynchon (1973); the work of research artists Jeremy Deller and the Vision Machine collective (Uwemdimmo 2007); and the passion for social change through art in the work of theatre artists Bertolt Brecht (for example, 2000) and Augusto Boal (1979).

This project can also be contextualized among cognitive mapping projects and similar theories for making sense of the world at this moment. The concept of cognitive mapping itself is useful for categorizing a variety of creative and intellectual projects that, like mine, provide ways of conceptualizing the world (for example, Abrams and Hall's (2006) use of the concept to frame their book on new cartographies). Cognitive mapping, as it is used in this sense, stems from Fredric Jameson's influential writing on post-modernism. Jameson (1991) proposes the practice of *cognitive mapping* as a tool to use in strategic response to this current manifestation of global capital, one where old tools of resistance no longer work. He takes the term cognitive mapping from Kevin Lynch's (1960) architectural book *The Image of the City*, extrapolating it from the spatial to the social realm (Abrams and Hall 2006). Cognitive mapping of the social realm would mean developing and creating representations (maps, images, text, theories) that organize today's social practices and relationships in ways that we can better understand them, as well as how they intersect with the present economic and spatial conditions.

Written theory, films, and other creative and new media projects can all introduce important ideas for cognitive mapping and/or serve as cognitive maps. For example, Manuel Castells' *Information Society* trilogy (1996, 1997, 1998), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), Arjun Appadurai's concept of scapes (1996), and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *Friction* (2005), have changed the way we think and talk about what is happening in the world. Film work that challenges dominant ways of looking, linear argument, and black/white thinking can also act as a tool to help us to see the world differently. For example, work in intercultural cinema (Marks 1999) and new experimental visual ethnography (Russell 1999). Interactive websites and multimedia tools are also a rich, and maybe the most promising future, area for cognitive mapping. Both tools that we use to literally organize our lives and navigate the world, and more conceptual projects could be considered cognitive maps. For instance, the online bookmark manager del.icio.us, Wikipedia, and Google Maps, or the *They Rule* project, an online tool that helps users to investigate links between individual corporate board members, companies, and government committees. In general, we need more tools and theories that can trace what is happening today in a way that allows us to see a subject that is tricky, full of similarities and contradictions, not quickly categorized, but still very important.

Broadly, I am interested in how film and other visual media can be used as this type of tool/theory. I believe that creative work can be used intellectually. And, that in

fact, some ideas cannot be expressed within what is usually seen as correct scholarship, or ways of making theory (Stewart, 1996). I like the concept of *poetic theory*:

Only in poetic language can one deal with meaning in a revolutionary way. For the nature of poetry is to offer meaning in such a way that it can never end with what is said or shown, destabilizing thereby the speaking subject and exposing the fiction of all rationalization. (Trinh and Chen 1994: 324)

Poetic theory is embodied well in Trinh Minh Ha's films and writing. For example, in her book *Women Native Other* (1989) Trinh brings together post-colonialism, post-feminism, anthropology, literary criticism, and critical cultural studies to discuss issues that she also explores in her films: cultural hybridization, marginal voices, multiple identities, how/from where we speak. What is most significant about the text is not its content, but its form. She writes literally poetically, incorporating images, surprising ideas, and juxtaposing different styles of text. Though her message is theoretical, she resists the standard, logical, conclusive structure of theory-writing, requiring the reader to engage with, and think through, the whole text, rather than "key points". Because it does not follow conventional formats, this form of writing or filmmaking is not necessarily easy to read and view. Yet, this is precisely how this work is powerful. Rather than appear to say everything that there is to say about a place or idea, poetic theory opens a space for the reader/viewer to think in. Rather than answering a small question, poetic theory begins to map the space for, but not conclusively answer, much bigger questions. In other words, it is possible, and useful, to approach large topics, without the aim of answering them, but with the aim of getting to the point where it is clear what the (important, key, critical) questions are. In this project I use the example of Beijing to open such a space of questions. From here, I want others to move further and in their own ways.

**What have I learned from the program as a whole?
How will I carry this work into the future?**

As a whole, my work in the Joint Programme in Communication and Culture has helped me to clearly define the kind of intellectual and creative work I want to do. As I began the program, coming from a background in cultural anthropology and documentary filmmaking, I was interested in the combination of social research and visual media as a tool for social change. My range of interest within these general parameters was wide. I was curious about the relationship between empathy and media

– are there ways of using media that can help people to see the world from each other's point of view? I also wanted to know more about agency and resistance – people's strategic and tactical approaches to changing the world. And, about areas as different as: hybrid fiction/non-fiction films, feminist research methods, scenario planning, and the potential for transformative work from within the business sector. I am still passionate about many of these things. But, the way that I want to approach them has changed.

Most simply, I now see my work as fitting into two distinct streams: creative work and strategic work. As part of this, I have moved from seeing social research as a place where I want to work from, to a tool that I will sometimes use. Through the course of making this project in particular I reexamined a decision I made at the time when I began to be interested in the three things that continue to intrigue me today: anthropology, art and activism. That is, that I wanted to combine all three. Others have struggled, sometimes successfully, and sometimes with difficulty, to practice these things together: anthropology and art, art and activism, anthropology and activism. I have learned that anthropology, art and activism have goals that both compliment and contradict each other. For myself, I realize that although I remain interested in each of these areas, I do not want to put them together in the way I first envisioned. Instead, I see my work as taking two complimentary, but separate paths, a creative one and a strategic one.

CREATIVE WORK

In my creative work I want to work with/in/about the following areas:

film/video/words/poetic/sound
how we come to understand/misunderstand each other
the revolutionary and radical possibility for change
ethnography, video, fiction/non-fiction, storytelling, imaginary
questions of: fear/love/life/death (personal and in the world)
theory, theory on the borders, experimentation

I want to work by/through:

drawing from the world, human experiences, conversations
deep perception, seeing underneath and behind, quietly
knowing others, knowing self, seeing others, seeing self
texts that get at the interior
texts that make you *think*, make you *question*
texts that open up space, space where things, new seeing, can begin

I am not a social scientist. But, I believe anthropology is important for my creative work. This is because of its close, intense, subjective method of asking questions (ethnography), because it sees questions of difference, of the relation between self/other

and us/them as important, because self-reflexivity is part of its fabric, and because of its increasing propensity to take into account, simultaneously, the local and the global (for example, Appadurai 1996; Tsing 2005). Ethnography, the method of anthropology, is a tool that helps me to ask questions that open, for me, new and more complex ways of seeing and living in the world. Anthropology also has a tradition of communication. Learning about places in, or ideas about, the world, is done for the purpose of sharing this knowledge. The ideal anthropologist is a kind of translator, a human that, through her own body and life, makes connections between other humans. The artist, like the anthropologist, uses her individual powers of observation to see, and show, unspoken or unnoticed parts of everyday life.

Yet, thinking primarily as an artist, not as a social scientist, changes how I work. Most concretely, this helps me to work in a way that is more instinctual and that I consider more accurately (and not so literally) representative of the world. In terms of image work, this project has helped me identify two distinct types of situations where I want to film/photograph.

1. I want to work in situations where the images I collect relate to my own impressions of the world around me, my own body, or are images chosen in collaboration with subjects. This is a subjective form of filming. For example, in Beijing I shot footage of public spaces in the city that caught my eye: traffic, parks, leaves on the sidewalk, the evening in Tiananmen Square. I also created video-journal entries, filming myself in my small apartment recounting the day, experimenting with Chinese cooking utensils, and exploring the feel and sound of the space. Additionally, I asked people I knew to perform certain aspects of their everyday lives for my project. For instance, with Yan Li, a woman my mother's age, that I had stayed with my first time in Beijing, I arranged a day to film her doing everyday activities, like washing clothes and making a meal. She showed me and the camera, among other things, how she recycles washing water from her clothes to wash vegetable bags and outdoor cloths, how she stores rice in old plastic peanut bottles to keep it fresh, and a device used for making traditional holiday cakes.

In these situations I really enjoy filming, a process of looking and listening intently. From this footage I can't (don't want to) claim to represent all of Beijing, or particular people's lives in Beijing. Like the Chinese writer Bei Dao (2005)'s essays about New York, or Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman's view of the former USSR (1993) I present my impression of Beijing. These impressions are significant, and both

differ from, and share similarities with, others' experiences of these places at the same moments. This is analogous to Trinh Minh Ha's practice of *speaking nearby* (Trinh and Chen 1994). Contrary to traditional social science representation the theorist who speaks nearby does not claim, and is not expected, to speak facts. The concept of speaking nearby is a way of acknowledging that it is possible for a speaker *not to know everything* – if we can ever know everything – and have important observations nonetheless.

2. I want to work in a way that mixes the borders between fiction and non-fiction, building consciously constructed stories from the reality of places and people's lives. This relates to the practices of ethnographic fiction (such as Hecht 2006) and imaginary ethnography (like Sontag's *Project for a Trip to China* 1978). This is also like, for example, Chris Marker's use of photographs of historical places and of actors to tell a story about a future world in *La Jetée* (1962); like Jia Zhanke's films about young people's lives in urban China that many times use non-professional actors and are shot in the streets or locations such as operating karaoke bars; or, like former documentary filmmakers Jean Pierre and Luc Dardenne's fictional portrait of a man struggling with forgiveness in their film *Le Fils* (2002). These films and books are powerful documents of the lives and environments of their subjects, and are more intimate than strictly non-fiction work could be. This is because this type of work, while it allows subjects/actors to perform their everyday lives in a way that may be closely reflective of their experiences, it also allows them to perform their lives in a way that they can claim distance from. For instance, while it could be dangerous for even a petty thief to allow a filmmaker to literally follow his life, a loosely fictionalized version of his actions can provide a safe space to portray his reality, such the performance of the principal actor/character in Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* (1997).

I am not a social scientist, and, I am not an Activist. I do not believe my creative work will result in literal social change. But, I believe that the concerns of activism – how we make the world a better place and how we can work to do so passionately – are honorable and imperative. I believe that art (film, stories, photographs, etc.) is powerful, but art does not have immediate and predictable effects. The power of art is not related to action. Instead, art percolates. Powerful art haunt us. Art, like memories, can come back again and again in our lives. This way art we have experienced may slowly, and in combination with many other factors, play on our views and desires. For example, I can trace how the vision of contemporary Shanghai, with its skyscrapers, alienation, disease,

loneliness that I saw in a film many years ago continued to stick with me, helping, together with other things, to make me curious about China. We never exactly know how what we see or hear may haunt us, but that this haunting is possible makes the very action of releasing art powerful. In this form, important thoughts and questions may reach beyond the places and times we know. To direct my future work I ask: What spaces or contradictions do I want to open? What questions do I want people to ask themselves? What do I want to *haunt* them?

In summary, both the program and this project have helped me to explore and define my creative work. Through my coursework I completed three creative projects: an experimental ethnography on the possibility of radical change from within the business world, a soundscape made with sound recorded in the Andes mountains, and a cinematic website to collect and express stories on the experience of living in the suburbs. My coursework also helped me to identify new theorists and artists that inspire me creatively. This project, in turn, has helped me to synthesize this earlier work, and to work out more directly the role of ethnography in my filmmaking.

STRATEGIC WORK

In my **strategic work** I want to take concrete action to change the world. I believe that we have the responsibility to act in a way in the present that leads to a socially and environmentally sustainable future. I believe that in my lifetime we will deal with great environmental, techno-social, and political uncertainty. In this world there is an increasing need for thought and action in the present that makes a conscious connection to the future. I also believe that in today's world transnational work and an understanding of transnational contexts is extremely important. As our economic and cultural systems become more global, the circumstances under which we act, and our social and environmental futures, also become progressively connected. To work better in this area I want to learn about:

- how change happens (government, business, paradigm shifts, revolutions)
- the role of stories and storytelling in social and organizational change
- what forms of media are best for what forms of communication
- how the things we want to lead comfortable lives can be made in sustainable ways
- companies that are doing exemplary sustainable work
- the global economy and global production systems

And, to use tools for thinking strategically about the future:

Scenario Planning

Systems Thinking
Game Theory
Business Strategy
Participatory Research
Social and Cognitive Cartography

I am intrigued by the synergy that these practices have with ethnography. Both these tools and ethnography, though at different scales, involve analyzing contexts in unconventional ways, an awareness of history, and an awareness of how local situations connect with larger events.

The Joint Programme in Communication and Culture and this project have also helped me to explore and define my strategic work. As a research assistant for the Ryerson based Centre for Studies in Food Security (CSFS) and Canadian Wireless Infrastructure Research Project (CWIRP) I have learned to think strategically about global/local food production systems and emerging communications infrastructure. My experimental ethnography on the possibility of radical change from within the business world allowed me to synthesize my thinking on the relationship between business and social change and to identify new questions. Also, based on work in Amin Alhassan's course Communication and International Development I published a theoretical paper on the digital divide (Potter 2006). And, through this project, I have had the opportunity to continue to learn Mandarin and to live in China, a language and a place important for this work and the future.

In my proposal for this project, I wrote that my overall goal for it was to: "develop a way of working – through intense looking, story gathering and storytelling, and finding ways of knowing others and knowing ourselves – that I will continue to use in my future studies and professional life." I have accomplished this.

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Project Timeline

September 2003

I work as a market analyst.
Everyday I read news about the automotive industry.
Everyday I read about China.

December 2003 & January 2004

I visit Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

October 2004

I decide to learn Mandarin.
I begin a language exchange with Qiang.

July 2004

I begin a language exchange with Yang Li.

September 2005

I begin my master's degree.

December 2005 & January 2006

I stay in Beijing at the home of Yan Li.

February 2006

I begin a language exchange with Li Bau.

May & June 2006

I return to Beijing to film and research.

July 2006

I continue research in Toronto.

October 2006

I begin analysis.

December 2006

I begin editing.

March 2007

I complete editing, and the project paper.

Amelia Bryne Potter

March 2007

Film Script

春风吹又生 (spring wind will bring life again)

By: Amelia Bryne Potter

Year: 2007

Format: Digital Video

Length: 42 minutes

Preface

(words on screen)

Working as a market analyst for the automotive industry,
I read about China everyday.

In January 2004 I traveled to Beijing and Shanghai
with a company looking to invest in China.

I decided to learn Mandarin.

I returned to Beijing in December 2005 and
January, May and June 2006.

I am concerned about the human relationship between China,
and my country, the US.

Part I

(spoken text)

Beijing.

Beijing,
this ancient capital.
It's disarmingly quiet at night,
Like a child who will wake vigorously in the morning.

I take the sky-train into the city,
There are gray fields,
and then miles and miles of construction sites
for new condo complexes
that have the names of foreign places:
"inspired by Roppongi"
"Vancouver Woods"

The world is shaking up.
Things are changing,
As Beijing rises, others fall,
Pull too many bricks out ...
What if the US falls?

You tell me about visiting a machining factory outside of Beijing,
new, shiny, amazing.
You're with a delegation of North American men who
talk about investing in the China boom
and about factories going under in the US,
even their own.
The market is slipping eastward;
they're here to follow it.
Walking through, you realize that the Beijing factory-with-the-newest-German-technology
is not running: it's for show.
The workers are miming their actions:
But they are ready,
prepared and waiting for the spark.

The world is changing.
Metamorphosis.

I eat with a woman at a late-night restaurant.
We're talking about life in the US versus life in China.
She tells me that at her company, you work 6 hours a day,
and get 6 months off when you are pregnant.
Women can retire at 50.
She's retired already
because to give young people more jobs,
you can retire early,

at 45.

She wants to know how much money my parents make,
and I blush, and tell her that a typical American makes \$30,000 per year,
and that a nanny might make about \$50 a day,
which isn't really enough to live on.

She wants to know how much a house would cost in America,
and whether a young couple could buy one.

I go into an electronics store, it's late, but it's still open.
it has multiple floors of very shiny new stuff.
The employees mill around in dark blue smock uniforms,
The store is busy.
For \$2,000
You can buy a huge flat screen TV.

A friend tells me a saying:

积重难返

It means making many small mistakes,
that, by themselves,
don't matter.
But day by day,
year by year,
they add up.
Eventually you come to a point where
you can't go back,
where you cannot undo what you have done.

He says this phrase is used at the point where something has been done
that can't be undone,
where you've made so many mistakes that there is no way to fix it:
to describe broken marriages, he says,
or, lowering his voice,
the communist party:
it has made too many mistakes to be forgiven.

We do so many small things:
buy one SUV,
drill just a little more oil.
So many small things that each hurt,
just a little bit.

Will we reach a point where we cannot turn back?
Where we cannot change course?
Are we already there?
What will we do?

I am afraid.

Part II

Beijing.

Beijing is famous for its parks and temples,
But, for me it's characterized by its roads.

At first I feel afraid every time I cross the street;
Beijing's new roads are the size of highways.

Cars come across the intersections from at least two directions:
bicycle riders, bicycle carts, taxis, buses.
People don't seem worried.

Beijing.

I sleep so little.
In Beijing you are woken by construction,
early morning birds,
summer insects,
traffic.

Here, there is an energy of making it for yourself,
whether by selling steamed corn from Styrofoam boxes,
teaching and consulting on the side,
being young and working late and sleeping little.

Beijing.

People, moving.
Chinese tourists visiting the capital,
Workers with rough sacks, strong bodies, tanned skin,
Tibetan women with bright orange blankets selling jewelry in the shade,
Men in slacks and short-sleeved collar shirts, hanging on to the subway car handles,
Girls in school uniforms that look like track suits.
Moving.

Even how things *look* is in transition:
awkward, experimental,
in a rapid, do-what-you-can-now way.

Nylon, ugly flower patterns, plain restaurants, clothing made from cheap fabric, high-heeled shoes. Pollution, people coughing, highways, dust, sunshine through coal smoke, television sounds, grays and browns, red lanterns, engines, bus tickets, China industrial and agricultural banks, roads passing, young men and women furtively touching on the subways, cell phones, numbers on the sides of torn down walls, construction sites.

Beijing is at the heart of something.
Maybe it is at the heart of the world.

I eat in a Korean restaurant in the corner of the city near the airport.
The waitresses are busy.
Behind me there is a table of four middle-aged men.
They have a whole bottle of white liquor.
They're eating peanuts,
laughing, but formal.
They take at least three shots in the time I'm there.
The waitresses smile
as they watch the men wince from the alcohol,
getting drunk quickly.

Beijing.

Metamorphosis is so clear in Beijing:
It's growing and emerging.
Immense and intense physical and material growth,
change in the basic structures of life.

A friend invites me to an afternoon party,
I'm not sure what kind.
We arrive at the house and sit in folding chairs,
the host pours tea in glasses.

She sets up a folding table,
and I notice a side table covered with different-sized
white plastic bottles, cotton swabs, cloths.

She takes one bottle from the table
She starts a demonstration,
and I realize that "An Li" is the Chinese name for Amway.

She mixes liquid soap from two bottles in two glasses of warm water.
She's showing that one cleans pieces of cotton better than the other.
She says Amway is expensive,
But, she says, it's better,
It's American.

There's a demonstration of how everyone can make money,
make it with Amway.
People watch, yell questions, doze, take notes.

The dream is not only for America,
Anyone with enterprise can make it.
We've succeed in making capitalism global,
Opportunities are global.
Desire is global.
Competition is global.

Beijing: the emerging economy.
The US: everyone's customer.
Both places are changing:

their transformations are reflected in each other.

Sick with a fever I watch Chinese cartoons late at night,
There are American ads:
for KFC,
Barbie,
Hot Wheels,
Skittles
McDonalds.

In the city it's harder to find an open-air market
than a 24hour convenience store.
In the new stores there are conveyor belts
to take shopping carts from floor to floor,
Sun Maid raisins, exotic seafood, Nestle cereal.

The stores remind me of the Boston and New York Chinatowns,
but newer and cleaner.
Packages of dried mushrooms and sour plums;
Containers of gold cooking oil;
Mops made from rags that look like a head of thick wavy hair;
Colorful plastic basins like the ones
the Chinese family that lives next door to me in Toronto
have in their backyard.
Large thermoses for hot water;
dry noodles, Lipton tea;
Teapots with blue and white machine-painted flowers.

There is so much America in China,
But, also,
There is China in America.

There is so much China in America,
But, also,
There is America in China.

One night I go to Sanlitun, where there are many Western bars.
To get there we walk through an empty lot,
piles of dirt, filled-in sewers,
a corner of a demolished building,

The bar is tacky and bare,
we drink whisky gingers.

A young American tells me that what he found here
was not the China he had in mind.
It is not so foreign,
it is not so communist.
There are no rules, no police, no drinking laws.
Everything bends if there's money to be made.

Four drunken American girls begin pole dancing in front of us,
one climbing on the pole upside-down,
falling on her shoulders,
getting up,
shrugging,
starting again.
Their friends cheering and taking photos with cell phone cameras.

America has struggled to
“make the world in our own image”.
What is the image of America?

At a bar near Tiananmen Square I meet a group of West Point cadets.
They seem very smart, forceful, and young too.

I talk to one,
He's drunk, maybe for the first time,
He says, earnestly and proudly, that the reason the cadets are learning Chinese,
is to “make sure that China and America
will not go to war in the future.”

He says, “a war between China and America would be bad,”
But he says, matter-of-fact,
“looking at history, whenever a *new power* has come onto the scene,
there has been a conflict.”

Whenever a *new power* has come onto the scene,
there has been a conflict.

China and America.
Looks like we're in this together.

In a park I meet a Japanese man,
We're watching people practicing tai chi and taking pictures between the roses.
He tells me that what strikes him most about Beijing,
is that people are *awake* on the morning train.
They know the future will be better,
At home, he says, “people look so tired.”

Is the US awake on the morning train?

Part III

I visit a park called the Old Summer Palace,
There are paths and ponds and the ruins of an emperor's vacation place,
ransacked by Europeans and gutted by a fire.
The park is dry, dusty, hot, rambling, even parched.
There are families with young children,
snack bars that sell bottled drinks and steamed corn,
goldfish,
man-made lakes with lily pads and low water.

The park management has shut off some of the canals and lakes,
so that more water will flow to the most-looked-at ponds.
This does not really make a difference.
It's impossible to hide the lack of water.
Algae, dust, dry air. Decay.

We fear decay, we fear decline.
Our economists are alarmed:
how can we stop, reverse, escape, mitigate
the decline of the US economy?
Decay.
What is decay?
What is the difference between decay and growth?

Growth is so evident in Beijing.
Now, before the 2008 Olympics,
massive areas of the city,
whole blocks and even neighborhoods,
are being demolished.

I stay with a woman who lives in a new suburb of the city.
She's been here less than a year.
In less than 5 years the government built this complex.
It houses 300,000.
Three hundred thousand-
just a part of the people
displaced by the central-city re-development.

One morning I walk through the east quadrant of the suburb.
There are other people out walking.
There is a park – not finished yet, so you can't go in.
There is a strip mall.
There is a traffic rotary with a spot to plant flowers in the middle.
When the weather is warmer, she says,
people dance together in front of the mall.

Wide boulevards lead out to tall apartment buildings,
as you walk towards the west they are little bit older:
tree lined streets,

lots of cars parked on the sidewalks,
it's almost like I'd imagine suburban Paris to be.
I get lost because the buildings look too much the same.

Every day we take a two-hour bus ride to the city,
and again, two hours back.

One day she shows me the place where she grew up,
in an ancient courtyard with shady trees,
near Beijing's most important shopping district.
I ask if she likes living in the suburb.
She says it is difficult to get a place there,
because the apartments are inexpensive and good.

I don't ask if she could ever live where she lived before,
Because I think she will say "no".
We know there is no going back.
The past is past.

One day I watch a Tai Chi practice.
It's 6am.
The older men and women are there so early in the morning,
at the edge of what will be a park,
but what is now a dirt-dusty field,
in the middle of the complex.

The space is open,
with some walls and stones already laid,
some dry grasses, and trash at the edges.
The sky is vaguely blue,
but mostly hazy.
Behind them the smoke from the new power plant is billowing up.
The colors are all so natural, so white, brown, gray, blue, light,
but also so alien,
like the moon, so lonely.

Change is so evident in Beijing.
In Beijing it is tomorrow.

There is only tomorrow.
How do we live in it?
What will we do with it?

Epilogue

I was thinking of using this poem near the end as a metaphor ... but?

A friend tells me a poem from memory.

离离原上草
一岁一枯荣
野火烧不尽
春风吹又生

We translate it.

Sparse grass on a grassland.
Within one year the grasses, grow, and die.
The wild fire cannot burn all this grass down,
The spring wind will bring life again.
It starts again, because the roots of the grasses are not burned away.

Is this always so?

Credits

Concept, Images, Editing – Amelia Bryne Potter
English Voice – Amelia Bryne Potter
Mandarin Voice – June Liu
Sound – Thierry Loa

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without:

Qiang Zha, Yan Li and Ma Jia who have helped me to speak Mandarin in Toronto. Jia Li, who showed me Beijing. And, Alexander Berger.

Thanks to:

Aniwar
Aaron Heisler
Christine Wang
Don Snyder
Fei Jun
Joe Ellis
June Liu
Kassu
Ken Little
Lorraine Spiess
Lydia Grey
Mami Rosner
Rowena
Thierry Loa
Wang Tiantian
Xiaoyan
Xu Chi
Yan Lin
Yang Wei

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Stories

I have written four journals related to this project. They include: Beijing, *December 2005-January 2006*; Toronto, *February-April 2006*; Beijing, *May-June 2006*; Toronto, *July-October 2006*. I wrote about my experiences in Beijing and with the Chinese community in Toronto. I also wrote thoughts on the making of this project. The following includes excerpts from the journals, mostly stories about Beijing. Before each section is a list of the topics of the stories I have included. I have used excerpts from these journals in the text of the film.

Amelia Bryne Potter
March 2007

BEIJING, CHINA

Winter 2005/6

Lost Luggage
Tour of the House
USA Standard of Living
Bus Into the City
Yan Li's Boss and The Wine Company
Dance Academy
Product Extravaganza
Yan Li's Life Story, Cultural Revolution
National Art Gallery
Sweets Shop
Soap Operas
Massage Basement
Dream of the Red Chamber Park
British Man on the Subway
Old Houses, Small Temple
Little Girl
The Suburban Mall
Liquor & Geography
Foot Baths
Walk Through the Suburb
The Summer Palace in Winter
A Painting Class
Afternoon TV
Early Morning Dance Class
Yan Li's Photographs
Yan Li's Son
Jellyfish
789 Art Area
Hot Pot
Visiting a Tai Chi Master
Tai Chi
Xiao Mei's Courtyard Home
Yan Li's Childhood Home
Temple of Heaven
Beijing Street Snacks
Christmas
Guests and Hosts
Haircut
Standard of Living, China
Shopping Center Food Court
Meeting Aniwar
Around Beijing Station
TV in China
Lao She's House
Around Beijing University
Huge Roads
The Nun
New Year's Eve

Red Gate Gallery
Pastry Shop
Qianmen Construction
Tailor
Tea Store
The Courtyard Restaurant
The Calligrapher
The Photographer

December 11, 2005

From the airplane: I saw sunrise over Siberia.

December 12, 2005

Sunrise, a little after seven.
Quiet sounds of cars outside.

I arrived in Beijing yesterday. Long flight, my luggage got stuck in Toronto. I went to the baggage claim office, it was a chaotic mess and nothing was moving. I followed different people who looked like they knew what they were doing. Finally I told someone working there, my first sentence in Mandarin, that: "I'm really worried, my friend is waiting, and maybe she thinks I have gotten lost." So, she helped me to call Yan Li's cell phone, and told them that I was at the airport, but waiting for my baggage.

It was funny how easy it was to walk in and out of the official airline office where we made the phone call, no one seemed to mind – you could never do that in America without much more formality and nervousness. Amazing. After, a guy from Toronto helped me to get help – from the back of the line – to fill out a lost luggage form.

I am staying in a little room that is normally the room of Yan Li's son.

This is what seems to happen here: you are generally really nice and kind, then when you need to get something done, need someone to do something for you, something is not happening right, someone is doing something stupid – you quickly use really harsh and fast language, they respond, then it's over and you are back to being nice again. Also, if you want something done you have to ask and ask and ask and then people will respond.

For example, to get my lost luggage Yan Li must have called 7 or 8 times, calling different offices, being really persistent, asking them if they were going to give me money because of my late/possibly lost baggage. In America would you do this? You would just trust that the luggage would come on its own and wait. If you called to ask that many times they would think that you were really rude and would not help you, people would feel insulted. But, here, it doesn't seem to be a problem! Also people don't really stick by the rules so much. For instance, the guy who brought my luggage was supposed to wait around while I checked to see if anything was missing, but he took so much time getting here and getting lost that when he did he said he had to go right away.

Yan Li and her husband showed me and told me so many things today that they thought I would be interested in. At their house there is a little temple in a cupboard, Yan Li gave me a blessed apple and an orange to eat from the small altar because I asked why they were there.

They also told me about Chinese medicine and showed me some from a cupboard, including a bottle of garlic pills from Florida. Here, when people eat garlic they bite off of a whole clove!

They also showed me a pair of tiny shoes, which represent the shoes that women wore when they had bound feet. You hang them on your wall to ward off bad spirits, or other bad things. Yan Li's husband and I used a globe of the world to talk. I explained how our airplane had flown over the North Pole, and we talked about polar bears, penguins, the weather, America.

Yan Li's "sister" (I never could figure out whether or not this person was actually Yan Li's sister, or just a very close friend that she had known since she was young. Yan Li called her "meimei" which means "little sister") wanted to know what life was like in America, in various cities, and whether one could live well on \$400/month – we'd been discussing at what age Americans can retire and the social security policy – I had said that the amount that you got from social security was quite small, and if you didn't have other money, then your life would be difficult.

For supper, we made dumplings, two kinds. They take technique to make. Yan Li's husband and I filled the dumplings in front of a soccer game on TV, he smoking a cigarette out of the side of his mouth, and very calm.

One of the very first things that Yan Li asked me when we got to her house was "how old is your mother?" Yan Li is the same age (54) – being the same age seemed to make her happy. She asks a lot about my mother. Her son is about a year younger than me.

December 13, 2005

We ate beans for breakfast – a pot of reddish beans of different sizes, usually eaten with some sort of fried starch, like last night's dumplings. Yan Li says that milk is not usually drunk in the morning because it makes you sleepy (but Yan Li made warm milk for me every morning).

Bus into the city – so many buildings, mostly apartments I think being built, the names of foreign places "inspired by Roppongi", "Vancouver Woods", piles of rubble behind construction advertising for these new apartments, miles and miles and miles – no way to tell what was there before – except through memory, photos maybe. Buses are old and rattle-y with unsafe glass windows that clank and really dirty looking cleaning buckets and mops in the corner, ticket writers who are fairly young women with thick, red fingers. Sort of a lovely freedom in this, no concern, repressing concern for safety, car seat belts, things to be perfect and clean, they work how they work!

Later we meet Yan Li's boss and we get into his car. He's got this old, dirty military coat, is about 55-60, bad teeth, glasses, completely unselfconscious, energetic. We drive to a company, the same building that Jim works in – they ask if I want to visit Jim and say that it doesn't matter in China if someone is expecting you or not, you can just drop by their office, but I say no (not quite believing them).

Jim is the husband of Lisa. Lisa is a classmate of my mother's from high school. Yan Li took care of her children and helped them learn Mandarin when they were young and growing up in Beijing. Lisa introduced me to Yan Li.

We go into the wine company office, Yan Li knows the receptionist, a young woman. The office looks like it's not permanent – boxes half-open on the floor, lots of white walls, very few decorations. We meet with a youngish friendly man who reminds me of Mikerek

in Germany, he gives us 2 bottles of wine, and various wine accessories. The company is called Montrose, one wine is French, one has Chinese on the label. Afterwards we're on the big roads to get to the dance academy, we are in a rush, a little bit lost, trying to figure out how to make various left hand turns. I'm really hungry, we stop by the side of the road in front of a bus stop, Yan Li runs out to a chain sweets shop that has a little "cute" bear as a mascot/logo. We wait in the car and her boss rolls down the window and smokes. The cars remind me of those on Chestnut Hill, old, dirty, clunky, friendly. Yan Li returns and she's bought some sweet white bread, a sweet roll filled with cream that tastes like butter but is still white-colored, and a croissant to eat on the way. The sweet ones she says are for me, the bread for her, but I eat some of the bread too. Afterwards my stomach feels greasy, sick.

Dance Academy. I wish that I'd gotten a better chance to look at this place, very large I think, many beautiful dance studios, young, thin, fit dancers. It's like a university, people come from all over China – either with talent or, now, with money – to dance or to find a job in Beijing. There is also a high school. Yan Li and I watched a group of dancers practice a folk dance from the province of Anhui. The dancers, about 20 of them, were all wearing the same black dance pants with a little logo at the hip and shoes that looked like Chinese slippers, but with thick rubber soles. They were holding pink fans and wore green shirts, the dance was quite simple, involved *looking* at the audience, no fancy steps, movement together as a group. We sat and watched in the sun and the *laoshi* (teacher) beat a drum with a stick and spoke out beautiful rhythms and the beat. She was very young, very thin, Yan Li knew her when she was a student at the academy. She'd recently gotten married, Yan Li says her husband has money. She was very kind towards the students when they did something wrong, making critiques with kind jokes. All the girls seemed very relaxed and pleasant to each other, faces, expressions, personalities, very different – some flirtatious, some awkward, some nothing-to-notice, some self-conscious. There was also another teacher, helping to choreograph maybe, he was a man with longish gray hair, handsome, dressed like an old artist or musician and some other musicians, who did not play very often.

December 14, 2005

Meimei (Yan Li's "sister") invited Yan Li and me to a product extravaganza – the sort of thing where retired people go to get some entertainment, a free lunch, and in return listen to a couple of hours of advertising – only the Chinese version was not nearly so crude. Yan Li and I set out at about 7:30, the cold, cold air, running to the bus, the sun just up, taking it one stop by tons of new, still empty, still being built apartment buildings, by the new school. Then we crossed a big road (the 3rd ring road? The 4th or 5th?) to meet Meimei and waited and waited and waited. It turned out that a bus was supposed to pick us up to bring us to the event, but that somehow we missed it, or it did not see us. Yan Li and MM kept calling the company, asking where the bus was, toes and fingers slowly freezing. Watched a vendor making "crepes", oil a flat, hot slab, cook the dough, crack an egg, flip over, add spices, add fried crispy cake, wrap up into a square, put into a plastic bag – something that you normally eat for breakfast.

Eventually, the company sent an extra van to pick us up. We ride to the outskirts of the city to a health and hot mineral water spa where the extravaganza is held.

When the van finally arrived MM started yelling – and yelled for about 15 minutes at the young girl who picked us up, the girl just listened calmly and nodded, not saying much,

letting MM vent. She was saying how the company bus failed to pick us up, and we had to wait outside, where it was really cold, for about an hour, giving the company something like 30 phone calls on the two cell phones. Yan Li also added some complaints, yet more calmly and politely – she says she's not as excitable, she explained to me that her style was different when approaching these things. These bouts of complaints continued throughout the afternoon, showing the girl exactly how many phone calls were made, saying that their foreign friend had wanted to go and was really, really cold outside not having worn enough clothes, trying to figure out exactly how the phone calls had been mistreated, asking to see a manager, and finally seeing one, and talking to him for about half an hour. It seemed totally normal to do this! To get so angry and be so crazy! In America I think (unless you were a completely crazy old lady) you would have gone home after waiting for 30 minutes or more and said "oh well", if you had gone you would have complained a little, saying that you were really cold and wanting to know why there had been a problem – but if you had yelled at the girl who had come to pick you up anywhere near so much she would have burst into tears, quit her job, not know what to do, you would have been seen as extremely rude and crazy – though justified in your anger – but not in your style of reaction. But, here, this was fine.

Arrival: In the huge hall are people seated around tables, salesmen/women in suits to the side, each one matched to a group of people, to take care of you, show you through the event, bring you tea.

Sitting up close, there is a singing contest with nine women, different parts of the audience participate in different ways, confetti. The nine contestants – I think that each one lived in a different part of the city, and had been using the vitamins. They stood in a semi-circle and two young girls, healthy and sturdy, asked each *aiyi* (general, respectful term for an older woman) to first say their names, introduce themselves. The girls, the MCs, were wearing new style pleated skirts and boots – cowboy boots maybe.

Taking blood and looking at it under a microscope; pulse checking – we sat in a circle around the doctor, everyone listening in on everyone else's diagnosis.

Lunch, there is a big lazy-susan in the middle of a table topped with low-quality looking meat balls, cauliflower which no one ate, green spinach like thing, two kinds of soup – one tomato, both cold, two women ate their own ramen noodles from a little metal tin, other meat, rice, white steamed buns which one old lady immediately took about half of. The people around the table seemed old, sick, greedy, but nice, sort of to feel sorry for. It must have been difficult coordinating getting so many dishes to so many tables on time – while this was happening there was more entertainment on the stage – an acrobatic troupe of girls, spinning tables and each other on their legs.

Buying the product, gifts for coming and for buying.

Fruit is generally only eaten after dinner, apples cut into small pieces, grapefruits are peeled and eaten like oranges, kiwis peeled and eaten like apples; everyone, everywhere, even in public settings when you don't know anyone shares dishes, each dipping their chopsticks in when they want something – seems unclean, so many colds and hacking coughs.

Things that Yan Li postulates are not the same in America/China: when you divorce in China it is a terrible thing, and you'd never keep friends with your ex or his/her family; parents in China like to take care of their children, for example, cutting up an apple for them, rather than expecting them to do it themselves; people don't live together before marriage; you must bring a gift when you go to a friend's house; at weddings you give money (somewhere between 300-800 yuan).

Yan Li is really curious about the prices of different things in America. I guess that this surprises me because I would have thought that she would already know, asking Lisa, her children, or someone else.

Yan Li and her husband got married when they were 28 and 30 (?), which, I think, may have been relatively normal at the time. Now men can marry at 22, women somewhere between 20 and 22 – as of now university students cannot get married, but I think that this law will change soon.

Yan Li's birthday is June 1, which is also Children's Day in China.

December 15, 2005

Nice weather, relatively warm

We visit *meishuguan* – Beijing National Art Gallery

Exhibit of paintings and calligraphy – the paintings were quite beautiful and simple, nicely displayed in 3 or more big rooms, each for a certain kind of painting. The first was calligraphy, which I don't like the look of that much, but I guess that, like with all these types of paintings, it is the thought, the meaning, the philosophy, the underlying connections that is important – something that for character paintings I think is really hard to understand if you do not read characters well & know them and their meanings quite well, a very intellectual art. The calligraphy was on different colored paper, though mostly white and red, and the frames interesting and different shapes, there were also long scrolls, which are written on in the opposite direction from Western scrolls, left to right not top to bottom. The character paintings usually had two characters, which didn't look like writing, but like things or emotions, Yan Li could guess what some of the characters were, but not others because they were quite abstract. The display area was beautiful, extremely simple, white and cream colored walls and ceilings, very light and bright, clean, making our clothes stand out, people stand out against the paintings.

We met the student of the artist, a graduate student at Beijing University. He was extremely friendly. He gave us a long tour of the exhibit, and gave us books and brochures for free at the end.

He was saying that the paintings meant things like a male & female dragon, black and white, yin and yang – that they were *faxian* type paintings (look and discover) verses *kan* paintings (look and see).

We went shopping for souvenirs – discovering that *gongxipin* (souvenirs) means exactly what you can find in Chinatown at home, but also learning about the meaning (deeper) of the things. For example, the metal balls, the things to hang for good luck and good fortune.

The tacky souvenir shops and wander around and around while Yan Li was bargaining for the teapot I wanted to buy, feeling quite uncomfortable, Yan Li explains that it is not polite to not speak to a person when they come in a store (or restaurant) – you should make them feel welcome. The saleswomen are so aggressive.

On the subway everyone was very subdued.

We went to a *danxin* (small cakes and snacks) store. *Danxin* are usually eaten at breakfast with tea. Bright and crazy and famous shop for small cakes and other things like that – you wouldn't be able to pick it out expect that it's really big, near the Andingmen subway, and usually, in America, really big means quite tacky – but not here. To order the cakes you line up at a big long counter, which becomes a window because it is covered by a long, counter-to-ceiling piece of see-through plastic, with various openings to hand things in and out and to take orders. There are lots of girls behind the counter, everything is a little bit disorganized, light colors, pinks and light browns, the cakes falling off their stacks, stacked on wooden boards maybe, the wall behind them white tile – simple, hospital or industrial like. The cakes are put in little sweets bags, white with a pink and light yellow/brown label. After we bought the cakes, about 6, Yan Li wanted me to try them all by the side of the counter so that we could see which ones we liked, then buy more. I tried little pieces of all of them, most tasted like Fig Newtons, but thicker and better, like homemade Fig Newtons – a dense cookie filled with dried fruits like cherries and dates. There were also some black sesame cakes that tasted a little savory and a thing that looks like a big piece of rice crispy cake – puffed rice, raisins, dried fruit – Yan Li says that *beijing ren* (people from Beijing) really like it – with a laugh, a regional, local thing. It's really amazing how many things I've never tried, don't know quite what they are, and when I eat them, I am still not really sure what they are made of.

Yan Li says that you ought to drink water two times a day at least, once at night, and once in the morning, because when you sleep your circulation slows down, this gets it moving quickly again. Makes sense.

After/during dinner we, but mostly Yan Li's husband, watched some kind of soap-operaish story about life in the royal court on TV, the girls were very young, small featured, helpless or evil, or crazy. The majority of actors were quite young, there were lots of young men, mostly handsome, and the evil, silly, fat young man who wanted to kidnap the girl, exaggerated face-expressions.

December 16, 2005

Massage basement – Yan Li's apartment complex, in which 300,000 people live, has lots of little free places where you can go to get massages from machines, or special fire treatments, and soak your feet in mineral water. This morning we went to one, which had about 20 massage machines that you lie down on and that have a special kind of hot stone that rubs your back. There were lots of older people there, getting massaged, the place was very basic, the sort of which people in America might be afraid of going into but, which are completely normal here, a little dirty looking, a little ugly, but people don't mind at all, everything works, is useful. The workers there smiled at me a lot, and I back, laughing. We went into a little side room that smelled very strongly of some kind of alcohol, a woman, about 35 or 40 was having her stomach massaged, it was no problem for strangers to come in and talk and look with her half-naked, it seemed totally

fine and normal. I think that what it was a sort of Tibetan medicine room, there were jars of a smelly dark liquid with a thin rope coiled inside – a wick for the fire treatment? There were also glass suction things in the corner, and lots of charts of the body and special points on the body on the wall. There were two massage cots, some little shelves for the bottles, that was about it. Outside there was also this machine that moves your body around in a circle – making your waist do a hula hoop motion – this is supposed to help you have a firm stomach, and also to relieve back tension.

For lunch we were going to eat crab, there are male and female crabs, you can tell by looking at the bottom of the shell, the females are good to eat – but there was something wrong with them, too salty I think. They were brown, dark brown, about the size of two pancakes stuck together, had a very insect like inside.

Took the bus into the city to see the place where *hong lou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber) is supposed to be set. The sky-train into the city was very smooth and you could see fields, barren because of the season, gray, and shabby looking long greenhouses, gray trees, then the city coming up. The ride was very smooth, new. The train tickets were like the little ones in Tokyo that you need to put in once when you start, then again when you exit. We then took a bus to the park, a long ride, this was the district where Yan Li grew up, and where her husband also grew up. Her husband's family's house still exists, but I don't think hers does. She spent 8 years in *dong bei* (a northern province) during the Cultural Revolution, very hard years, and afterwards, when she was 28 or so came back to Beijing and met her husband through a friend. Yan Li's parents died during the Cultural Revolution, and she used to have terrible nightmares, dreams that they were calling to her, were there with her. In *dong bei* they used to pick this certain kind of mushroom that we had for lunch today, which is very black and delicate, wavy (called *mouer*). When it rained these mushrooms would come out, growing on the trees, and afterwards they could pick and eat them. Yan Li also said that from 1961-1963 things were very hard in China, even if you had money you still could not buy enough to eat.

Yan Li's husband is watching the emperor soap opera again. Lots of tragedy.

On the subway by chance I sat next to a (dirty) English man, has been in China for about a year, think he might have been a bit crazy because his clothes – his pants – were really disgusting – you could not quite see this until he got up – like something you would never wear unless you were homeless or crazy. He asked how I liked Beijing, how I *really* liked it – saying that he rarely met other people who spoke English, seemed lonely and lost. He said he spoke nearly no Chinese, being everywhere was like being in a tunnel of white noise he said, disconcerting. He invited me to go out with him and, after asking my age, to have some drinks, assuring me he wasn't crazy and that there were no strings attached nicely enough – but if you really are so nice is there a need to say that? Gave me his e-mail address on a scrap of paper.

Yan Li, when it is crowded, takes hold of my arm, and today also half held my hand. She does this very nicely, warmly, naturally, like it is what one ought to do.

December 17, 2005

Lisa's house: Beautiful, all of Beijing used to look like this – how sad that it has changed!

These old houses are incredible, like temples, only smaller and more brown – plain wood without the red shiny paint, courtyards, high ceilings, arches and gates marking the different parts of the city. Calm and refined. These must have been rich people houses, now maybe the hutongs, where the more common people lived, are all that's left, and these are likely disappearing too. Yan Li doesn't seem to mind too, too much, though doesn't really say. I asked her why there were not more of these old houses left and she said they were "very expensive". The hutongs are lined with trees ... the temples, the gates. Now the main roads are lined with ugly semi-modern buildings, they cannot be that new because many are in disrepair, maybe built in the 1950s or 1960s. Banks and little restaurants, dirty flower shops, tall apartment complexes (which are likely nicer inside than out). You'd never guess what was here before!

Small temple, Yan Li's uncle used to live in one of the buildings, it was an orphanage and he was a doctor, before it was a place where the empress *cixi* rested when she was out and about in the city.

There was little a girl with her parents, about 9 or 10, who saw me standing outside one of the temple buildings while Yan Li was listening to the tour guide (quietly, for free) inside. The girl walked right up to me and said, "Hello. Welcome to China". She spoke very clearly and earnestly. She then asked, "Where are you from?" I said "America" and she translated for her parents. After this she said "do you speak Chinese?" and after I responded she felt shy. She wanted her parents to ask me questions, I think they were whispering to her things she could try to ask me in English, but she was saying, "I've forgotten". They asked me whether I was working here or on vacation. We smiled a lot and there was silence, looking at each other. I asked her how long she had been studying English for, but she didn't understand, so I asked in Chinese, and said "five years". She spoke so clearly, perfectly, when she spoke, and also very proudly, with great curiosity.

The mall across from Yan Li's house has more than meets the eye. I was thinking when we were in it today that this was the re-creation of Chinese life, in the suburbs – maybe it doesn't make a large difference to live here rather than in the city? I don't know how people feel. Around the sides of the mall are little snack shops – that don't seem too busy – and places to buy cigarettes and alcohol. In the main entrance of the mall you can buy all kinds of plumbing, lots of white plumbing items (like toilets) are displayed. Further back, along the walls, there are paintings, carvings, embroidery of flowers for sale. Yan Li told me the names of all the different flowers. Beyond this is a modern grocery store, busy in the evening, yogurt, bread, meats, fruits, a few clothes, toothpaste, you can use a credit card, packaged cookies and crackers, very bright fluorescent lighting, it is called "WuMart" and there is a sign that says, in English, beyond the checkouts "Thana (no "k") You for Shopping at WuMart". Outside this are little counters, one for sweets and little cakes, one for snacks (where we bought candied fruit sticks, the kind popular in Beijing in the winter), one for paper, and also a place where you can get a facial and a foot-massage. Yan Li says the foot massager is very knowledgeable and by feeling your feet can tell where else in your body you have pain – the idea is that by touching the right points on your feet you can help to relax the rest of your body. Down below this is a huge area where you can buy meats, vegetables and homemade noodles. The meat and vegetables are spread out on long, very simple tables, each vendor has their own spot, in this basement-like place.

Chinese people talk generally about *waiguoren* (foreigners) – don't break them up often into different countries like we do.

Yan Li's husband, drunk I think, uses his plug-in globe of the world to tell me about history. Tells me about what happened in China during WWII, Japan took the upper corner of China, Russia took Mongolia – but retreated when Germany attacked Moscow. The U.S. only got involved in the war after Japan attacked Hawaii, Japan surrendered after the U.S. dropped two bombs on it. Strange to hear the same facts in another language, similarly learned and spoken, U.S. war in Iraq, struggles over natural resources, wars, China's current military status (now it has weapons so the U.S. doesn't want to make China mad). Every day, all day and night, he sits in front of the new TV and drinks *baijiu*, a cheap, harsh, clear liquor, from a silver metal flask. He fills it from a big jug under the coffee table that has a funnel perched on top. How can they not have to work?

December 18, 2005

This morning I took a walk with Yan Li around the suburb to a place where you can go, also free if you live here, and soak your feet in hot mineral water. It is Sunday so it was actually officially closed, which Yan Li forgot until we were on the way, but we went in anyways to have a look. The family (?) who runs the place was eating a sort of carrot salad and bread on one of the benches in the main room where people soak their feet. Their laundry, kid-like shirts, and other things, were hanging up in the back behind a display of a water filter system with a pH chart. There was another room where the foot-soaking tubs were stored, and a third room with a sink and filter-water system and a shaking washing machine chugging away – its top was open and a sheet half hanging out as it ran. They explained that before people in Beijing would drink "any water", but now they are becoming more health conscious and want to drink better quality water. Yan Li also has a filter in her house, and insists that I drink this water (neutral pH) and not the store bought bottled water – she says that tests have found this tends to have an acidic pH. They wanted to know what the water quality was like in America. The girl there, in high school maybe, was studying English, and wanted to practice a bit, she'd only been studying six months and was shy. But as we soaked our feet (they let us even though it was closed) she and the manager sat and talked with us. The manager was a woman in her later 30s, calm and good looking, thin, curly hair, calm face. You soaked your feet in wooden tubs with tourmaline stones on the bottom that you could massage your feet with, also "medicine" from Tibet was added in teabag form, it had a dark red-brown color and you were supposed to mush it around so that the color came out. The tub was lined with a plastic bag, I guess so that each person would have a clean surface to soak their feet in – to be thrown out afterwards.

On the way there were a fair amount of people out walking, and the suburb does have a bit of variety, a park – not finished yet, so you can't go in – places for strip-mall like stores, not yet filled, a rotary with a place to plant flowers in the middle, wide boulevards look out to tall apartment buildings, a little bit older, and more friendly looking neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, lots of cars parked on the sidewalks, almost like I'd imagine suburban Paris to be. Most of the buildings are white, with little bits of brown creeping in as they get older, in this season trees are gray brown, Yan Li says that when the weather is warm people dance together in front of the mall. Yan Li says that it's difficult to get a house here because they are relatively cheap and also pretty nice –

you've got to put your name on a list and wait a few years, unless your house in the city center has been knocked down – then the government gives you priority. This is what happened to Yan Li, her house is now a park, the government decided to knock it down because it was next to a temple, and wanted some more open land I guess. Yan Li used to go pray with the monks twice a day. Whenever we go to a temple here she prays, and also has a little shrine in a cupboard in her house. She does this very calmly, quietly.

Yan Li told me that after she had her son, she again became pregnant, with boy-twins, I think she must have had to have an abortion because she said "I cried and cried".

December 19, 2005

Summer palace

Trying to get the yearly pass for parks

Rocks that are shaped like the different animals of the Chinese zodiac

Tibetan temple, up high

Frozen lake

Big rock that had to be abandoned because the guy who liked it ran out of money, but which was finally brought to the summer palace.

The summer palace, in its non-touristed parts, was quite beautiful. A large park with a big and icy lake, and smaller lakes, buildings, temples, secrets, hills, many old dark green pine trees. To walk through it is exercise, hills, steep steps, brisk wind, wind off the water. The large temple on the top of the hill, Tibetan I think, was amazing, you approach it part by part. First the long, wide stone stairs to the wall, with a big flat courtyard, then through this up even, steep stairs, green (common people's color) and yellow (emperor's color) glossy tiles, paints, small metal ornaments. Then around more buildings and around rocks, finally up to the top temple with thousands of tiny golden statues of Buddha on the side, inside there is no building frame, the high temple is an architectural wonder – free standing – about 80 feet high, 3 or so statues of Buddha, one very huge and golden even though this Buddha is not the most important one.

We stayed in the city. Cold house, expensive salmon. Came down with cold, very painful in chest, read the medical source book in Lisa's son's room where I was sleeping. Cold moving from head and nose to chest.

December 20, 2005

I went to visit a class of Naru's. He is a friend of Lisa's, probably in his 50s, who is a painter. He used to paint quite often in Lisa's basement in a small studio, liking to paint a particular kind of hieroglyph or old character system, light colors, fairly abstract, like some of the mid-Picasso, or dulled Kandinsky. He's now a professor at Nationalities University, which is right next to the Beijing Dance Academy. He met me at the gate, light long dark coat, silky and not warm scarf – light colored. He took me, speaking very quickly, to the class building, into the studio. This looked like a studio anywhere, lots of paint everywhere, rather bad paintings stacked up against the walls, a jumble of easels, students listening to music, a little bit listless and slow moving. Naru proceeded to critique and give helpful advice to the students on their paintings. Both before and after the class he said, "students here now aren't as good as they were before". The paintings were nothing special. The best I thought was one that a boy was painting of

his classmate – a feisty girl with a yellow winter coat and long wavy hair. In the painting she was eating a red fruit stick (found all over Beijing in the winter) and had seductive eyes. In class she was sitting next to him, so he could paint better I guess, and not doing anything herself except listening to music on little white headphones.

I asked most of the students a small question, but none really seemed to feel like talking or asking me questions. Though, I did speak for a while with one who straight off the bat asked me if “we could be friends?” and gave me a little brown piece of art paper folded in half with her name and contact information. She seemed very young, almost made me think this was a high school – she wanted to know about art schools in the US and Canada and had no idea! I tried to explain that you could find all the information online about when and how to apply, and the sorts of things you would need to submit. She was very surprised that you would need to write an admissions essay and wanted to know if all the classes would be in English. She was sketching off of photos that she had taken around Beijing, and said that currently, she was in a program studying 4 types of painting.

A few people have said that I am more like an Eastern girl, then a Western one in my (shy, quiet) manners.

I’ve gotten a cold and have this hacking – mucus cough, the kind that makes you sound really sick, but which doesn’t feel that bad. The cold has moved really quickly, first a headache and sniffy nose and a sore throat, then a really sore throat and a chest so tight it was hard to breathe and when the coughing started in the cold middle of the night it ripped and hurt – I read about my symptoms in Lisa’s son’s medical dictionary and concluded it was unlikely I had strep throat. Then, the next day I coughed and felt very tired. Yan Li wanted me to eat all sorts of medicine, the first stuff was fine, a combination of a thing in a green package that you mix with hot water and it turns purplish brown. You drink it as a shot with a chaser of water. Tastes earthy and fairly easy to get used to, a little herb-y as well. There were also pills of what looked like the same stuff, the same color and a similar smell. I took these two things a number of times, but then Yan Li also wanted me to take some stuff at Wang laoshi’s house which had a green package and looked a little more Western and Yan Li wasn’t quite sure herself what it was, something she had found that was good for sore throats. On the back of the package there was also English, and this description said it was for much more serious stuff – tonsillitis and things like that, fancy words. And, while it may have been fine for a sore throat – plain old – as well, I did not want to take any. In China, when you have a cold, you are supposed to drink lots of water, eat lots of vegetables (and not certain kinds of meat), get lots of sleep, take lots of Chinese medicine.

I spent about five hours on Wang laoshi’s couch, shifting various positions, sleeping with winter coats on top of me, feeling very hot (dance institute heating is quite warm), and watching afternoon TV – dull! Chinese TV seems generally really under produced, no nice redone colors, simple local shows, lots of news sorts of shows, local interest, soap operas that play during past dynasties. There was this long show on that was half cooking, half about health. They were making recipes of what you ought to cook up if you are sick in the wintertime – including *yinger* (that clear mushroom stew). There were also lots of shots of sick older people, hacking up phlegm, getting a simple IV in a hospital common room, walking outside, not seeming to mind their coughs. It was a bit sickening in itself to watch, germs, germs, germly places, sickness, ill health. Then there was a show about police cracking down on meat vendors who were selling bad meat,

meat that they'd bought very cheaply and were telling customers was some other kind of meat than it actually was. The police took away many vendors' long metal roasting pans – tossing them in a heap in a police yard. This show goes along with this sort of idea here of *righteousness*, that people get really worried/angry/impudent when someone else is treated badly, cheated because they don't know, etc.

Eric called, but I wasn't there, Yan Li's husband tried to give him Lisa's phone number, but forgot that he could have said the numbers in English (he knows a little bit of English) until after Eric had hung up. Laughed about the whole thing.

December 21, 2005

Got up very early to go to dance class at other location, dark and bitter wind. The Dance Academy is about a 7-minute walk from Lisa's house. Yan Li used to work there, and also, I think, for many years, worked as a nanny for Lisa's family. Some of the photos she had (see below) were of Lisa's children. There were almost as many photos of them as there were of her son. Along the walk to the academy from Lisa's house there is first a big road, then you turn off into smaller streets, gray, a bit dirty, crumbling, fruit and sweet potato vendors (later in the day) waiting for the dance students. Brightly, garishly colored shops that sell what I at first thought were like Halloween or burlesque costumes, fuchsia tutus and the like, but which I think are just the little shops where you can buy dance clothes. The Dance Academy buildings themselves are nice inside, wooden floors, much light, warm, airy. But from the outside, and from the hallways, they look gray and dirty. There are many things in China like this – things that appear dirty or falling apart, but that people have no problem using, and that actually might be quite nice and comfortable. Wang laoshi's apartment is small, but the living room and bedroom are very modern looking (Chinese kitchens and bathrooms tend not to look so nice), covered with light colored wood on the floor and on parts of the walls, and with a big mirror covering the wall between the entrance and the living room. She has a couch, an armchair, and island with stools to eat, the island is covered with a big, cut plastic placemat with photos of things like dumplings on it. Wang laoshi buys expensive clothes and gets expensive haircuts. The walls are covered with professionally taken photos of her at a time when her hair was very short, some are of her dancing, but most just posing, some big and some small, there must be about 20. On the wall behind the TV there are little folk souvenirs from Russia, and on the shelves good liquor and fancy foreign chocolates.

It seems so important in China, or maybe especially to the older generation to get a good deal. To get something that is well made, and even better, even more, that is cheap, a good price. Every time we've bought something where Yan Li bargained well, she tells the story proudly and in very great detail – like the jacket and the teapot, which only has 3 cups and not 4. But also she asked for discounts from the hairdresser, for money from the airport for my lost baggage, for cheaper meat, vegetables, roasted chestnuts ... it's not that you won't buy the expensive thing if it won't be sold any cheaper, it's just that you might as well try to get the best deal possible.

Yan Li shows me old pictures. Many of the others, she said, were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. I think she showed them to me because I asked if she had any pictures of old Beijing. There were about 50 old black and white photos of her as a child, her parents, her two older brothers, various relatives. Many of them were taken at the Summer Palace, by the lake, etc.. There were also a number of Yan Li as a young

woman when she was in *Dongbei*. She said it was very cold there and everyone ate a lot and was chubby, including herself. She says that that time stretched out her stomach so now she must eat a lot [when I returned in May Yan Li spent lots of time talking about her body, comparing her body to mine, showing me her stomach, saying she should be thinner]. There's a photo of her and her husband in their house after they were married standing in front of a big wooden cabinet. You could only get one of these if you got married – you brought your marriage certificate to the government, then could get one. No money could buy one otherwise! At that time, around the Cultural Revolution, there were no wedding pictures or clothes, just two people posed in everyday clothes as if it were a normal day. Yan Li also had some fashion photos taken last year. The kind where you go to a studio and you pick fancy clothes to wear and they put make up on you. She looked like an American woman this way! Sweet face in too-tight prom dress.

Yan Li's son came by again in the evening to see his parents and to look for a document, an invoice (?), which I don't think was successfully found. He's a little chubby and didn't seem particularly happy to see his parents, but I guess he has not been away for that long. This was the first time since I've been there that Yan Li's husband turned off the TV in the evening. Yan Li's son seems young, I think his is 23. Yan Li is the same age as my mother and she had him when she was 31. He ate supper, spoke on his cell phone for a very long time, wanting privacy, slept on the couch, said I could listen to his music. Today he's at work, and tomorrow will head out to another city for about a week. His company assesses the value of property and of things.

December 22, 2005

Yan Li has gone, riding her bicycle, to a market or place where she can buy more *danxin* (small, sweet cakes), and will also get my Frye boots and leather shoes polished very cheaply. This morning I ate some grapefruit that was slightly sweet. It comes about the size of a kid's soccer ball with a yellow skin, and is yellow inside with big lines of the fruit. Last night we ate jellyfish, which Yan Li's son brought back from his business trip. The people the company visited also gave them salted fish, which we ate too. Both are specialties of that city or area of China. The fish, like most salted fish, tasted terrible. The jellyfish – which I wasn't quite sure what it was when I was eating it – was sliced up thinly and mixed with little slices of cucumber, so it became this crunchy salad. The jellyfish came in a small plastic package and was clear/slightly skin colored. Yan Li's husband made all sorts of movements with his arms trying to describe what sort of animal it was. I guessed that it was either squid or jellyfish, then, later, looked it up in the dictionary. Yan Li's husband then proceeded to tell me all about jellyfish, then got out his lighted-up globe and told me more about China's geography – about Tibet, the world's highest mountains, a pretty region in the southern part of China where there are few roads and only the tour guides speak Mandarin, locals speak a dialect.

Later in the day I went with Yan Li to the 798 art area to meet Wang Jan Wei a friend of Lisa's who used to be a painter, and is now a video and theatre artist, he is quite successful. Lisa said that about 2 years ago she was in Paris at the Centre Pompidou and there was, by chance, an exhibition of New Chinese Art. At the start of the exhibition there was a large photo of Wang Jan Wei!

798 is an arts district built around an old, but still running, factory complex in the northeast part of Beijing – not many cab drivers know it, nor does the general public,

which is strange and interesting given its increasing size. I'm not sure if it was this big in 2004 and we just missed it all, and/or how much development has happened in the last 2 years. Wang Jan Wei's wife gave me a tour – we walked around and looked at different galleries. She spoke a bit of English and likened it to NYC's Soho (Chelsea?), as an industrial area turned art area. It generally still looks rather rough, true manufacturing workers, gruff, wandering around, off limits areas, dusty wide paths. There are many quite sophisticated restaurants and cafes – more Western in décor, in that there is much attention to detail, but they were nearly all empty when I was there (in the later afternoon). I saw the gallery with the beautiful high ceilings and machines on the floor that Eric and I had seen before, also the bookstore we saw on our first entrance. Most of the art captions, unlike in the museums, are both in Chinese and English, and fairly well translated. Yan Li says the area used to be a factory area where secret things were made, and on the inner roof/high up on the wall of the gallery that I'd been to before was a slogan in faded red paint from the Cultural Revolution – saying something like, “when Mao speaks, you should listen!” There was also an exhibition of Mao photographs – the standard portraits. Wang Jan Wei and his wife, who is not an artist but helps her husband, and is quiet and self-collected, kind – reminds me of Renate, Oswald's wife in her looks: They were both very sharp, clean, normal looking (for American art scene) sophisticated. They invited us for coffee, but Yan Li declined (did not know I understood) – why? Maybe she wanted to get home? Maybe this seemed strange to her, too expensive and extravagant? A cup of coffee costs about 25rmb, which is expensive, you could buy lots of groceries with that amount, for example you could get 25 ears of steamed corn.

There was a fair amount of conceptual art, some not very good traditional-ish art. Also, a few video projects, decent paintings by a French painter, a Korean gallery, the Beijing/Tokyo project. Interestingly Wang Jan Wei's wife, at Yan Li's mention of the official Beijing art gallery, had absolutely no interest in listening to the story about the exhibition there (though, by all standards, it really was quite good – bordering on stuffy for sure, but fresh enough). Tension between the official and more avant garde art scenes?

Bus, waiting next to the highway bridge as bus after bus passed, steady stream, pollution. Bicycle riders, little girl sharing a bicycle with her brother, waiting by the side of the highway, packed buses, rush hour, empty, ramshackle stores, people walk on the streets rather than the sidewalks.

Eating hot pot – piles of red, raw *yangrou* (mutton) sliced very thinly, green green green greens (dandelion leaves I think and something else) – bitter greens, winter melon, white tofu. “Hot pot” is very common in Beijing, especially in the winter. There are many restaurants where you can eat in this way, but you can at home too. There is a “hot pot” – a pot on an electric burner that you put in the center of the table, it is filled with a broth, and everyone sits around the pot and puts little bits of food in the broth to cook it. Sort of like fondue. Very extravagant looking, though simple, also ate *shier bing* on the side (little breads, flaky, filled with a little bit of a nut paste, sesame seeds on top). You also mixed up a sauce to dip things in of tiny red chili peppers, fermented tofu, a green sauce of mashed up grassy type vegetable, vinegar.

One thing that disconcerts me is that you “drink” soup, stew, yogurt here instead of eat it. People ask: “*ni yao he suan nai ma?*” (“do you want to drink a yogurt?”).

Freddy, Yan Li's son, worked for the day in Beijing and this evening is heading out again on business. He's quite a bit nicer than my first impression. He said that yesterday he felt "sad" so didn't want to talk, but I think he meant more "frustrated" – was having trouble explaining in English, but I think was annoyed by his mother meddling with his things, moving his stuff around, giving too much advice. Yan Li says that he wants to rent his own apartment, but that she won't let him. She says that he doesn't earn much yet and spends all his money on expensive brand name clothes and shoes (Esprit, etc.). Dresses quite conservatively, kind of a like an American Dave Matthews, American Eagle guy. He's a little chubby (his belly) – but I think it's more his childlike-face than his body that gives this sense – he is actually quite tall, I'm not sure if he has dimples, but gives the impression that he does, he's got a full, friendly face.

We talked for a while in English/Chinese on the couch. Almost the very first thing he said in English – which his parents cannot understand – was that he did not like his job. He had wanted to study chemistry and/or to study to be a veterinarian, but his parents said that he couldn't study chemistry because in China it is too dangerous – men who work in Chemical factories are often exposed to too many chemicals and cannot have children. Since he is the only boy in his father's line all the relatives got together and said he couldn't study it; he studied accounting instead. He's of half a mind to go back to school to study veterinary medicine, but it afraid that he'll be too old (26) by the time he finishes. He's afraid that girls, other people will say "What's wrong with you? Why did you finish school so late?"

December 23, 2005

This morning, at their request, I taught Yan Li and her husband how to say "one moment please" and "beautiful" in English. We also tried "pretty", but that was a little more tricky. Yan Li says that English words seem so strange to her, the sounds, trying to say them. Even being with Lisa and her family so much she speaks really no English. This is different, English seeming so strange, because the Chinese people I know in Toronto all speak at least some English, many have been studying for a long time.

Saw relatively little of interest today ... but was relaxing, quiet. I went on my own to 798, wandered around some more galleries, some funky clothing stores (mix between Japanese, Tibetan, and new age styles), cafes and little Western-ish restaurants. The area really is still quite industrial, there are a number of the bigger companies and factories marked on the map. I saw lots of Westerners, the Chinese cheap restaurants were much fuller though, the place empty, like galleries sometimes are, lots closed, there are many openings tomorrow. A lot of the art was quite Maoist in reference, quite "Chinese" in reference and also quite conceptual. I wonder if there's a fight between the two camps and if the Chinese art audience is interested in the Mao stuff, or if this is more for/appealing to the foreign market. The nicest people I met were two older ladies who had a little knitting shop selling socks, scarves, some machine made stuff, and small stuffed animal pigs, some with Communist costumes. The shop was less classy than the others and they spoke pleasantly to me and to each other in Chinese, more relaxed. The bookshop, Timezone, is very nice, like something you'd find in NYC or Paris or a nice place in Toronto, great art books, including lots on modern Chinese art, pleasant to browse. I looked at Edward Burtynsky's new book on China – very industrial, big landscapes, empty of individuals – what would you think if you only knew this? What does it say about the West's idea at the moment of China & the ideas we might like to have about it?

On the bus back the ticket collector, a man, which is rare, charged me 3 *yuan* for a ticket when I was pretty sure it was supposed to be 1 *yuan*. I didn't say anything, but sat thinking "grr", about how foreigners are treated badly – about how if people know you or you are with a friend or a family you are treated extremely kindly, but how otherwise people think it's fine to cheat you, I was trying not to think too negatively, balancing the good with the bad. As I got off the bus the ticket collector said, "oh, you're getting off here! It's only 1 *yuan*, I'm sorry!" He gave me back the 2 *yuan* – it must have just been that I'd said the stop wrong so he didn't really know where I was going.

Chinese people often put egg in soup.

I went with Yan Li to visit an old woman who practices tai chi. She moved to the suburb with her husband, son, son's wife, and grandson about 2 months ago. The daughter in law works at Freddy's company. Yan Li helped them to get a house here, they stood in line as a team of 8 for 2 days and 2 nights. Yan Li also helped the family of another co-worker of Freddy's to get a house here. We went in and she showed me her small and clean room of tai chi instruments in a tall cardboard box, neatly taking them out and putting them away, small cups of tea and fruit, husband with old style shirt came home – Yan Li has given them a museum passbook, talks of this, of her old home, they then talk of young people today, university students, about people who live in the compound and about the compound itself, about the weather, about Chinese food and what I (the foreigner) like and don't like to eat, about the art museum and meeting the student of the master painter, about what I've been doing while I'm here. The *lao taitai* (what Yan Li calls the old woman when she speaks of her to me, this is a respectful term for an old woman, meaning "old misses.") thumps me on the back in a very friendly way. Hardly anything on the walls, clean but bare, the kid watches TV and doesn't say hello.

Yan Li's husband sings 2 Japanese songs, his father could speak English and Japanese. Tells me about the rivers & border struggles of the world, that China and the USSR took different views on Marx & Engels' philosophy.

December 24, 2005

Got up at about 6am this morning to get ready to practice tai chi with the woman I met last night. I think that she leads a group of about 5 other older people – maybe there are more, but today there were five. She is quite experienced. I wish I could have filmed because the setting was incredible!! They were practicing, so early in the morning, in the cold (around freezing), at the edge of what will be a park, but what is now a dirt-dusty field in the middle of a number of the apartment complex's buildings. The space was relatively open, with some walls and stones already laid, some dry grasses, and trash at the edges. The sky today is a tiny bit blue, but mostly hazy. Behind them the smoke from the power plant was huge, billowing up. The colors all so light, so natural, so white, brown, gray, blue, light, but also so alien, so moon-like, so lonely, so amazing that you would do this action in a place like this. When I first got there they were practicing to music, played in a little tape player, afterwards we practiced in silence, the *lao taitai* speaking out the sequence of actions, the hand movements, lifting feet, lunges, kicks, turns, all very slow and deliberate. Then we also practiced with swords, similar movements, practicing patterns.

Afterwards Yan Li and I went to a large vegetable, fruit, and other things market about a 10-minute walk from the house, situated in a field. It happens every morning and is sort of dirty and chaotic looking, but this is where you can buy relatively fresh and cheap food. There were also fish and people making different sorts of breads and dumplings – which Yan Li says are a bit dirty.

Yan Li says Chinese people believe that the best houses are in the North, then West, then South and East. This has to do with the weather and the wind, and maybe some other things too.

In the afternoon went into the city to meet Xiao Mei, the art magazine editor and another friend of Lisa's. I was going to stay with her, her house is much more central, but then her sister got sick, so she said she felt like that couldn't work. Her house is in an older part of the city, just a few *hutongs* (hutong means "alley", hutongs are small streets lined with courtyard homes and trees) away from where Yan Li was born. It was interesting to see the inside of a hutong – there's the outer alley with the (now quite clean looking) public toilets, then you enter small doorways and there are little winding pathways to different people's houses. Xiao Mei's courtyard was relatively big, it used to be the house of a daughter of an emperor. In old times, it must have been beautiful, it's now carved up and dirty, bicycles, coal cakes, dust, over the beautiful old roofs, the small lake filled in and the little side houses to the lake gray and in disrepair. Xiao Mei's house was quite dirty and messy, but she didn't seem to mind. We sat and had water – not tea – for about one hour and a half in the small entryway room that she had wanted me to stay in, she kept saying that I could come back and stay there in the summer and that I could ride around by bicycle with her son – that way he could have someone to practice spoken English with. Poor Yan Li had to sit behind a counter crammed with bits of toys, a telephone, pencils, while Xiao Mei, her son, and I crammed around a half-sort of table in the front part of the room on tiny stools. Behind Yan Li were two beds, one a loft bed, and one under. I think the lower one might have been the boy's. Her son seemed quite nice, he asked me in English what Americans did to celebrate Christmas and was very attentive and didn't say much, a sweet and rather intelligent face. Xiao Mei wasn't very interested in talking about her work, but wanted to tell me about all the great ancient things I could see and the old paintings – not because she liked them I think – just because this was something, and something to say, thinking of course I'd be interested without really asking. She also suggested that I travel to the poorer parts of China, saying that some people there had very, very rarely seen foreigners, and repeating again and again that life was very hard. Yan Li was a little horrified by the whole scene! She asked I think if Lisa had ever been to visit, and Xiao Mei said no, but that Lisa's son had.

Afterwards Yan Li took me around her old neighborhood with great excitement, into little courtyards, pointing out old buildings. On the house entryways there were often either two or four pegs marking the family's class (the higher the number the higher the class). We went into Yan Li's old courtyard and were met by an old woman who Yan Li spoke with for about 10 minutes, about the changes there, whether their sons were married or not, health. As soon as we left Yan Li said "that is a bad person." This surprised me because she had spoken with the woman in such a friendly way, and because Yan Li is very kind, open minded in what she usually says. Then, later Yan Li said that during the Cultural Revolution that woman, from a relatively poor family, criticized Yan Li's family, who had a number of houses. This led to a number of Yan Li's family members, including her parents, being killed. Now this woman lives in their old house. Though,

when Yan Li lived there as a child there was a more open courtyard with a few trees that she used to sit under during the summer and eat or talk. Now there are lots of little half-additions, like everywhere, the beautiful old buildings, chopped up and dirty. On the bigger hutong roads and on the larger street there are restaurants and shops inside the old buildings, but you don't even notice that they are old buildings because mostly they are covered with bright signs, and inside they are all new – you can mostly tell by looking for the tiles by the roofline. This area is quite near Wangfujing, Beijing's big shopping street.

December 25, 2005

An interesting Christmas ... It doesn't feel like Christmas at all because no one else is really celebrating, not the same foods, music, smells, snow, family. There are lots of paper posters of Santa's head in restaurant windows, reds and whites that match their outer décor, spray-painted *kuai le* (happy) characters in white, red lanterns (which may be there anyway, not just for Christmas).

This morning, early, but not early enough to catch all the older people before they went home to have breakfast and to see their families, I went to the Temple of Heaven. This is set in a park, which is huge. Its lines and lines of open dark green Cyprus trees are quite attractive, they are ancient and not very tall, mysterious, but not threatening. It was very bright, sunny, warm, the dark reds of the gates, the golden pegs set in rows of 9, the dark trees, wide open and long walking corridors. There were older people singing, playing old instruments – not for money, just for fun! Also, older women playing an ancient form of hacky-sack, and also people playing a game sort of like the racket game you can play at the beach, playing with swords, with noisy fans, practicing various forms of tai chi. The houses in the area around the park have already either been destroyed, or are slated for destruction.

On the subway there was a man with a deformed face singing into a microphone and asking for money. Yan Li says she gives money to people who truly can't work (can't walk, etc.), but not to others. People acted similarly to in NYC, mostly ignoring this person, though the woman next to me took 1 *yuan* out of her bag and gave it to him. After visiting the park, Yan Li took me to a place to eat Beijing *xiao chi* (snacks, literally "little eat(s)"). You could order these small things from a window outside, like a French bakery window with racks, or inside from the counter where most things seemed to be made – a metal kitchen, dark. The place was very crowded, dirty dishes overflowing, people harried and bumping each other, sharing tables or refusing to, dim inside, dark colors, basic. I ate a stew, which had various kinds of beans and grains as well as whole dates with the pits, very hearty. This stew was, in the past, "poor people's stew", what you threw together when you didn't have enough ingredients to make anything proper. There were also various fried breads, pieces of twisted dough, things with sesame seeds, beef *baozi* (large dumplings), a soft red bean paste filled thing, not too sweet, something that looked like flan or congealed butter and tasted slightly of tofu or beans, a terrible smoky tasting and runny light gray soup (some sort of fermented tofu milk, good for your health) eaten with a light golden sauerkraut, things that looked like donuts, something like fried potatoes with a slightly sweet sauce – dates perhaps (a Muslim snack Yan Li said). We ended up sitting at two different tables here, first with a man and a woman, then with a group of old people. They were all a little strange, sort of guardedly curious about what I wanted to eat and what I should eat. An old man gave me his chair so I could eat the gray tofu milk.

When we are walking Yan Li always points out Tibetan people or stores. Mostly we encounter them on bridge-ways – over and under passes – selling jewelry, and occasionally, food. They look poor.

Later in the afternoon, we went to a small park behind Beihai park, here lots of families were skating with their younger children, either on ice skates, or on little metal sleds that you could stand on – this was very holiday like, idyllic. The ice was not that slippery, scratched up by so many skates. At the front end there was a shop with some interesting Chinese/Indian looking shoes.

I'm wondering of the guest/host relationship here is like what T. Minh Ha refers to in her work on her work on Japan, these very detailed, close, nearly suffocating roles. Or, maybe this is just like what family is here, or maybe this is not a typical example. Yan Li and her husband have squabbles about what food I'll like and what to buy and not to buy and how much to make, and think I don't like anything because I don't eat tons, and then guess that I won't like things that I actually do like (like sesame cakes) based on past experience. There's so much worry. Or worry that I feel cold, that I get sick, that I don't drink enough water, that I don't wear long underwear, that I wash my hair too often (too often takes away hair's natural oils), that I'll get lost, that I'll spend too much money on buses and taxis because I don't know my way, that I'll have trouble crossing the road, that I might spend too much money, that my haircut is too expensive.

I wrote in a letter to Carson, that my time here feels so full, so full of people. Unlike traveling other places, and that it also makes me realize how much of my daily life is spent alone, thinking to myself, in public spaces/private thought.

Yan Li and her husband made me a Christmas dinner tonight, and I wanted to tell them earlier not to worry and to make something like Chinese holiday food if anything at all, because that would be better and I would not miss my family, but I felt like it was too late to tell them. But, in any case, it was nothing like American Christmas. We ate fish, "dead" fish (fish from the ocean, too far away to be sold live) because I had said that at home I more often ate ocean fish and did not know many kinds of river fish, something like baby octopus or squid, shrimp, that fruit/vegetable root thing (mangosteen – dark purple hard skin), some cooked bitter greens. They gave me a tiny, nearly shot sized wine glass and some (rather bad) red wine, Yan Li drank some sort of medicinal liquor, and her husband drank *baijiu*.

Days of buses, pollution, coughing people, dirt, highways, dust, sunshine, coal smoke, television sounds, grays and browns, red lanterns, engine sounds, dirty money, bus tickets, peeled apples, hot milk with a tiny bit of oatmeal mixed in, kewpie island dressing on toast, China industrial and agricultural banks, poor and unhealthy looking workers with rough and beautiful faces – quiet with large bags riding and waiting, pine trees, roads passing quickly, walking off the sidewalk, work of the bus ticket takers, electronic or human stop calls, young men and women furtively touching on the subways, cell phones, numbers on the sides of falling down walls, piles of rubble, new things not-shiny, or not enough of them to stand out, bright and tacky décor over everything no matter if what it hides is beautiful or not, woman washing her own hair inside a shop window, spitting on the street, pushing for a push seat, cutting in line.

Must be different to live in an only-child society – you and everyone else has the same number of siblings. Do you then become closer with your cousins, your grandparents, friends?

December 26, 2005

In the morning Yan Li took me to Laoshi's hairdresser, a relatively expensive place (120rmb, about \$17). It was located on the first floor of an office building near *Xizhimen*. This area is rather barren, high-tech, cold. There are lots of high buildings, big roads – nearly highway size, or highway size. The building was quite shiny and new, though the hair place was strangely located. You couldn't enter through their front door, even though there was one, but went in through the main office building, then down a hall. There was no sign from this side, but you could peak behind the beige colored doors and see what places looked like a hair place. The room where your hair was washed was located on the opposite side of the hall from the main salon. First you put your things in little lockers and got bracelets with numbers on them to indicate your stuff. Then, a black, light robe, then a hair wash, then to the main salon which was brighter because of its big front window. There were few people there because it was so early – the hairdresser said that most people came in the afternoon – just the hairdresser and the assistant (both young men), a receptionist (early middle aged woman, not quite Han looking), and perhaps two other hairdressers. The hairdresser was 28, a real Beijinger (something unusual), and hair been cutting hair for about 10 years already. A variety of music played, some somewhat Latin, but a lot of Backstreet Boys type stuff. The hairdresser really knew how to cut, it took about 2 hours for the whole experience.

There is a Walmart Supercenter stop on the *chuntie* (sky train) to *Xizhimen*.

When people meet one of the first questions they ask is "Where are you from (in China)?" It seems that nearly everyone is from somewhere else than Beijing – e.g. born somewhere else. This sometimes frustrates Yan Li – who was born in Beijing – especially when asking for directions and people don't know the answer, and in situations where it is really crowded: she says, "too many *waidi ren* (people from the outside)!"

Yan Li tells me: In China you generally are supposed to work 6 hours a day, and get 6 months off when you are pregnant. Afterwards your older relatives will normally care for your child. Since people only have one child, they want to make sure this child is in good hands, and is safe and well. If you are a woman you can retire when you are 50, for men it is a bit older. Though right now, since so many young people do not have jobs, you can take early retirement at 45. It is unclear whether people pay taxes or not, though companies certainly do. It works like this – say you make \$100 a month, the government takes \$30 and saves it for you for your retirement. BUT you might actually "make" \$120 a month, but the company is already giving that \$20 to the government and you don't know about it. People in the city typically have health and other insurance, either through an employer, or something they pay into themselves. If you get sick, and have no money to pay, the government won't help you, you must borrow money from friends or relatives. People in the countryside typically don't have insurance, and there are others who (also) feel they have no real use for it. People save up a small hoard of cash not for going on vacation but as a safety for getting sick.

Tian Tan Yuan (the suburb where Yan Li lives) is government built. The project was started about 5 years ago, clearly still in the process of being completed. It is the largest such project in the city, though if your house is demolished in the city centre, there are also other places that you can choose to buy. Yan Li says that people, or older people at least, won't go the bank for a loan, but will save & save until they can buy their own house. I asked at what age people could afford this, and she said, in their 40s mostly. So, I asked, "before then where do people live, do they rent?" She said, "no, they can live in government (rental) housing" – which is very cheap, much cheaper than renting something privately – and not really considered "renting". But, then she said that actually there were too few of these places now, and that it was really hard to get one. So, it makes sense that, now, young people are renting outside apartments & taking bank loans to buy houses!

Went with Yan Li to a big shopping center which had 4 floors of stalls of little things like holiday decorations, lipsticks, combs, eyeglasses, coats, scarves, sort of Japanese looking retro-chic skirts. Across the street was quite a nice (American-ish) department store that I went to on my own. Yan Li has only taken me to these sort of middle-of-the-road type places, places that are chaotic and look sort of tacky-American, with nothing particularly exciting on either the local or the best quality end.

People here, for the most part, dress fairly simply, in that there's nothing really flashy, or that stands out. Though, maybe people would seem to dress more interestingly if it were the summer & not everyone was wearing a coat.

The 5th floor of the shopping center had a mall food court, Chinese style. Each little booth had Chinese food from a different region, or some other sort of Asian food. It was like a mall food court in America in that it was loud and dirty, that there weren't enough tables, that the tables had plastic seats, and that you got your food on trays. Some things looked quite dirty, coming out of metal tureens that likely had been boiling away for a while. We ate some southern Chinese food: some steamed dumplings, some fried egg roll shaped things, some black bean and grain soup. Across from us sat a little boy, maybe about three years old with his mother, who had bought him a bag of small *baozi* (filled buns) to eat, as well as something that looked like corn soup. He sort of little-kid-spacily ate his soup, and used chopsticks to munch on the *baozi*, sometimes he had trouble and his mother helped him to hold the chopsticks so that he could take bites.

Sanlitun area – dusty, tacky bars, lots of construction pits, some decent but not that exciting little shops, little girl in the post office. This area was depressing, like seeing a frat party in the daylight, tacky and sad, signs for beer, dusty shops among construction pits, behind this, apartment buildings, a road not yet paved – cars shooting up waves of dust as they drove along.

Yan Li wanted to know if she could come as a tourist to America, and thought that, probably she (Chinese people generally?) couldn't. Though she had thought she had heard her relatives that live in America say that you could if you got a letter from someone in America inviting you to come. Did she want me to invite her?

December 27, 2005

In the morning I went again with Yan Li to the vegetable market. Also stopped by at another free place offered by the apartment complex. There were about seven older

people listening to a lecture on health. Yan Li said that after people's children and grandchildren go to work and school older people can come to these places, then go home for lunch, take a nap, then go back in the afternoon. She said that she thought my grandparents would certainly like to live here, then they could do this too.

Yan Li also invited me and Eric to stay together at their house if we thought the hotel was too expensive, we could stay in the little room with a single bed where I'm staying now (because it is warmer than the rest of the house), and they could cook us meals, and it might be a little inconvenient but we could use the money we saved on transportation to get places more quickly. This seems like it would be strangely un-private! Though, maybe if most Chinese young people are used to living with their parents, an invitation like this would not seem strange. It seems less important here to be able to have one's own space – though maybe this is not true. But, I felt so relieved when staying at Lisa's house & there was so much physical space to be alone & to do things, like even go blow your nose, without it being known.

Related-ly, in the small number of Chinese public toilets I have visited the doors to the stalls did not all close – they seemed like they should be able to, but were sort of bent out of shape. No one seems to mind, you just leave the door a crack open and squat and go. Not that there is anything wrong with this! Just that most Americans I think would be pretty horrified – though maybe you adjust pretty quickly, if you have to pee, you have to pee. In any case, it's a new sort of situation to encounter.

In the afternoon I went to meet Aniwar, a friend of Lisa and Jim's who teaches fashion design at a technical arts university. He's originally from *Xijiang* – an autonomous region of China I think, people here are mostly Muslim and can look quite physically different from Han people, tall with darker skin and more wavy hair, almost Middle Eastern. I wasn't very excited about meeting him because he'd been so hard to get in touch with, and also because I figured that I would likely not have a lot in common with a fashion teacher & fashion students. In America, this profession has the reputation of attracting vapidness, a drive for money. We got there about 25 minutes early and Yan Li insisted on calling Aniwar's phone many times, with no answer, though he finally picked up and suggested we visit a little gallery on the campus. The gallery (with very bad looking art inside) was locked, and it was quite chilly outside. So, we wandered around the classroom hallways, peeking in on classes, and actually, by accident found Aniwar's class.

When he was done he took me to a cluttered computer lab with lots of big old computer monitors and asked some students who were there to show me some of the program's work and their projects. I was surprised by how young he looked, long hair, a bit off his hairline, wild but clean, beautiful face, slender, wearing fairly tight but still conservative Levi's jeans, a fashionable but understated set of jackets. Two boys showed a number of their projects, which they said they had made using Director, and which were graphics heavy and too big to put on the web. Most had very Chinese characteristics- a sort of Ming Tombs weapons game, an interactive tourist guide to the *Dong Cheng* district in Beijing, various animations that were interactive and told stories, a piece about Chinese shadow puppetry. Aniwar asked lots of questions and seemed genuinely interested. Now copyright is an issue, you must pay if you want to use someone else's movie clip, for example – five years ago it would not have been such a big deal. Aniwar also said that "in America multimedia art and business have a closer relationship than they do in China" – so I guess in China it can be more about the art?

After this we took a quick cab ride to Aniwar's studio, which is in an old warehouse, doors open with a simple padlock. As soon as we got inside Aniwar ran to turn off a faucet in the corner connected to the sink and toilet, it had somehow sprung open, flooding the studio – around the edges there was about an inch of water. We took the important things off the floor – electrical wires, paintings, Oriental rugs – hung a big rug, the end sopping wet, on top of a filing cabinet next to the sofa in the center of the room. The room was relatively bare/barren, there were about 8 paintings on the wall, all large scale, many using a combination of paint and cut-up photos, abstract. There was a small work table with photos and scissors, other paintings in bubble wrap, a film lighting light, some good looking arm chairs with wooden arms. Aniwar turned on a fairly large-sized heater and we stood around it and talked for about 2 hours, maybe a bit less.

What he had to say was extremely interesting! I started out by making comments about his art, asking question about the process, and whether it was easy to live as an artist in China. He said that it was relatively easy – you could live in total poverty as in China there is no social safety net – but it is fairly easy to make a living with art. He said that in America, you only make a living with art if you are the best of the best, but in China you can be so-so and still live. He said, for example, he didn't think the multimedia projects we'd seen in the afternoon were that good, but that the students had been quite pleased with them, and that they would likely find good work. He said that this ease of work without being excellent leads to there being fewer excellent artists in China – you get caught up in producing these things that people are happy to buy, you feel comfortable and content, you're not pushed any further. He added that many of his students didn't really care for art, but had been pushed into it by their parents, because their parents wanted them to have a "freedom" they did not have themselves.

We then spoke about:

Feeling lonely

Fear, fear of fear

Being aware of your fear

The importance of looking at oneself, listening to oneself, knowing oneself

Art as a way to freedom, a way of knowing oneself

The important of other forms of communication (not just verbal), communicating by drawing

Each person discovering their own path, using art to help do so

The deeper meaning of things, the changes that happen by the hour that you can notice

The fear people have of living on their own – government says "just follow us"

Thinking or not thinking about death, the future

The difficulty of communication between generations

The young people not knowing what questions to ask, the older people not speaking

Chinese people become machines, forgetting that their bodies are for things other than work

The Chinese sense of rhythm, ritual, preparation, knowledge of the seasons and of body – but not putting this into art, as do Europeans

The ability to communicate and sense other people, sense their fears – especially across cultures (his experiences in NYC and Paris)

Ways of getting to know each other, trust each other without speaking – drawing pictures, making art together

The importance of a staying with people of a place when you visit that place, to see the small things, like what they eat for breakfast, and how they answer the telephone

December 28, 2005

Another day!

In the morning I went to *Beijing Zhan* to try to find the Red Gate Gallery, but had no luck. I should have taken a cab, but was too stubborn. I wandered around the area, fairly barren, lots of big streets, big buildings – banks and hotels, cars. I found my way to the Beijing Ancient Observatory Museum, which seemed to be completely devoid of tourists. You could see some old instruments on the roof. It looked chilly. I hopped on the subway here, went to *Wangfujing*, wandered through some of the shopping malls and a big bookstore, and found them to be completely dull, devoid, plain, barely living – how sad were all of China to become this! Even duller and more conservative, more cautious, more girly than the American malls – nothing risky or flashy or wild, brands, ugly but safe expensive furniture. Part of the reason for the dullness probably was that there were few people inside these huge spaces. I also went to a very new looking, very fancy, very empty mall at *Beijing Zhan*.

In the morning Yan Li was asking me about what people who are retired in America do everyday (she is, it turns out, retired). I said I didn't know, but proceeded to describe Papa and Beatriz's typical day. Yan Li wanted to know how much money my parents made and I blushed, and told her that a typical American made \$30,000 per year, and that a nanny might make about \$50 a day, which wasn't really enough to live on. Chinese people generally count how much you make by the month – versus the hour or the year. They also calculate property value by the square meter, so it's hard to quickly translate the meaning of these things. Yan Li then wanted to know about the American and Canadian University systems and how much tuition was, how much my tuition was, whether my parents helped me pay it.

I asked if the majority of people liked to watch TV in China – she said yes, though young people also like to read the newspaper – for older people “it hurts our eyes, we prefer to listen to TV”. And indeed their TV is on almost all waking hours! The only times they've turned it off was when their son was here, and for about 10 minutes during the beginning of Christmas dinner. Yan Li said that kids like to watch TV too, and that parents don't worry that they watch too much (?). After kids start their 5th or 6th level of school (age 12 or 13) they've got a ton of homework and have no time to watch TV. Also, on the weekends their parents may arrange for them to have extra classes.

I also went to Lao She's former residence, a writer who was greatly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and committed suicide at this time. His old furniture, though behind dirty plastic, and under plastic sheets, was beautiful. You see it and imagine these old small houses in the hutongs as being very refined: a sofa with a semi-Western looking tea set, a small bed next to a writing desk with a delicate silk covered – off-white with pale pink roses, a mirror and bent up dark old fan on the dresser, a sofa/bed – wide and flat with a pack of cards spread out on top (why?), clothes hanging in the corner, the beautiful framing of the outer and inner window sills, squares within squares, a small courtyard with a tree.

On the subway and buses you ought to give up your seat to people traveling with small children.

December 29, 2005

This morning I asked Yan Li why Lao She was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and she began to talk about this time in more detail. She said that at this time if you had knowledge, had culture, you were persecuted – there was no reason, you just were. People who were poor, people with lower status could critique you, and you couldn't say anything back, all you could do was say, "yes, I did that, yes I am guilty." People could accuse you of anything if they didn't like you – they could say you were adulterous, or other things. Then you would have to wear heavy metal necklaces (?) and would have to walk to all sorts of places, your head hanging. At this time, lots of people committed suicide. You could not save your friend or your family member if they were being persecuted. People, the government, could come to your house and take a person away in a car – maybe they would be seen as not guilty and allowed to come back, but also maybe they would be tortured and forced to live in a dirty small room, with not enough to eat. At this time many people in the government were struggling for power, doing things in secret from one another. You could not criticize the government. The time was very "hard on the heart". Finally, Yan Li begins to cry, something has broken. She says she cannot talk about past times. I tell the story of Eric's family in WWII. Yan Li says at that time her husband's father was persecuted because he was a professor, her parents died because they had money. At that time she was 15, she was living in her "American mother's" house (she often refers to this woman and her family who now live outside of L.A., relatives I think who are Chinese but moved to the US). But, she said, that she felt bad because she had no money, so she choose to go to *Dongbei*. Here she earned a little money for her work, as opposed to other people who went/were sent to do peasant labor and just got food in return.

Chinese food I like: *danxin* (little dry cakes, sort of like Fig Newton crust) with dried fruit inside; *yumi zhou* (corn stew); *naan* (flatbread from *Xinjiang*); *biandou* (big, thick, green beans – fava beans).

Things also eaten: pork ribs, all sorts of vegetables seasoned with a little bit of meat, radish, stir fried bitter greens, dumplings, hot pot, clear mushrooms with dates and a red bitter dried fruit, rice, steamed plain buns (*mantou*), bean sprouts, bean and date stew, wontons, soup with little meatballs made from meat and a vegetable that looks like grass and tastes like garlic, tofu, tofu with meat inside, fish – often salty or with a pungent sauce, shrimp – often plain; sweet and regular potatoes. At meals we eat at least three dishes and some sort of starch, usually rice. Sometimes the dishes are those from the day before if there are leftovers.

Later, I went to *Beida* (Beijing University, one of the very best universities in China). It's located along a series of huge roads – the one I came up along, *Zhong Guan Cun Bei Da Jie*, is lined with little stores and banks along way out. Tsinghua University (China's MIT) is right before Beida on the left. It took me a little while to figure out how to walk in the gates – I walked to the right down a smaller, but still big, tree lined road, visited a large bookstore in a basement. Then through one of the gates to the campus, which is refined, mostly older buildings, many students with bicycles, calm, but crowded, so non-commercial. Students were gathered around a series of movie or theatre posters, I think you could buy tickets. I wasn't sure whether I could go into the buildings or not. I

watched which buildings other people were going into. One was small with a couple of bright signs (most other buildings had no bright signs, were light and dark grays), but I think it was a cafeteria, it was about 12:30. Then, I walked out of a different gate and felt lost around a huge intersection, just this feeling of hugeness and lost-ness. I spent about 20 minutes inside a huge electronics mall, about four, or maybe more floors of computers, digital cameras, things like that, hard drives, blank CDs. It was crowded, women were washing lunch dishes in the bathroom, pink dishes and chopsticks, people were eating on top of their glass counters, not paying attention to customers.

It was still early, cold, and I couldn't go home yet, so I decided to go into the city, that way I could be sure of finding my way back. I asked at a bus stop which bus I could take to the subway. The problem with asking directions or with small questions is that when you don't at first ask perfectly people think you can't speak or understand anything at all and get worried, then I get flustered too. A young man told me, I thought, that across the big road I could take the subway. So, I walked across a big road, thought I saw what looked like a construction sign for the subway, followed it, found nothing. Asked at the next bus stop. A man told me in sweet flustered English to take a certain bus, but he seemed so nervous that I asked again, got a different answer, took that bus because it was coming right then, ended up at the military museum subway stop. The ride on top of the bus, a double decker, was peaceful. HUGE roads, still lined with buildings and not highway, coming in from the northwest to the city. I kept thinking that this isn't the first world, but it isn't the third either.

The thing about Beijing is that things are just a bit more edgy: there's lots of little things that would make Americans very nervous or afraid, but that people don't seem to mind – leaning against subway doors; walking off the sidewalk, with the cars and bicycles; buses with no heat, bus doors that not quite close, glass windows in street cars that aren't fixed – just two big and rattling sheets of glass that sit on top of one another; the dust and the coal smoke; internet cafes with dirty and stained keyboards; squatting toilets; washing your lunch dishes in the bathroom; leaving bicycles everywhere unlocked; collections of hot water canteens on the streets to refill your tea thermos; roads the size of highways that pedestrians are allowed to wait for buses next to, or even allowed to cross, or walk next to. Lots of places look “dirty” even if they are not.

Yan Li's husband, quietly, followed me to the bus stop this morning, waited with me, saw me get on, then at the last moment, sweetly popped up to tell the ticket woman what my stop was. He is so afraid that I will get lost, gets worried when I go to the internet café across the (big) street on my own, let alone out in the city. After nearly 20 days they still fill my little hot water thermos when I'm not looking, Yan Li at the moment is hand-scrubbing (!) my old blue jeans, insisting that she wash my laundry before I leave and that she buy fruit, milk, yogurt, little cakes for me to take to the hotel! She asked if she should come to the airport to meet Eric – felt that it would be rude if she did not come to welcome him!

December 30, 2005

In the morning went to the San Moon salon next to the grocery store and got a free foot massage, while Yan Li got a facial. We spent quite a while waiting in the salon – at that time there was only one other customer, but she was having her feet massaged, so we needed to wait. Pink towels, pink uniforms.

Later, we went to visit Yan Li's friend who is a Buddhist nun. We were going to go to her temple, but either she or her master was a bit sick (not clear), so we went to her house instead. She has just moved into a new apartment with her son – it's in a highrise. Yan Li could have lived here as well but, for some reason, her husband really dislikes this woman (we could not tell him we were going to see her), and did not want to live near her. They were next-door neighbors for more than 20 years. About 6 years ago this woman, Yan Li calls her *Shifu* (meaning "master, accomplished person"), became a nun. Before this her second husband – not the father of her son – had become a monk. Now they have no relation with each other. The apartment was certainly more central to the city than Yan Li's, but the building, as of yet, was really quite unfinished. To get in you had to walk all the way around it because the front lawn part was still being constructed. The elevator and scratched-up wooden boards tacked on the inside so that the real walls wouldn't get hurt with all the moving in I think. The halls didn't seem quite finished, or maybe they will always be like that – rather hospital like, swinging doors, very plain, industrial. No one seems to mind.

The apartment was on the 18th floor. We went in, Yan Li had not been before, so the two women spent about 15 minutes looking at the apartment and Yan Li comparing it to her own new place. There was a small bedroom near the entrance, then the main room with a table for eating framed by fake grape vines with fake grapes on the table, on to a living room with a huge new TV, large rounded sofa, many plain cushions, two with a kid-like print, on the table was a plastic bag of peanuts and chestnuts, and a bowl full of two sizes of small oranges that were a little old looking. This led out to an inner-balcony with a long window, some chairs and a table, though it was quite narrow, then there was a small, enclosed kitchen, and a bathroom across from this with a slide-shut door. The final room was a larger bedroom with maybe three single beds set up as sofas, a desk with a photo of *Shifu* when she was young. Finally, an altar, fairly small, set up on a long thin table, three or so small statues in the back, then incense, some of which was burning (the whole apartment had a very clean, very noticeably and pleasantly clean smell), then in the front a number of small cups full of fake jewels, other small things were spread out in between.

She showed us about 100 pictures (a thick stack) of photos from her trip to Tibet this October. A lot were of her in various outfits and of this older, quite corpulent, man in various poses. Some photos were with peasants, some in temples, some of the pine tree and steep field scenery – though all with people in them. Yan Li asked if she could understand what people in Tibet said (their language), she said "no, we used a translator". She told a story about a person who can cure many illnesses – cured a man whose arm really hurt, can also cure other things, heal them. She told a story about what Tibetan people do when people die. Dead people are cut up into small pieces and laid out for birds to eat, each kind of bird eats a certain part, and only that part. A good person will be eaten up in about 10 minutes, a bad person will take longer. If the birds are not eating the person the relatives become very worried and they can pay a certain person, who will then eat a piece of the dead person, about 30 minutes later the birds will start eating. Interestingly, the birds won't eat a Han person. The Han do something different with their dead. Yan Li then told various stories, I think about people they mutually know. *Shifu* quietly listened.

Went over receipts for bus tickets and other expenses with Yan Li. She had kept extremely precise track of where we went, how much it cost, including the bus number. She wanted to go over each day with me one by one, checking with me that that was

indeed where we went and what we spent. Finally she insisted on saying that she wasn't the kind of person that would add extra on – telling me things cost more than they did – this was so strange that she felt she needed to say and prove this very precisely! I would not have even thought this, knowing her!

Routines at Yan Li's house: got up at around 8:30 each morning, usually got dressed, then walked to the bathroom – Yan Li and husband were always already up. Washed face, etc., went back to room, Yan Li would have begun preparing breakfast immediately, knowing I was awake. Hot milk with a little oatmeal, toast or *danxin*, two kinds of fruit often sliced (banana, kiwi, apple, pear). In the evening we would eat basically when we got home, generally earlier rather than later, somewhere between 6pm and 8pm. Yan Li's husband would often cook, but would not eat with us, he would eat later, slowly, in front of the TV – though I never saw him eating very much. They would always want me to sit down first and start eating, though it felt rude to eat without waiting for Yan Li to join me. I would dabble with the food, slowly, until she came. You were supposed to help yourself, but if I was not taking fast enough they would say "take some of this", or pick some up and offer it directly. About 20 minutes after dinner they would offer me all kinds of fruit – most often oranges, tangerines, apples, also bananas. I drank only hot water – they had a double filter system, first through the tap, then through a hot/cold water-dispensing machine. At night I could also fill a little old orange and silver thermos with hot water, often was filled for me when I was not looking. I used one cup, a beige mug with some white flowers and a lid, the whole time. At night they would often suggest at what time I should take a shower – we'd be watching TV. After taking one, using the white bathrobe that had been bleached clean, I'd walk back to my room and say "goodnight" – they seemed to very much like to say this in English, very cute, always with a smile. They stayed up until I think at least 10:30 or so watching TV. Would ask me almost everyday if I wanted, or needed to go to the Internet café across the street in the basement of the mall-complex.

December 31, 2005

Eric arrived today early in the morning, 7:20 flight, with tons of luggage. Meimei's daughter drove me to the airport to meet him, then us to our hotel. She picked me up when it was still very dark. Yan Li made her some hot milk with oatmeal, wanted her to eat all sorts of other stuff, which she refused – "I don't really like to eat in the morning" she said. She was so normal and natural and young! On the way we talked about Chinese medicine and I described a folk remedy for colds (lemon and ginger tea) – and how to make it, she was curious, and had not heard of it before. She said, "In the West your parents, older people, don't bother about you so much, this is true, isn't it? I think it's better this way." She said that when her boyfriend stays up late doing things on the computer her mother is always telling him that "it's too late, you're hurting your eyes, go to bed!" She also said that she and her boyfriend will likely get married this year or next (asking me first when I would get married) – she's in her early 30s I think. They may get married later rather than sooner because her boyfriend's father recently passed away, and it's not good to get married too close to a death. She said she liked laid back people, not people who are chic, chi-chi, wear tons of jewelry, care about these little things. She also laughed at Yan Li's concern about me being too cold, saying she didn't wear long underwear (either), even though the older generation seems to think everyone should.

Eric slept most of the day in the hotel, which is this beautiful old courtyard residence, up a dim little hutong, with red lanterns hanging at the entrances. The room is filled with dark, dark wood furniture and fancy carved window frames, deep red curtains with little yellow diamond pattern, many French people staying here.

In the evening we met up with Marilyn and Huang Chen, the guy she's teaching a one-month Flash course with at the Central Academy for Fine Arts (CAFA). Huang Chen is Chinese, but teaches at Alfred University in upstate NY, though says he may move to Beijing, has bought a house here already I think. Marilyn is Canadian, but lived in Beijing and traveled between Beijing and Washington, DC from about 1979 to 1994, first as a student, then as a business person, then politically. This is her first time back since 1994 – which is when she stopped doing anything to do with China and began to learn Flash. We ate at a *Yunnan* Restaurant called Silk Road owned by an artist with big photos of horses and men hauling tea, a glass staircase with enclosed water running through it, a huge front window looking out to the frozen little lake where you can ice skate behind *Beihai* park. There was a set menu for New Year's Eve that came with a bottle of sweet red wine, distributed by Jim's company – Montrose. Marilyn had much to say about the changes to China – really positively impressed by the students at CAFA – bright, individualistic, much more free (didn't come to class on time until she told them they had to). Said she used to go to banquets in a banquet hall in *Beihai* Park, that maybe the changes are much more cosmetic than internal, that when she was at *Beida* her roommate would only try on (something as flashy as) Marilyn's ankle length kilt with the door locked and the shades down. She arrived in 1979 and stayed until 1993 or 1994, started out in business and ended up doing work with the peasants. She said there used to be only a couple of taxi drivers in Beijing and sometimes you'd have to wait more than an hour outside the best hotel to get one – sometimes because the drivers were busy playing a game (cards? *Majong*?).

Spent the New Year's first moments in a bar called "Sex in da City" with bad fizz-less cocktails and two pole dancers. Small dark, decent, but not memorable music, a video screen behind the bar, which had three sides of a square, playing scenes from the Love Parade in Berlin. Not too crowded. No one counted down for the New Year, but afterwards sent and received "Happy New Year" text messages on cell phones. Two young men completely ogling the dancers, looking up the short skirt of one – they danced every 20 minutes or so on the bar. Young couples, young girls, very clean looking, yet simple – not flashy, quietly sitting and seeming to say little (strange in a bar!). Dark, lights, typical, a little snazzy bar, nothing noticeable.

January 1, 2006

Went to the Antiques Market. Afterwards ate a roasted sweet potato.

Red Gate Gallery – beautiful space. Would be lovely to film through the little windows on the 4th floor. The gallery occupies the 1st and 4th floors of the old watchtower, the middle two floors are a museum. Huge, high ceilings, red beams, offered tea, run by an Australian guy I think. One of the women working there had her son with her, who was about seven years old, he'd just lost a tooth and wanted his mother to give him 100 *yuan*. They've just signed a new lease for another three years, until after the Olympics, when, the owner says, "everything will be up for grabs." Says buying a house can still be quite cheap in Beijing. To get there walked through a very empty hutong.

Silk market – the market which had lots of fake goods next to the subway stop one over from *Jianguomen* and next to a Starbucks was torn down. In its place is a new shopping center, which basically sells the same stuff, which is funny because Eric said that the news reported its demolition as proof that China was cracking down on counterfeit goods. Lots of Polo, some Mountain Equipment Hardware, Prada t-shirts. Would make a great soundscape “Cashmere; I remember you, take a look at these jeans”; “200, that is final”, “lady look at ...” ...

Duomeiti chain store cake shop (the one with the little bear as a logo): very clean, display cases of help-yourself cookies and very buttery pastries. Like in Japan you take a tray and tongs, help yourself, then pay at the front. Also little tables where you can eat and drink hot chocolate. Pink trays. All very sweet, rather on the bland side, fancy little French cakes like *Rahier* in Toronto, bright lighting in the display cases, very busy. Fancy things, including the tiny little cookies, but which didn't look very fancy with that many things, in that setting, with that lighting. Pastry buns with short hotdogs in the middle, croissants, soft things, soft bread.

Qianmen – The part around the old train station, the circle moving away from this where a lot of buses stop, is slated for demolition, and already partially knocked down. Then you get to the shopping streets, little colorful stands selling winter clothes and souvenirs, big tea shops, big cloth shops, lots of people, steamed corn, roasting hot dogs/sausages on little grills. Saw the spaces that I saw the first time here, saw much grittier places than with Yan Li, actually quite rundown compared to the other hutongs I've seen – still patches of rubble, lots of browns as compared to grays and reds. We ate some little breads from a shop window, a dark wheat sesame bread (*shi'er bing?*) and a just-made plain bread. I remembered how afraid I'd been to walk through here before. We ended up on *Liuli Chang*, which was nicer and less-touristy than I remembered, went into a few tea shops. There were also brush and paper supply shops, though we did not walk the whole length. Relatively calm, though it was nearing sunset.

In the evening went to a lively hot pot restaurant on a street full of restaurants lined with red lanterns in all the trees, really nice looking at night. Ordered a 3-flavor hotpot. Lively, so many people and dishes moving in and out, all young people. Recommended by Meimei's daughter, called *Xiao Shan Cheng*. Here, Eric was saying that the first time he came to China he felt like he had to be completely self-sufficient, spent about \$200 in the US buying all kinds of cleaning supplies to bring. Got here, and within one day, realized that this was not necessary. Point of realization happened at the grocery store near *Beida*, which had a better laundry detergent selection than you could get in the US, including German brands. He feels sad that the physical landscape of Beijing is changing, all around *Beida* it used to look like the little hutongs around *Qianmen*.

People quite quickly assume you don't speak any Chinese – which maybe indicates that there are more tourists than permanent foreign residents, though I'm not sure if this assumption is true every place in the city.

January 2, 2006

Spent the better part of the day working on getting to the new hotel, the Shangri La managed Kerry Centre which seems to be in the high-rolling business district. It reminds me a bit of the area around the Park Hyatt in Tokyo, really pretty barren and quiet, but calm, lots of big and shiny spaces. The hotel seems very empty at the moment. Left the

first hotel because the room was very cold and also relatively small. When we left they wouldn't call a cab to help with the many, many bags (2 shopping bags, camera rolling suitcase, huge rolling suitcase, smaller rolling suitcase, video bag, huge backpack), so we walked to the end of the street with them. Took 3 cabs to find one that knew where we were going and would take us – the luggage was a big turn-off I think. In the hotel everything is very modern and clean, rap music in the lounge, various shades of wood furniture, many well-lit mirrors. Comfort that I'd forgotten.

Later went to the tailor and spent maybe about 2 hours ordering for Eric a suit and a pair of pants, and for me a dress, two shirts, and a skirt. We think we finally figured out how the place works – it's separate companies that sell the different kinds of cloth and independent tailors – so each want you to use their services, buy their things. The place is large, you walk in through those thick plastic strips that get dirty and are almost greenish that are over most public doors in Beijing, so that they can be open, but that not too much cool air can get in maybe. There's a little ante-room with some jackets and Chinese style other clothes on racks, then steps to the main room, filled with tubs of cloth. Cashmere seems to be very popular, there is also silk. The women behind the counters yell out "look, look, Cashmere", etc. They kept doing this and reverting to very simple words in English even when I was with the tailor (who would say "she understands Chinese"), running over each other to show us different materials for no consideration of what that actually looked like as long as I liked them – just to show as many and as fast as possible. Up the stairs more cloth, displays of *qipaos* (traditional women's dresses) on mannequins and a small desk in the centre of these with pattern books.

Also went to a tea store across the street, asked what different sorts of teas are drunk in China – oolong, jasmine (most popular), green (best for your health), black, something else. The store was recommended in 1997 by the mother of a friend of Eric's. They don't try to serve you tea or to speak English like other places. The tea is kept in very simple canisters, that probably hold about 2 big popcorn tins worth of tea each, it's distinguished by kind, price, leaf type (rolled up, balls, flat, etc.). You smell and look at different kinds, then the tea is put in a canister, using some paper to pour, and weighed. Very big, but simple, not a fancy space. Utilitarian and practical.

So much construction is happening right now – you can see all around the hotel, from the 20th floor or so, all the various projects, many not visible from the ground because the scaffolding hasn't gone up yet. The city will perhaps feel so different when all this is, at least temporarily, done in 2008 and when you're walking isn't characterized by seeing these construction sites, scaffolding on the famous buildings, buildings half-knocked down – in their places will be shiny and new things, and although lots of the gritty older buildings will likely still exist at this time, maybe the whole cityscape will be cleaner on the eye.

January 4, 2005

This evening went to perhaps the most fancy & refined (Western style) restaurant in Beijing. It's called The Courtyard and is located above the Courtyard Gallery which currently has an exhibition of photographs called "night" – these fairly dark in subject photos of China, city, nighttime. A number of young women with black face masks standing in front of bright shopping center lights – city mall lights. Then also young women balancing on the side rails of busy highways, and finally a photographer that

does posed scenes. One a homeless scene, a young woman with big breasts, bared, and a dirty man, about 55 or 60, skinny, asleep together in a pile of refuse. The other of a grave with fat Chinese bodies, excavated, a person peering in, entitled "the archeologist" – a playful but morbid curiosity. The two spaces are located in a building on the other side of the moat from the Forbidden City. This was a Wednesday night, very quiet there, the majority of people were foreigners, a group of 4 Italians, two Asian women in the rounded window over the moat, a French couple in their 50s, two British men, an Asian women, 2 Asian men, and a Western man – all speaking English – some real-estate deal. The space is very white, extremely clean looking, about 20 tables with starched white table clothes, simple light brown almost gray padded cloth chairs, German style white windows, a high ceiling, pointed, filled in with glass, then rolls of white cloth draped from the ceiling, large art on the walls, including a pink-ish painting by Aniwar, three paintings of an Asian woman with eyes that look at you and who is very young, a shiny and glittery wine storage area behind a small bar, English is spoken. The bathroom is down a white hall, fluorescent lights/plexiglass/guffled white cloth curtains, all white inside, green plants stand out surprisingly. The food was well-presented, both my dishes were very French, lots of cheese, a chocolate tart with jasmine (or other) tea and a cold banana on the bottom. This sort of cleanness and detail is rare anywhere, and especially in China. Feels like this could be the only place like this in Beijing and maybe in most of the country, except perhaps Shanghai. Prices about 1/2 what they would be in a similar restaurant in the West, but quite expensive for here.

January 7, 2005

Went to pick up tailored clothes, rushing through the streets, this was the first time I felt truly busy and purposeful in Beijing, makes you feel the city much differently. Frustration with the crowdedness, "saw" no hawkers, impatience.

Took at cab to Yan Li's for lunch. Ate three kinds of dumplings, felt sick from so much meat inside (pork, lamb, beef and that spicy green that looks like grass), shrimp, chicken, jellyfish, little oranges, a pot of strong tea brewed for us. Yan Li and her family were kind and curious. I made jokes. They helped carry our bags to the street, got us a cab.

Then went to the *Beida* graduate student's studio that I met at the National Art Museum exhibit. The cab driver, with his meter turned off, had us wait in the car while he made sure we met up with him. He was there in that long gray coat, the shape of a winter coat but lighter, longish hair swept back from forehead, standing very straight and confident. The studio was inside the former residence of a Chinese emperor's son. Walk into a first courtyard with white walls and windows that have lights behind them, then into a larger square courtyard with stone and a fountain with dragons and lions. Then, into the house, big and cold. We were hosted in a front room, a huge table with a yellow/gold velvet tablecloth. At first we sat across from the painter and his friend, about the same age, but the friend was in obvious deference to the young painter. The friend spoke a few English words. We had relative trouble communicating though. Why? Tea in covered cups was ready. Then were given a number of presents (books, calendars), then shown snapshots of the painter with famous people – he is the friend of the son of Deng Xiao Ping. Then showed us a variety of his paintings. Then painted us two characters, a dragon and a *feng* (phoenix) on red paper. Then we painted together, different characters and art pieces, important to sign the work, importance of process, curious to see what we would make. We showed them photos from India, said we

wanted to send him a larger photo, got his address [later sent a photo of a hawk, taken in California]. His manners were extremely precise, formal, beautiful, yet flexible, very ancient almost, reminded me of Zhang – this same code of manners. Carried our bags to the street, got us a cab.

Met with Aniwar and the photographer that we went to dinner with last night. The photographer lives north of the city on the 25th floor of a high rise. Entryway of his apartment was very comfortable because it had a big space, rough and simple red rug to take off shoes. Many pairs of a small child's shoes, though his child was not there. Open dining room and living room, simple and funky. Brewed English black tea in a mod white teapot made by a friend that always gets too hot at the handle, brewed espresso in an espresso machine. Dining room table was pleasant cluttered with a bowl of candy with a drawing of a shrimp on it and that tasted sweet and like chocolate and peanuts; a huge glass bowl with rocks, water, little crabs, a tiny gray fish. A few of his photos on the wall. Talked about his and Eric's photography for about three hours, left around 11:30.

TORONTO, CANADA
Winter 2006

Studying China
Boston Tea Party
Oatmeal Chocolate Chip Cookies
Tim Horton's Coffee with Zhang
Toronto Chinatown
American Legal System
Watergate
Maple Syrup Festival

February 10, 2006

I went to a couple of events this week regarding Asia & scholarship, the first was a gathering of students doing research related to China, the second and third were talks – one about doing qualitative research in China, the other about research in hostile environments (e.g. politically repressive regimes, but also hostile minds and prejudices and assumptions).

A young woman who has just completed her PhD in anthropology at the University of Toronto, very shy, spoke about her work as a Chinese woman but Western trained scholar doing research in a State Owned Enterprise in Beijing. She said that people very clearly understood that she was a student and needed to do her “homework” and to get something done, but certainly found her place there as strange, an unmarried Chinese woman, coming from the West. The workers, she said, would test her. For example, once she was walking and a worker summoned her over and asked, “when you are on the street in Toronto and people ask you where are you from? What do you say?” She was confused by this question because the answer seemed so obvious. The worker said, “you’d say you’re from Japan, right?” And, she answered, “no, of course I say that I am from Mainland China.” It was a test. She spoke about needing to position herself as Chinese, to show perhaps that despite (re)coming from the West, that she was loyal to China, not necessarily the government, but the people. She also noted a perception among workers that Western researchers were interested in the “dark side” of China.

I’ve begun a language exchange with my former Chinese professor from York (Li Bau) and his wife, both in their 30s I think. They come to my house one afternoon per week and are awfully polite and formal. The first time I was talking about Boston because they wanted to know if I knew any typical American songs, and I could not think of any, so I was saying that in Massachusetts in school we learn lots of stories about the American Revolution time period. I asked if they knew the story of the Boston Tea Party and he said “of course”. She said “no”. I proceeded to tell the story, and it turned out that he didn’t know it – he thought the “Boston Tea Party” was a political party.

Last time his wife brought some Japanese tea with rice in it that has a deep and nutty flavor and also some little rice-crispy *danxin*, candied nuts in little packages and Chinese New Year candy. She also asked for the recipe of Grandma Lou’s chocolate chip cookies which I gave them to eat with some French green tea the first time they came, and which are not too sweet. She worried that perhaps I was not liking the tea she brought because I was not “accustomed” (a common word, a common concern re. foreigners to China) to the flavor.

February 12, 2006

Today I told Li Bau’s wife how to make the oatmeal chocolate chip cookies. I ended up showing her physically what lots of the stuff was: a bag of oats, a measuring cup and how much a cup was, a set of measuring spoons, chocolate chips (showed a picture from Google), vanilla – they asked “oh, like vanilla ice cream, maybe?”, butter and what form/sort of butter to buy. Chinese people whisk eggs with chopsticks, like we whisk them with a fork. I explained how to chop butter into small pieces and then to “mix vigorously while adding sugar” as the recipe says.

February 15, 2006

I had coffee with Zhang (my first language exchange partner, a PhD student, about 35) today. He'd invited me when I saw him about two weeks ago to catch up after a long time and to do something on the last day of Chinese New Year, which I had thought was today – it turned out it wasn't but said we could get together for a coffee. He suggested that we go to Tim Horton's. So we went there and he bought me a tea and we shared a carrot cake – he had me hold an open table by the front while he got the things. We've known each other for a while now, so our conversation sort of went in its usual patterns – talking about him finishing his degree (he defends on Monday), his applying for academic jobs, my Norwegian grandmother, my sister, things that are small-town American, grocery store chains, knowing/forgetting German, differences with the British educational system, whether I will pursue a PhD (he wants to know), me trying to speak in Chinese, and him drawing us back to English, Canadian citizenship (would have to give up Chinese citizenship if he got it).

We then talked about the auto business, the rise of China's auto business, and he said that if I go to China again, he can introduce us or give/get us a tour of the Chery plant in Anhui.

February 21, 2006

I took a walk in Chinatown today, something which has basically taken me two years to do! I made myself go into all the stores that I had not been into on the West side of Spadina from Queen to a little above Dundas. I went into the big mall, Chinatown Centre, which has a HSBC at the corner. It was pretty quiet, empty. There are 3 floors, in the middle of the bottom one, which is below street level, there seemed to have been a celebration stage, for Chinese New Year maybe, but it was a mess, abandoned, and the escalators down to that floor were not working. There were lots of stores selling DVDs, children's clothes stores, dried mushrooms stores. There was a little "snack shop" on the second floor that sold lots of dried things in big glass jars, like mangos maybe, there was also a drink cooler. A different sort of snacks! I felt really shy and afraid to ask anything, just wandered around and looked at things, silly to feel so out of place!

I finally made myself buy some fruit, a pomelo and two mangos at one of the fruit stores with lots of fruit out front. A man noticed me right away, brought me inside, picked me out a pomelo and was sort of humming saying "pomelo, pomelo, pomelo" the whole time and afterwards. He was all business, helping me quickly, then expecting me to be done. I think it was a Thai store. I asked the cashier if the green Thai mangos had a different flavor than the ones I was buying, and she said they were sweet and crunchy, she was friendly. One store that I like is the big grocery store in a basement just north of Dundas. All kinds of packaged goods, bags of rice, fresh noodles and dumpling wrappers, fresh tofu, little jars of dried and salted fruits. It's busy and no one seems to notice you, although there are little security cameras, you can see the old-fashioned gray display near the entrance among some goods. The vegetable section is amazing. Most things are prepackaged, the weight and price printed on a little sticker on the plastic and Styrofoam casing. I did not know what about 70% of the vegetables were! Many things I had not even seen in China! Especially things in small packages, that seemed like herbs, things that looked like big green potatoes, different sorts of green squashes or melons, leafy things ... I asked a young (Asian) woman what a package of something

was that I thought might be snow pea leaves – but she did not know! Two other women nearby did not know either.

I went into many bakeries. All of them had little trays and tongs, like in Japan (and Beijing), where you could choose your own pastries, then pay. Most also had big but plain seating areas in the back. The air was very sweet, unhealthy, soft buttery breads, crispy buttery cookies, coconut and pineapple flavors, cheap log-style sweet cakes the size of breads for about \$5 (cheap!), the smallest things usually about 80 cents, unhealthy looking Canadians, regular Asians, cream filled buns, and buns with hotdogs sticking out. Lots of places seemed to be low on things, perhaps because it was the end of the day, things were quiet and clearing out.

February 27, 2006

Today both Li Bau and his wife came to talk, though this is her last time since she will be going to China, likely through August. She said that she had not yet decided when she would come back.

We talked about the American and Chinese legal systems, they very specifically wanted to discuss this – I'm not sure if it was for knowledge or vocabulary, or for both. I told them about how there are criminal and civil and family courts, and a bit about how the jury system works. They said, "in the courts that have juries it must be more fair". And, they also said that 15-20 years ago the courts in China were quite different – quite unfair? At this time the lawyers were just decoration. In a trial there would be a judge, assistant judge, the person accused, and a prosecuting and defense lawyer, but when the lawyers were talking "the judges could pretty much sleep, they had already made their decision before the trial began." I'm not sure *how much* things have changed now, but they definitely seem to have changed somewhat. Currently there is a criminal court, civil court, and economic court in China.

They also wanted to know how I would interact with my neighbor if I saw a police car come to their house. I said that it would depend on the situation – if it just looked like the police officer was talking to them or asking questions, then I would not think anything of it. But, if a bunch of police officers raided the house with guns and arrested them, then I would be worried. They wanted to know if this happened, would I talk to the neighbor again? I said that this would depend whether I knew them or not beforehand – here in the city I don't know my neighbors, so I'd probably just try to avoid them, but if this happened in the place where I grew up, I'd probably ask other people if they knew what went on, then perhaps talk to the neighbor. Li Bau's wife said "oh just like China" – specifically in that you would ask other people for the back-story.

March 6, 2007

Today Li Bau came, his wife went back to China last week.

I told him the story of the Watergate scandal because he had mentioned Nixon – he saw a documentary on Jim Kerry the other day and said that if he was an American he would support Kerry (though certainly knows that I do). Anyways, Nixon is thought of quite positively in China because he helped to reestablish China-America relations – though Li Bau did say that he thought that Nixon was involved in a scandal in the US. I drew a map of the Watergate in relation to where Eric lived in Washington, DC, and he was

surprised that it was a building – a professor of his had thought, guessing from the name, that “Watergate” indicated some places near a river, or somehow connected with one.

April 1, 2006

I spent the whole day today, from 10am-6pm, with June, from a class of mine, and two of her friends. She is from Beijing and they were from somewhere in South China and Shanghai. The Shanghai boy was patient and kind, both a little older than June and I – June is 25. The South China boy was more boisterous, “moody”, June joked, pocked-skin, friendly face. He had a nice car, which we drove to Elmira, Ontario for the annual maple syrup festival. Completely full of people, an abandoned house, maple syrup for sale by the side of the road including candied syrup in tiny ice cream cones. The weather was chilly, gray, damp, turning colder, we took a school bus to the woods, then a tractor, on which there was a group of Chinese women, to a sugar shack, romped through the woods, then headed immediately back. City people, all of us. The fields were beautiful, browns, before everything awakes, beginnings of mud, rural, rough faced farmers, sharp voices.

Afterwards we went to a German restaurant in another town – a special trip – for pig’s feet, ate tons of meat. It was cheap, white bread with butter, green-couch dining room, home-brewed beer. Most of the other diners were Chinese.

We had an interesting conversation about freedom in China. June was a journalist for a year in Beijing and interviewed many people who were being displaced to the suburbs, lots of trauma, but nothing you could do, the need for all these rules with so many people, the need for city entry permits or else everyone would rush to the cities, like applying for immigration to the US.

BEIJING, CHINA
Spring/Summer 2006

Arrival
My Apartment
Memory of Market and Hot Pot Places
Korean Restaurant
Rain, Fancy Malls
Amway Party
American Video Artist
Beijing Art Market
Bars
Hunan Restaurant
Evening in Tiananmen Square
Exotic Night Market
What Linden Sees
Bird and Flower Market
Chinese Doctor in the Park
Fever, TV, Capitalism
Divorce on TV
Muslim Neighborhood
Fragrant Hills Park
End of Subway Line Crowds
Temple of Heaven, Songs
Laundry Machine
Li Bau in the Holiday Inn
Vanguard Hyper-Market
Steamed Bread
Yan Li's Kitchen
Kitten
Frugality
Walk Through Macro
Grand Hyatt Peking Duck
Old Summer Palace
Olympic Stores
Day in Traffic
Fabric Market
Korean Restaurant, Bare
Yogurt
Vodka Party
man yue Banquet
American Dinner at Yan Li's
Ex-Pat Beijing
Safety
Importance of Brands
Talking and Shopping with Yanglian
Linda, Instant Coffee
Kassu's Photos
Broken Shoe
Japanese Man
Electronics Store

Noticeable Objects in Beijing
Tiantian's House
Qianmen
West Point Cadets
Empty Peking Opera
Conversation with Aniwar
Yan Li's Questions
Highway Firecrackers
Impression of Beijing

May 7, 2006

I arrived in Beijing early this afternoon. Coming off the airplane, that part where you step off the plane into the walkway and there is a gap where air from the outside comes through: the air felt hot, dry, smelled smoky. It was that same sort of earthy coal smoke smell, but less strong than in the winter, the smell blends in better with hot air than crisp cold air.

The driver from CAFA arranged by Yan Li (Huang Chen's sister in law) met me at the airport. He drove a stick shift and asked me questions like "are you on vacation?" "Is it just you?" "How long will you stay?" He brought me right to the building where I'm staying. I think it is a foreign student's dorm. But, I'm not really sure what the name of the school is or where it is in the city. I didn't ask many questions on the way, because I figured I would figure it out later. I'm somewhere very close to Dashanzi because this is the exit of the highway that we got off, then took a couple of turns on big roads. There are also lots of buses outside, one that takes you eventually to Wangfujing.

There apartment is very nice – a real apartment. There is a main room about 16 feet by 8 feet and a big window at the end. There is a small kitchen equipped with utensils (a huge knife, small bowls, medium bowls, large bowls, two sizes of dishes, 3 glasses, chopsticks, two spoons, a broken corkscrew, a hot plate to cook on, electric kettle, tea cup with cover) marked off by a separate door. The bathroom has some plumbing malfunctions, but I don't think anything terribly unfixable. There are tiles on the floor and an open shower. It's on the third floor and looks out over the backs of some buildings and a basketball court. The walls are thin and sometimes I can hear voices in the corridor or next door. The building seems a little old, built somewhere between the 1940s and 1980s, the walls are white and have nice cracks, and gray cement outside. But they've added all sorts of brand new wooden furniture and doors with light-colored wood. Two of my three black chairs still had plastic on the legs. I think the person who lived here before me didn't feel like bothering to take it off. At first I thought this was tape to hold them together. There is also a new silver TV and cabinets with black glass doors.

I've opened the window and there are constant construction noises, not right next-door, but close enough to notice. It is 10pm. I slept until about 5:30pm, then got up and walked around the campus. I bought a phone card to call Yan Li, she says she will loan me an old cell phone. I asked her where I could buy one, and she suggested this instead. She works at CAFA. Outside, it was calm, on a Sunday anyway, there were lots of boys playing basketball, girls walking around. All seem no older than 20. What they were wearing was very simple, nothing that stands out, baggy shirts and shorts for the boys. The campus seems small and there is a dry flower bed of big irises. Also, a statue of a woman in sort of Roman/Art Deco style in another flower bed. Out of the gates there is a big road, which seems to have other small universities on it. Their entrances are all flanked by a gate with an arch with their name written on it, or by it.

May 8, 2006

I remember this absolutely beautiful food market that I came across in Shanghai. I'd gotten a little bit lost outside the area where the subway ran, and down a long narrow, older street there were shops selling soups, noodles, little bakeries, baskets of greens, completely overflowing, healthy looking, a surprise. Is it gone now?

Also, I remember the little street of hot pot restaurants that were near Tiananmen Square the first time I came to Beijing, in 2004. Brown, dirt-covered buildings, grungy windows, fires to heat the water outside like little lights, low noise, steam, dogs barking.

Last night I ate in a Korean restaurant. There was a table of 4 middle-aged men. They had a whole bottle of white liquor. I saw them take at least 3 shots within the time I was there. The waitresses, always a young group of girls, many of them, smiled when they winced from the alcohol, getting drunk quickly. There was also a younger couple, they seemed unhappy with each other, did not say much, haughty. The girl had a bottle of beer, the man a smaller – but still big – bottle of clear liquor and a shot glass. There's also a Korean grocery store close by.

I go into a lot of stores and feel like: there is nothing edible here! In a store for foreigners: cans of olives, dusty cheap olive oil, bashed up cereal boxes, brand-name dish detergent, pasta, rows and rows of canned vegetables, dirty margarine in ripped paper. In the many convenience stores: packets and small buckets of instant noodles, dried salted and sugared fruit, individually packaged yogurts outside the refrigerator, bottles of soda and tea that looks sugary, chocolates, chips, cookies.

May 9, 2006

I had the idea today of going to Wangfujing, then wandering off into some of the *hutongs*, little restaurants and carts of food, but it ended up being rainy so I walked down the main shopping street: camera stores, fancy malls, McDonald's. McDonald's and KFC are everywhere! And, they must have some kind of monopoly because I have not seen any other fast food/American places other than the occasional Pizza Hut and Starbucks. There was a foreign language bookstore with a good selection of French books. I first took the elevator to the top floor where the "sales" were. But, when I glanced out of the elevator all there was were rows and rows of empty white book display shelves, and an older man with a uniform, a mop, looking surprised to see someone. I didn't even get out of the elevator to explore, just pushed the button to go down one floor (music books), then another (imported CDs), then another.

I talked to some girls in the next big department store I was in. First, with two girls working at one of the wedding ring counters. It seems like it is common to buy a set of his/her wedding rings where the two are slightly different, or match, but are more distinctive than the plain gold band. Most of the rings were silver colored with "diamonds" in them. Most were also very dainty. They had me try on a couple different styles. I asked if they had gold ones, because "that's what we normally have in the West" and there were a few with a kind of strange copper hue. One of these pairs, the first one they showed me, when you put the man's and woman's rings side by side they formed the picture of a heart. I told them I would come back with my boyfriend.

I then talked to a saleswoman about the packages of roast duck. They are for sale everywhere, not in normal grocery stores so much, but next to things like fancy chocolates. There you could buy a couple of different brands, a whole duck or a half duck. I asked why they did not have to be refrigerated – they are in sturdy plastic sacks with pictures of ducks or nature on them so that you can't see the duck. The saleswoman assured me that they were not bad, then pointed out the ISO quality inspection label. I asked if they were everyday food or festival food, and she said

something ... I think that that style of duck was from a certain era, that it became famous then.

May 10, 2006

Yesterday evening I walked to the intersection near CAFA where there is a large post office – where I got my cell phone number and card – some restaurants, a little neighborhood, new apartment buildings. It was misty, because of the rain earlier, and really calm, lots of people outside, fruit vendors on the inner sidewalks, children walking and playing with their parents.

May 11, 2006

I spent the last two days with Yan Li, and ended up completely exhausted. I visited her at her house, and spent the night. The next day she took me to an Amway demonstration and party, afterwards a mother's day extravaganza at a hotel, and then we spent the night with a childhood friend of her husband's in a rich suburb in the countryside outside Beijing. For breakfast there was cow tongue, fatty duck, rice soup, bread, mantou, pickled vegetables, fermented soybean paste.

I'm boiling some tap water to save to wash fruit and vegetables with. Necessary?

I went to see a talk by a video artist (American) at CAFA and then for dinner with Mike, who is a student of Yan Li's – she wanted us to meet – and was a classmate of Lisa's son at Putney. He has a friend visiting him, a girl from Alfred University. We ate with the artist. The talk/showing of the videos was in a classroom of the art institute. There were simple desks arranged stadium style, maybe 50 seats, all filled. There was a guy who was organizing it, a professor I think, who asked most of the questions, guided the interpretation of her work – mostly films of her painting on her own body. She said, "our world is globalizing, we no longer have "homes", "cultures", but what do we have? Our bodies. What are our bodies? How do bodies relate to each other? Where do they overlap? Where are points of common experience? How much of another body's experience can you imagine and understand?"

We ate at a restaurant called "Golden Wallpaper" in a semi-private room with two big tables. The wallpaper was literally shiny, golden, with a sort of flower pattern I think, though subtle. Hunan food – spicy. There was tripe, which I could not bring myself to try. White and swiggly. The Chinese artist/student was surprised, honestly I think, that Americans had never tried it before, didn't really want to eat it. Talk focused around art in Beijing, gender, that the art market here is about learning to make art but also about learning about how to make money, Beijing as a city of the future, cultural capital of the future, the ease with which you can live as an artist, how easy it is as a foreigner to meet people – you stand out. The artist (Katy Aaron), 55, curly hair, librarian-like, was flustered, innocent, amazed. She has a show at Dashanzi tomorrow, or, I think it is a show that she is the curator for.

Bravado is important for men, especially foreign men here. Showing that you can drink enough *baijiu*, going to bars, paying the bill, taking taxis, congratulating yourself on being in this growing/exciting place, being more important than at home.

May 13, 2006

I am so busy! Sleeping and walking and riding and eating and walking. My feet hurt, the soles of them. It was dusty today, dry, surprising after all the rain yesterday – I was caught in a rainstorm walking to CAFA, along the road near the intersection with the restaurants street vendors, mostly of food, were running to cover up things, like little fires, most were already covered as I noticed, very quick. I took the bus to the area around the place where there is a big grocery store and where there is a little shop that you can get sweaters made. I asked if they could make a sweater like the one I was wearing, and they said no – you would have to use a different kind of yarn. Machine knitted? The knit they showed me was like something from a sweater set, closely knit, the kind of thing that easily stretches out of shape.

In the afternoon I went to Dashanzi (798), the art district, because I heard there were lots of openings. It was crawling with people, foreigners. Outside the gates a strange, large Italian man with a daughter named Maria, about three years old, asked me how to find the area (it's in an industrial park).

"If you can't read and can't speak, it's just impossible to get around" – exasperated British woman, late 50s, with a map at the bus stop.

"That's what is great about Beijing, you can do anything you want. You can be stupid [go out and drink until 6am and dance on tables]. And, it's so cheap. So, cheap to drink. You can be crazy. Come out with us!" – Mike and friend, met them on the road at Dashanzi

I went for dinner at 798 with Mike and his friends as well as Aaron (Lisa's son) and his girlfriend. Aaron grew up in Beijing. There was a thin Chinese man in a cook's uniform with a nice camera taking pictures of us outside the restaurant window, weird, bobbing in and out, in the window and out, snapping shots. The table was dirty – an old plastic cover with bits of sauce on it over a fancier red table cloth, cheap chopsticks in plastic wrappers, cups with water or soap or dirt still inside. The restaurant had run out of many things, we vegetables in a jelly, there was a lazy-susan in the middle of the table that did not work, it was off center and knocked over cups of beer as one girl turned and turned it, we gave up turning and passed the plates around.

After, we went to Sanlitun, the area where there are many Western bars, walked through an empty lot, piles of dirt, filled in sewers, a couple of ruins, a big empty space mostly walled in, to get to the first bar. Tacky and bare, drunk whisky gingers. Mike says that Westerners come here with a serious intention, like studying Chinese, and then come to find that China (Beijing) is not like what they imagined in the West – it is cosmopolitan in a "small" way – you can get all sorts of things, it is very capitalist. You get here and there are no rules, no police, no drinking laws, it is extremely capitalist in the sense that everyone will bend the rules to make a buck. So, people start partying, going out every night. Four drunken American girls began pole dancing in front of us, one climbing on the pole upside-down, then falling on her shoulders, getting up, shrugging, keeping on going, their friends cheering and taking photos with little cameras.

There are many layers of foreigners here Mike says: Westerners, other Asians (Koreans, Pilipinos, Japanese), Chinese people from other regions, and Westerners here for various purposes, with various intentions. Generally the foreigners in the bars were

gross. Loud, young, drunk, raunchy, wild. Kassu, from Finland says that her Chinese friends say "Why would you want to go to bars, they are so boring!? All you can do is drink and dance, the music is so loud you cannot talk." Pop/rap sort of music, disco lights, long lists of fancy/tacky drink names. The taste of ginger ale from the whisky ginger is still in my mouth, sticky feeling.

Mike says that he feels funny about making art about China while in China – that while you are in China in a sense you are seeing nothing special, nothing different perhaps than all the other foreigners – though when you go back home people see your work, this subject as fascinating. Kassu says that many people come with no specific project in mind and just shoot everything, and then get sick of it, and it has special meaning to them perhaps, but to no one else.

May 14, 2006

I ate lunch in a beautiful restaurant with green everywhere. It's hot today, thick air, hazy, but inside the sun was coming through the front windows, over the people sitting there, bright and relaxed. The cups, porcelain and blue and white, were stored in a sort of glass cabinet that looked like a refrigerator. The food tasted fresh, fresh crispy cucumbers with a light fresh sauce, a little spicy. The tea was a dark brown, earthy flavor, I think maybe this was barley tea, something sold in every convenience store, but I've not been adventurous enough to buy a whole box. I learned that it is possible (seeing the people next to me do it) and how to get your leftovers wrapped up to go. You say "*keyi na bao ma?*" – sort of like "can I get this bagged up?"

I'm getting more used to the restaurant style here. I don't mind that the waitresses come up right away anymore. People I think are expected to know what they want, be quick about ordering, be demanding, ask lots of questions, it's not imposing on the waitress to have this dialogue. I used to think that the waitresses only did this to foreigners – stand by their table until they ordered. But, I think that it is typical and polite.

I bought some "natural figs" from Iran. They are dried and tiny, maybe the size of a quarter, but peaked on top. Like other dried fruits here they come in these very neat little packages, shiny, tapered up at the top. There were about 8RMB, so really cheap for figs! They are good. I like them & wish I could have them at home.

I spent the evening at Tiananmen Square. I got there and lots of people had started to gather around the fenced-off flag with two guards at the end of the square, opposite the Forbidden City. At sundown the army marches over and takes down the flag. Others were still flying kites, running after their children. The day had been really hot, but it had begun to cool down, with wind, these big comfortable gusts of warm dry air over cooler air. Lots of young men, some trying to sell art (you are invited to a "student's gallery") and some just curious spoke English with me. Sometimes I pretended I wasn't American, and said, in Chinese, "my English is not too good". This threw some of the vendors for a curve, but didn't work for others that I talked to for longer – one guy said I had an American accent, really thought I must be American. Something seemed quite unfriendly about these conversations – why insist to speak English? It did not seem so earnest in most cases, like they wanted to practice, it was more like showing off, insisting that they knew more than you – though maybe I was doing the same, I don't know.

I then went to the night market near Wangfujing where all sorts of things are sold that are strange, purposefully so I think. It looked like baby chickens and frogs on skewers, penis in big clay pot – a vendor purposefully pointed this one out to me as I waited for a beef kabob to be roasted, saying, “do you know what this is?” (he he he). Also scorpions, some sort of thick and big larvae. Near some of the stands there was this absolutely fetid smell, I think from roasting whatever strange thing it was ... lots of tourists, looking nervous, tall awkward Germans, though still many more locals than Westerners. A thin Xingjiang man, who would let out whoops that sounded like a cricket’s call, really cute, and open, to attract customers – rather than “come here, come here”, “strawberries – delicious”, “hello, hello” – gave me a big piece of naan bread for free. I waited for his partner to roast it, and talked to him, then he would not take money, smiling and waving it away. But, what was nicest was that he seemed like he was, there, where everyone else was “in business”, himself, and having fun, playing.

May 15, 2006

Today I took Linden with me to the city. She is 20, a student at Alfred University studying ceramics, and a friend of Mike’s. She is visiting Beijing, and speaks no Chinese. Things she notices in Beijing: 60 year old women playing “hacky sack” in the evening; barbers on every street corner, that is people with an electric razor, a stool, and a cloth to cover the customer’s clothes; different treatment of children, so much bodily contact with them, no carrying devices, just body to body; children tagging along everywhere rather than being dragged along; the Chinese style of eating of sharing dishes; that Mike and his friends go out to dinner every night and drink beer and are very tight, calling each other each day; bargaining is uncomfortable because with such cheap prices the people who are making the things must be working like slaves.

Tonight it is so beautiful outside. Calm. Warm, dry air, small gusts of wind. Little bits of light from signs, full, dull smell.

May 16, 2006

There’s a thunderstorm, but just a few raindrops, still warm.

I wanted to go to a bird and flower market by the Temple of Heaven today, but I think it’s now gone. I wanted to record all the birds chirping, because even though there are a lot normally, there are always traffic or construction sounds on top of them. The market was supposed to be across a bridge, across a river south of the Temple of Heaven. The river was dried up in one part, and nearly dried up in another. It smelled rotten, drying-out green algae, waste, dusty. The river was difficult to walk around because a highway entrance, and other big roads, have been built right around it. I’d like to go back and film.

I found my way to a little neighborhood street on the other side of the bridge, run down. Children, middle or high school, called to me from the school windows. They all seem to wear uniforms like track suits here. I sat down on a rock in a dusty, dry little park, and hadn’t been sitting for more than a few moments, when a man, about 55 walked by and noticed me. It turned out he was a doctor who had a little bed for examining, a wooden chair or two, and a blood pressure thing for looking at people’s health in the park. He said that he is there everyday that the weather was good. He invited me to come and sit, and the night afterwards to his house to eat where I could speak English with his daughter, a university student. He was very, very interested in getting us together to

practice, got my cell phone number out of me by taking my cell phone to call his, so insistent.

Later, I went to see Aniwar, an abstract painter who I met last time here, in his studio. It is actually not far from where I'm living, but in this warehouse that's hard for even taxi drivers to find. The area is free and ramshackle, drove along a tiny road with one-story buildings to get there, a short-cut. He has just finished a painting, it blends in with the white big painted brick wall that it hangs on. At first it looks as though it is just a white, square painting, but then there are colors behind it, and it does not seem cold, it seems to say hello, very quietly, calmly.

We talk about: the relationships between a painting and a person, between a painting and sound/music; art making as a way of pushing yourself further and further in life, trying something, then not being afraid to ruin what you have by trying further, each step helps you to see more.

May 17 and 18, 2006

I am sick, fever and sore throat and dizziness. I tried to go out yesterday afternoon to a movie after resting in the morning and first made the mistake of taking a bus, feeling sick and getting there late. Then, I'd read the date wrong and the movie that I'd really wanted to see had played the day before. This one was about global capitalism, consumerism, very musical – sort of a dark music video for some for of revolution, physical revolution and protest – though the message wasn't exactly clear *why* we should do this, very simplistic. A foreign film.

This – consumerism and capitalism and their growth – was I think my original reason for becoming interested in China. In 1999/2000 I saw some films by young Chinese directors, mainland China had huge sky skyscrapers, chain restaurants. Young people felt alienated, or that's a big word, but seemed to feel similarly to how I felt. I wondered: what could this transition to capitalism teach us about ourselves – America the consumerist country? Indeed, Aniwar says that people – the world over – work, work, work are tied to their jobs, a structured mindset. Though, we did not talk specifically about consumerism. Ask him about this. And, indeed, I watched about 5 hours of Chinese cartoons last night. I didn't have the energy to pay much attention to the stories but the sound was nice, nothing harsh. But, I did notice the commercials. Almost all seemed to be for American products. Though the commercials, for the most part, were certainly made or remade for the Chinese market – in Chinese, with Chinese cultural markers, with Asians. Though, there is always the English product name on the ad, package, next to the Chinese one. There is one for Oil of Olay sunscreen – “natural white” which is on all the time, where a young woman puts on the sunscreen and then does not have to carry a sun umbrella. There was also one for Hot Wheels – “a good present for a boy” where a giant snake can bite your cars as they spin around the track. Also, for Barbie and her hair-color changing dog, Skittles – at a school, KFC – with a martial arts master. The ads repeated a lot. I don't remember any non-American commercials. Except for one for a green tea drink, which is everywhere, which may be American in some way, or at least is a huge brand.

Ugliness, unpleasantness, difficulties of a place: traffic, construction noises, crossing the street with the cars not seeming to care, driving as if they were pedestrians, people calling to you, SEEING you – noticing, grabbing you to get you to buy a product, smog

and dust, the confusion of trying to read characters, bathrooms with no shower stalls, squatting toilets, dirty toilets, no toilet paper, no forks, bargaining, huge roads, bus stops on the sides of highways, eggs not in cartons, unsafe water, crowded buses and subways, out of repair buses and street cars.

I'm still feeling ill, though better than last night. I went out to eat lunch – despite the fact that my “survival guide” (a little book on what to do if you are lost in the woods, etc., that is in the medicine kit I have brought) said you should not eat when you have a fever. I ate at a nearby Mongolian restaurant. You were served *nai cha*, literally “milk tea” in little white tea pots, with a light wooden bowl, nearly the size of the pot to pour it in. I liked the tea very much, it looked a little oily, oil shimmer in it, but tasted hearty and light – a grain, maybe barley. There was a little bowl of soft, but not smooth, white sugar to add, but I did not add any, because it tasted nice as it was. They said it was a Mongolian specialty, and that they made it themselves. When I asked about it, and asked the waitress to write down the name, she did so on the back of her business card. Business cards are a different thing here, also relationships between clients and people in businesses. I think it is important, normal, that you get to know certain business people, and that then they take care of you. You get to know business people in North American too, but this rarely means they treat you much differently, or bend the rules for you. I think it's different here.

There seem to be lots of shows on TV here about divorce, particularly about the relationship between the father and child after divorce, the child wanting the parents to get back together, the father having a hard time of it, less from the mother's perspective, less about the parent's relationship. The shows also seem to involve outside people – the police, people that the parents are trying to date, people who want to intervene to help the children. In one show the father works in some sort of construction business, wears dirty clothes, his ex-wife wants to send their son, about 10, to America. The father looks dirty and has a dull, dim living room. In another show, the father owns a very simple sort of home-goods store, selling things like linoleum, the son, about 13, seems to work here, and they seem to live here, the father has a new wife and young daughter. But, I don't think that these men are meant to look simple or dirty, just normal, everyday. Everyday sort of clothes, restaurants, cars, streets.

May 19, 2006

I felt a lot better today so in the morning I went to visit the temple I'd been hoping to visit for a while. It's in the southeastern part of the city, sort of south of Qianmen. The temple houses an active monastery school, so I thought there would be lots of people around, but it was pretty quiet, and a lot of the buildings seemed to be having repairs done, and/or to be in not so great shape, unlike most tourist temples which look perfect. There were a couple men in monk's dress, but they seemed to be wearing different colors of a plain shirt and pants, no set uniform, and then a few middle aged women praying inside the different temples, usually about one at a time since there were so few people there. It was, like most temples here I think, a Buddhist temple with various Buddhas on altars and fresh fruit, and various forms of lotus flowers laid out before them.

The neighborhood that the temple is in seemed to be mostly Muslim, lots of the signs of businesses, restaurants were in Arabic, and men sometimes wore geometrical, sort of round but standing up about an inch off the head, little hats. I ate lunch at a local restaurant and had a really gross dish of garlic cucumbers – there was tons of salt on

top, not mixed in. I sat diagonally from the door to a smaller room that had a large table or two in it for a big party – many restaurants have this, a separate room with a big round table, for about 8-12 people with a lazy-susan in the middle. Some of these tables can seem really massive, especially if you don't have enough people to go all the way around, then there is a strange gap. The room here was very brightly colored inside, some sort of gold color on the walls, shiny, in contrast to the plain white and green in the rest of the place. Two kids, a boy and a girl, about 8 and 10, kept running in and out. They had little red scarves tied around their necks. For something like the Young Pioneers? I haven't noticed these scarves here before. Also, a man kept coming out with the empty, little plain white teapot to ask for more tea.

The staff in restaurants seem to work much more communally here than at home. You have this sort of gaggle of young women, girls almost who greet you, help you figure out what to order, get things, bring things out. They are often wearing some sort of surprising uniform, like something matching the walls of the restaurant, or some sort of traditional dress, or something really institutional looking. Of course, waiters wear uniforms at home too, but I think not to this extent, or they tend to be simpler, like all black, or the restaurant's t-shirt and pants. I'm not sure how to explain the different, expect that I think that waiters at home would feel silly to wear some of the normal uniforms here.

May 20, 2006

I went to Fragrant Hills Park, which Linden told me that Mike said is sort of like the equivalent of Central Park here – though it is outside the city. And, actually it is quite a way outside the city. I took the subway all the way to the end of the line, as far west as you can take it, then took a taxi, which was about another 15 minute drive towards a range of hills. I think that most people who go must have cars! The park itself is quite hilly, and large, all the paths seem to go up or down, and there are lots of signs pointing to different sights. It was raining, not hard, but enough so that I bought an umbrella, and when I got there it was already about 2pm, so everyone at first seemed to be leaving. The park was filled with families, small groups of young men, young couples walking, or more like hiking because the hills and paths were in the woods and steep.

I had water and peanuts served on a little paper plate with a basket filled with newspaper for the shells at a teahouse. The tea was expensive, at least 50RMB per pot. I found out later that just down the side of the hill, where the view wasn't so nice, where two much cheaper places. When I arrived there was a group of about 15 people sitting together at the table inside the teahouse, most tables were outside, with umbrellas, or covered by the building itself. They were very loud, and had a little video camera on a tripod set up to film the party. But, they soon left. Then, there were couples of two, married, or friends sharing pots of tea and playing cards that they had brought. It was beautiful, and the rain stopped, and the view was misty. But, the waitresses turned on some sort of traditionally-influenced, but sappy pop music that then filled the terrace. It's like in a taxi when the driver seems to always turn the radio on or up when you get in (usually some sort of talk-radio), assuming that you want to hear it. Or, maybe they want to hear it when there is someone there who they are not talking to? Or, maybe it is supposed to make you feel pressured not to talk?

The area near the Pinguoyuan subway station was interesting. As you come out of the station there is a chaotic lane with little snack shops. The typical: meat sticks, *baozi*, fruit, pungent meat smell.

Across the street from the exit is a large mall with lots of little stalls inside it, sort of like the style of the silk market downtown, except with no foreigners. On the bottom floor, trinket and cheap jewelry shops, then clothing higher up. Clothes are so cheap here, but uninteresting, plain cotton, t-shirts, plain pants, shirts for older women with ugly prints. Next to the mall spreads a row, in both directions, of similar shops, a few restaurants, a branch of the Andingmen *dianxin* shop, then, after this, the buildings very quickly become a mix of one-story shops and, generally newer, high, cement apartment buildings – maybe 10 to 15 floors. Part of the area may be a government development like where Yan Li lives because I did not see any ads, like you do when private condos and houses are being built.

One thing about being a (non-Asian) foreigner in Beijing is that people are constantly saying “hello”. I think it is generally to see what you will do. It’s usually men who say it. Or, people trying to sell you things. It’s disconcerting because you know that you are being noticed, whereas, in a city, you are normally anonymous, or feel that way. It must have been a zillion times worse in the 1980s, or earlier!

May 21, 2006

In the morning I went to the Temple of Heaven, it’s much more busy in the summer than the winter. By 8am there were almost hoards of people, tour groups and local retirees, pleasant, friendly. I took lots of footage – people playing together (tai chi, dancing, singing, making music). Again, a social phenomenon that would be shocking in America, the collective joy of older people. I saw one woman, about 70 maybe, stretching her leg on a tree, it was quite vertical, had she been on the ground it would have nearly been a full split.

In the afternoon I agreed to go out with Marylin’s husband, who is here with her for 2 months and speaks no Chinese. We went to two huge food markets, one a big hall selling many fruits and vegetables, the other a 4-floor grocery and department store. I bought a pot and a vegetable peeler: two things I’ve decided are essential to being able to cook here. Earlier in the day I bought a bag of rice – Thai Jasmine and a thing of noodles, staples. After being sick and days of yogurt and fruit and figs I decided I needed to really cook. I’m curious about ways to put together typical ingredients to make things sort of Western style. It’s funny, because I think you really have to work with what’s there, and what’s there is often surprising – for example, it’s very difficult to find any sort of dried or canned beans (something that seems such a staple, and that I eat a lot at home), except in ex-pat stores. I’m going to try cooking with the various kinds of vegetables and the fresh noodles that are made everywhere, garlic, and fresh fava beans, and perhaps some fish. I’m also going to try to make some of that rice soup that seems popular for breakfast – seems easy ... hmm.

The way that people work, at least in restaurants, and in small hotels, or small businesses seems, again, to be much more communal. For example, the girls who wear pink uniforms and clean the dormitory every day and the woman who wears a suit and works at the front desk, all, I think, live here, on the first floor, in rooms with many bunk beds. Or, for instance, the restaurant I ate at in the evening, after all the other

customers had left the whole staff it seemed began eating together at two tables, the cooks – young men – and the waitresses – young women. Really sitting down for a meal together.

Here I notice all kinds of things, restaurants, stores aimed towards Westerners, but perhaps for someone from China living in North America it seems similar, that there are so many things designed for Chinese ex-pats, immigrants – things that the general North American population may not notice.

May 22, 2006

I returned to the large fruit and vegetable market that I went to yesterday to film. People were really friendly. When I was filming with the view-screen open the vendors would come over and look, usually saying, “oh, pretty!” – I was mostly taking close-ups of fruits and vegetables. I talked with one woman for a while, she wanted me to point out which vegetables we had and did not have where I was from – I recognized for sure maybe about 2/3 of the vegetables, but could make general guesses about what the other ones might taste like. I also went to the big indoor grocery store nearby and bought some more things to eat – fresh noodles, dried red beans, garlic. I tried to get some oil, but they only had two kinds of olive oil, which were expensive, and not even extra-virgin (just virgin). There's little bits of English on most of the packaging here.

For the first time today I braved the laundry machine. I asked at the front desk for someone to help me, but then felt silly afterwards because it was easy to use. The machine looks kind of strange, very flimsy, but I think it actually works pretty much just like one at home. I didn't expect it to spin the clothes, just to mush them around in the water, but it did! There is no dryer – they don't really exist here I think. Lots of people have clothes hanging in windows and have these funny little round things with clips that you dry socks and underwear on. But, there are lots of air-conditioners, though I don't think most are turned on yet – mostly the sort that hang off the side of the building, one for every apartment.

May 23, 2006

I met a guy who teaches Chinese to foreigners in the lobby of the Holiday Inn Lido. I'd just bought a copy of “The Insider's Guide to Beijing” and was looking through it and trying to call this café that is supposed to have movies on Tuesday nights, but the telephone number was wrong, and I reached a hotel. We talked for a long time, more than an hour I think, because he was waiting to give his next lesson – to a Taiwanese guy who works for a crude oil company that has offices in the Lido complex. The man, about 35, broad round face, had lots of detailed questions about America. He wanted to know the correct pronunciation of “cranberry” – it took a few minutes of guessing and describing for us to figure out that we definitely meant the same fruit: “a small, red fruit, that ends with “berry” and that is often used in juice.”

I wonder if in school Chinese children, if they are not learning English, learn the ABCs the same way as at home? Or, if there is a different system for learning the Roman alphabet that ties more closely to pinyin and its sounds? Yan Li can spell out letters, but very slowly and cautiously, and often difficult to understand.

We also talked, a lot, about accents – whether I could immediately tell British English, from American English, from Australian English, from Indian English, from Black American English, from Southern English. Whether it sounded nice or funny when people from different countries, like Italy, spoke English. He said that in China people think that American English has the nicest sound, which surprised me because I think that we always think that British English, or other sorts, sound the best. He said that he is thinking about going abroad next year to teach Chinese, wanted to know what place I would recommend, whether many people in America were learning Chinese, how much it would cost to live each month in Toronto, whether it was easy or hard to get a visa, whether he would need to know English to be a good teacher. We talked about names (first, middle, last, hyphenated names), also about ancestry – apparently *Roots* was a popular book in China a while ago. He was confused/surprised that my ancestors would be from so many different countries (lots of places in Western Europe) and thought that I was answering his question wrong – I think he thought expected me to say clearly, “my family was originally x”, not “my family was originally a, b, c, d, x, y, z”.

I went to the Dashanzi area to film in the evening, and while I was waiting for it to get darker I went again to the big grocery store there, called *Vanguard* in English. All the aisles, as is typical of these monster stores – sort of like Walmarts with grocery stores or French hypermarches – have labels in both Chinese and English. Though, the English tends not to be particularly descriptive, and is sometimes completely wrong. In this store, the English signs are off by one aisle, so that if you are looking for “coffee” you’ve got to find the sign for coffee, then walk over one aisle to the right. This store, and others like it, have absolutely everything! Shoes, cleaning supplies of all brands, tons of dried plums, cheap teapots (about 7RMB), those big hot water thermoses with roses on them that look so old-fashioned and have a wooden sort of cork (about 30RMB), nylons, cheap socks, kitchen utensils, DVDs (about 30RMB for a “real” one versus around 7RMB or less on the street), sheets and towels – seeing this I have to laugh at myself for all the things that I brought.

I’m encouraged by my cooking. Today I made pasta with olive oil and garlic, fresh steamed fava beans and slightly cooked red cherry tomatoes – all on my one-burner hot plate. It was a little plain, but good, my stomach feels very nice. The eggplant I attempted in the wok though was a disaster, burned, and the pasta, before I figured out how to regulate the temperature, kept boiling over onto the counter. Also, online I looked up some recipes for *zhou* (stew) and for how to cook dried beans.

May 24, 2006

I’m feeling tired and like I want to go home! Part of it is not having an everyday routine, part is wanting everyday things to be easier ... bewilderment, loving it, hating it, coming to terms, perhaps... In some ways things are seeming really easy, like I find myself not being so aware of myself, of sticking out on the street, tiredly ignoring all the “hellos”, it’s easy (but not good) to live just by speaking tiny bits of Chinese. I’m tired of Beijing, the smog, the sounds, the big roads, taxi drivers not understanding my pronunciation, my stomach feeling queasy from the strange sauces that come on top of meats, from the sweet liquid-y yogurt, the fact that people eat all sorts of fungus and strange seafood, that the fish always has bones, that people seem impolite and that I probably seem impolite to them.

May 25, 2006

I met Li Bau again this morning, and we talked for a couple of hours, again in the lobby. He gives a lesson there every weekday morning, but also gives lessons at the language school, and at other places. This time we spoke both English and Chinese – he wants to practice his English because in June he is taking something like the TOFEL and is nervous about the listening section. He asked: Do people in American eat Chinese food? Is it expensive? What kind of Chinese food do they eat? What is the American education system like? How much does it cost to go to university? When you meet a woman, is it okay to shake her hand? (In China, he says, if you are a man you should wait and see if a woman extends her hand, if she does, shake it, if not, you should not try to shake hers.) Can Americans use chopsticks? Do Americans always use a knife and fork – are these two things “enough” to eat with? How do you eat things like peanuts? (With our fingers.) Even when you are with other people, with friends, with your boss? (Eating with your fingers, he says, is not polite in China, I am not sure why. People even eat bread like things with their chopsticks – but maybe they eat American style toast with their fingers, or the little Beijing *danxin* with their fingers?) How much money does an average family earn per month? How much does it cost to take a taxi? Does every family have a car? How much do cars cost?

Some of these things are so hard to explain. Like trying to paint a picture of the role that the local Chinese restaurant plays in American small towns – especially because I don't think that small towns exist in the same way in China – here there are “villages” and “peasants”. The lo mien, chow mien, chicken fingers, Shirley Temples.

It is interesting also because unlike my language exchange partners in Toronto he has not been to North America or Europe – he has traveled to other places in Asia I think, lived in Shanghai for 10 years or so. He says that almost all places that teach English in China, like high schools, use the TV show *Friends* to help students learn. *Forest Gump* is also popular.

I finally bought a bunch of *mantou*, steamed bread that is rather dense, very plain. I bought some that is sort of whole-wheat like instead of just white, which is the most common, very dry. I had it once when I was here before. You eat it instead of rice, usually with some sort of soup or stew I think. I had one for breakfast with yogurt (which is very soupy here), then another for lunch with some warm soymilk. They are so cheap! I could not buy a package smaller than 6, which was 2.50RMB (about 35 cents), but you could get a package of 12 for about 3.00RMB. And, the rolls are quite big, probably the equivalent of 2 or 3 slices of bread because they are so dense.

All afternoon I've been working on cooking a batch of red beans. I bought the right ones, also extremely cheap, because they have the same smell as the ones that are served everywhere for breakfast and in stews – but, they always come dried, so you need to soak them, then cook them. I got about .75 kg of beans for around 6.00RMB (70 cents) and they expand a lot when cooked. You could eat them for a week straight! Or, even more! I ought to ask Yan Li what the best way is to cook them.

May 26, 2006

For lunch at Yan Li's today we ate this bread that tastes a little oily but that is actually sort of steamed on a pot/pan on the stove – you make a big piece of round dough, then

put it in the round steaming pan, put the cover on, keep turning it so that it cooks evenly, then flip it over so the other side gets browned. You can add another piece on top of the first after the first side has cooked, and cook them together. Then, you are supposed to split it open and put things inside, like omelet or vegetables, then eat it sort of like a sandwich. It looks a little bit like a thick pita bread, or pizza dough. There's a nearby pizza place to their house that you can call and get delivery – they had a couple of magnets with their phone number on the fridge, “pizza” was written in English. I asked Yan Li to give me a tour of her kitchen showing me “what every Chinese kitchen ought to have.” She protested that it wasn't much different from an American kitchen, but gave me a very detailed tour – I think that that organization looked much the same, but the little details are really different! There is a dishes cupboard, a drawer for silverware (chopsticks), knives, other utensils, a place to store extra plastic bags, a stove, a microwave, a refrigerator, spice and oil cupboard, cupboards for pots and bigger appliances, place near the sink for disinfectants, cleaning things. Inside there were lots of Chinese oils and things that looked like soy sauce bottles, old coke bottles filled with rice, a big bag of flour, woks, various electrical plates and cooking pots, chopsticks, about 4 different types of vegetables peelers, big and flat knives, water filters.

Recently a friend of her sons' gave him a little kitten, Yan Li doesn't like the kitten very much, it was a very expensive one, probably about 2,000RMB, it's a Thai sort of cat that usually lives in a temple, they've named it “*Cong Cong*” which means sort of “Smart, Smart” or “Wise Wise” because it is this kind of cat. It has blue eyes and gray paws and a gray tail, lighter body. They feed it kitten food (Purina) mixed with milk, and have made it a couple of little beds, a kitty litter box is temporarily in the bathroom – in the shower stall. It runs around and plays with its own tail, sleeps, is fascinated with people's feet which are usually bigger than it is right now, crawls under the sofa, through tiny spaces.

My overall impression of the morning and afternoon was that there is this sense, I'm not sure if it is just Yan Li, or if it is wider here – and I think it might be – that it is very important to keep things very clean, clean things very thoroughly, and also to be very frugal – to take care of your things well, conserve water, make innovative sort of ways of saving or reusing things, keeping things clean – like Yan Li uses old silver cigarette wrappers in the grease catchers of the stove hood, after the grease collects inside they can be thrown away, this way you reuse the wrappers, save time because you don't have to wash the grease things, and also save water and detergent. She also has a method for sticking together old, thin pieces of soap so that you can keep using them when then get small – you wet the soaps, then stick them together, then wait a while. She also said that before she used to wash all the clothes by hand, then put them in the washing machine to wash. Even now she is so aware of what sort of water you should use for what, and how you can reuse water – like use water from washing vegetables to water your plants, use water from washing clothes to flush the toilet, use relatively dirty water to wash vegetable bags, clean water for other things.

May 27 and 28, 2006

I've asked Mike to think about how he would answer the question: “What five things would you show, or five experiences would you give, to an American who has never been to China, to understand what it is like to live in Beijing?”

Hmm. My answer to this question would maybe be: walking through a street where everyone is hustling and yelling “hello”, eating at a Chinese restaurant, walking through a huge mall or grocery store, hearing construction/bird/traffic sounds, using a squat toilet, and also trying to do something really practical like buy a dish sponge or rent an apartment. But, there are so many other little things that could fit in this category: like buying, the very common, map of Beijing in Chinese, and having no sense of what it means, it’s not possible to read! Or, boiling tap water, taking a taxi, taking a crowded bus, buying something where you must bargain, seeing/hearing people signing or dancing publicly, seeing adult “exercise parks”, eating the typical street food (baked sweet potato, meat skewers, candied fruit on sticks, steamed corn that tastes very earthy, *baozi*, ice cream sticks), watching Chinese TV commercials made by American companies, mailing a letter, eating *mantou*, *danxin*, *jiaozi*, *zhou*, using a typical washing machine and hanging your laundry to dry, visiting the tourist sites, the *hutongs*, the big roads, feeling ill from the pollution in the air – black dirt in your nostrils, cooking with a wok, big flat knives, heating plate/gas stove, eating with chopsticks – including the more tricky to eat-with-chopsticks food, eating hot pot, drinking in an overpriced bar/café, getting a list of how much things typically cost.

The other day Li Bau had all kinds of questions about religion in America. We got into a conversation about the difference between Christianity and Judaism. He wanted to know what Judaism was all about, and I started talking about the Star of David (vs. the cross) as a symbol, and WWII and the Nazi yellow stars, and the split between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Li Bau knew about the cross, and about Jesus, but only vaguely I think, he did not know how all the symbols and pieces of the story fit together. He wanted to know if you could tell if someone was Jewish by looking at them, and in what countries Jewish people lived, and what percentage of the American population was Jewish. And, I tried to answer all of his questions, but I feel like the picture I have given him must be so sketchy. There are so many small personal experiences, friends, meals, stories, behind the things I was trying to explain that I think that the picture that I was able to give was so vague. He would have to live in New York and eat in bagel shops and read “All of a Kind Family” and look through my cookbook of Jewish world recipes, and maybe go to a synagogue, make friends with a few Jewish people – both practicing and not, and pay attention to the news about Israel and Palestine. What are the experiences that I need to have to begin to understand the experience of migration, of coming from China to Canada? Who can I ask to recommend these things?

May 29, 2006

This morning I took a long walk through Macro, which I think is a French chain because there was (I think) a French flag flying outside along with the Chinese flag, and lots of little company flags. It’s sort of like a Costco. You’ve got to buy a membership card, and then things are sold “in bulk” – though most packages don’t seem to be much bigger, or any bigger, than what you can buy at a regular store. The store itself is pretty much a huge 3-storey warehouse, with those long sort of conveyor belts that you can take shopping carts on. I’d been there on Saturday in the early evening, it was absolutely crazy with people. Today it was quieter, but still pretty busy, as most stores and restaurants seem to be.

Examining the store was interesting because it made me realize that I think I’m starting to see the “categories” of things in Chinese grocery/home goods stores – some of the

logic by which things are arranged, the things that you ought to sell, the “departments” you ought to have. There is usually a pretty big dairy department, but nearly all of what it sells is this plain, soupy, sweet yogurt either in little cups hooked together in a pack, tiny drink bottles, or in things that look like milk or plastic orange juice cartons. There are usually a few kinds of very processed cheese, maybe a few cartons of milk. Then, near this, is usually a soy bean product section: tofu, tofu strips that are flat and big, tofu strips that look like noodles, tofu paste, some small bottles of soy milk, flavored tofu – all in little clear plastic packages. Near these two sections are often tables with little bags of milk and milk tea, which, apparently, don’t need to be refrigerated. Eggs often come loose, no cartons, and there are maybe 8 kinds instead of 2 kinds, various sizes and shell colors. There are usually a number of meat counters, often meat looks like it’s already been cooked – marinated and roasted maybe, it does not look like it is very good for you. There’s usually also a bakery, which makes really sweet, soft breads and pastries, and sells frosted birthday cakes, words on them often in English.

There are many things that you buy by weight – including frozen dumplings, the most popular filling seems to be pork & anything else; fruits and vegetables; nuts and dried fruits – lots of them are candied or sugar coated; beans, rice, other grains, seeds. There are also many, many things that come in packages, or pre-weighed and wrapped in plastic or put in a plastic bag. I think this must be a phenomenon of these new big grocery stores. Every store also has huge clear bottles filled with yellow colored oil, often peanut or corn I think, aisles of soy sauce sort of things, white wine vinegar, lots of packaged mushrooms and fungi, dried hot peppers, various types of dried seaweed. There are also various instant teas w/powdered milk, instant coffees, and cereals: some kind of instant wheat drink, walnut powder, lots of oatmeal – usually comes in a clear plastic bag and doesn’t look in very good shape, a few Western brands, like one kind of Cheerios – not all 6 or so. At a lot of these stores you can have a customer card, which maybe gives you discounts, or maybe you can earn points. Also, in the store there are often a couple of samples with an attendant – I see them a lot for Western cereal. But, also for other products, like today, there were samples for that sticky rice that is wrapped up in banana (?) leaves and looks like a triangle – I tried one for the first time yesterday. It is quite good, sort of a very sticky, gluey texture. They look like tamales, but the inside is certainly denser. The one I had had rice and a little bit of red bean, it was just slightly sweet. I think that the also often come with a little bit of meat.

It’s interesting how you figure out the system of what things are usually stocked and how they are arranged. I noticed lots of these things in the first few convenience stores I visited – though they have a logic of their own – but it was hard to know if the things there were typical or oddities. I also figured out that there is typically a whole soy products section because I got really confused because I couldn’t find soymilk next to regular milk in the dairy section, then, later, near the fruits and vegetables found the soy section of the store.

I also looked at the large cookware section in Macro. There were mops made from rags that look like a head of thick wavy hair, tons and tons of plastic basins that are brightly colored (the Chinese family that lives next door to me in Toronto has lots of them around their back courtyard); woks, pressure cookers, pans with tight fitting glass tops, large thermoses for hot water, multi-layered pots for steaming; all knives, or nearly all seem to be these big, flat, almost square or rectangular shape knives; tea pots with “Chinese” decoration, tea sets, large tea cups with lids.

Packages of little bottles (to drink) could be bought of these things in the vitamin section, the labels had both Chinese and English:

Swallow's Nests with Rock Sugar
Essence of Black Skinned Chicken
Yak Marrow Strong Bonedust
American Ginseng
Chicken Essence with Cordycops

Finally, I looked at the clothes and shoes sections, and at what the other customers were wearing. This is probably analogous to making such observations in a WalMart, but it was hard to come up with a system to clearly describe what clothes are like – other than that they seem bland. Men's clothes do tend to be darker colors I think, blues, browns, blacks. Women's clothes are more pastel, small frills, pinks, many bad-looking flower patterns, nylons that are ankle-socks and not tights (the photo on the package of one brand showed a young woman wearing them with a pair of shorts, so that you could see the thicker band above the ankle that holds them up). Things tend to look "cheap", bad-quality, like even WalMart would sell things that look better quality than so many things here. Cutesy pajamas with tops and bottoms, animal/Chris bear sort of patterns.

I watched an episode of "I Love Raymond" dubbed in Chinese last night. It must have been an old one because Raymond and his wife were getting married. Normally I really dislike this show. But, anyways, it's one of the only American TV shows I've come across on TV here – though I also saw an episode of that Pamela Anderson show where she runs a sort of high-action detective agency. It was interesting because even though the show was in Chinese, and I'd never seen the episode, it was a lot easier to understand than most things I've watched here – I could get all the jokes, follow what was being said. For one thing it was a familiar event, an American wedding. Also, I knew the characters, or at least the general ironic gist of the show. Then, the names sounded essentially the same as they would in English, so it was really easy to tell that they were names and not just words I do not know. I've come across a some of Chinese comedy shows – or at least they must be comedy because people move their bodies in really exaggerated ways and talk loudly or have weird facial expressions and there is laughter – but they're hard to follow. It seems like a different kind of humor. There was one show where all the neighbors kept bringing a family *baozi* (big dumplings), hundreds and hundreds.

May 30, 2006

Tonight I went to a banquet-style dinner again with Huang Chen and Marylin. It was in a huge, modern Szechuan restaurant that had 3 big floors. The first floor was an open restaurant, and the upper two floors were all private rooms. We had one on the third floor, it had a big round table, and also plush leather sofas and chairs against the wall where you could sit and relax. There was a cabinet at the side of the room with extra dishes and hot water for tea – chrysanthemum tea, which tastes herb-like, but also bland, and slightly like cleaning fluid (not my favorite). There always seemed to be at least one waitress there, changing small dirty plates for clean ones, refilling tea and other drinks. There were 10 or so dishes, maybe more: chicken pieces in a bed of chilies, tofu with a gross egg (?) sauce and broccoli, fresh cucumber sticks with radish slices and cherry tomatoes, a whole fish, a leafy green vegetable that was difficult to pick

up with chopsticks, two kinds of dry roasted beef, fatty duck, a soup with a gelatin kind of clear broth and maybe a chicken flavor, fried sesame studded balls stuffed with black sesame seed paste, a desert gelatin with a sweet black liquid that tasted like molasses and bits of melon (it looked savory, like soy sauce and a small bit of tomato salsa), watermelon and another melon and cherry tomatoes arranged on a plate (no rice).

May 31, 2006

I had lunch at the Grand Hyatt's ground floor restaurant. Peking duck, a noodle dish, green beans, little dishes before the meal, sticky rice to celebrate the dragon boat festival for desert. Altogether about \$40 for two. At a place like this, you just speak English. The staff's English is not perfect, but they expect to serve you with it, are very professional. The restaurant was beautiful. It had many crannies, areas, arranged around various glassed-in cooking stations. We sat across from the Peking duck ovens – men in white chef uniforms chopping cucumber after cucumber, tending the ducks and draining them as they came from the oven – a burst of fluid when a cork at the bottom of the duck is pulled out. There were chopsticks holders, spoon rests, a blue ceramic plate on top of a more decorative one. Watching the waitresses reminded me of waitressing (also in a hotel restaurant), how intimately you get to know your uniform, the various sets of dishes and how they go together, how you are taught to arrange things, the rhythm of refilling drinks and being in the kitchen and out, the place settings, the business, the table-cleaning cloths that you are careful with, but don't clean as often as you should. The bathrooms were also beautiful. The luxury of a nice bathroom in Beijing! There was toilet paper, and the toilets could flush it, it smelled sweet, fresh flowers maybe and not of urine, it was clean, clean, clean. There was nice soap, and paper towels to dry your hands!

June 1, 2006

The Old Summer Palace is dry, dusty, hot, rambling, even parched. I went today and walked for maybe 2 hours through the park, near Beijing University. There were lots of families with young children, park snack bars that sold bottled drinks and steamed corn, lakes with lily pads and low water. The park management had shut off some of the canals and lakes, blocking water, so that more water would flow to the popular ponds and canals. But, even these did not look normal. Algae, dust, dry air. Nevertheless, or maybe because of this, the park was calm, somewhere you went to let your kids run around, to pass a day when you are bored of other places.

I've been seeing the Olympic stores and objects everywhere. There are 5 little cartoon character mascots that have been designed, that are for sale at official "Beijing Zones" stores with nothing but a few Olympic souvenirs. They look sort of like Teletubbies, and come as different sized stuffed animals. You can also see the skeleton of the Olympic stadium. It is just outside the North 4th ring road, big silver metal pieces, just the frame, behind a big empty (?) lot fronted by advertising of what will be there eventually.

Sometimes it is starting to feel that I am nowhere in particular – waiting in a cab in traffic jams, at a café, looking though DVDs (starting from about 7rmb each, pretty much anything for under 20rmb).

I finally found, within the last two days both of the major Beijing ex-pat magazines – though it's easier now because the June issues are just out. This month's *That's Beijing*

has a special pull-out section on house-buying and decoration and the growing ex-pat community near the Holiday Inn Lido – all the foreign restaurants, various apartment complexes, fancy bars, services. It's funny because if you read this, and did not go to this area – which is the area where I'm staying – it would sound like there is very little because the magazine only names the most Western things, not the little strip of restaurants with outdoor tables with roasted meats and beer and tiny snails, not the dirty old apartment buildings, the zillions of hairdressing shops near Dashanzi.

June 2, 2006

I feel like I spent the day in traffic. I took lots of cabs, to the south 3rd ring road, then to the Worker's Stadium area, then near the Lufthansa center, then home. The traffic is usually alright at night, but there can be terrible jams during the day, the taxis, buses, bicycles, bicycle carts, pedestrians, private cars. Eric was saying that when he was here in 1997 there were hardly any cars, that the whole city seemed as if it were *hutongs* (small, low, dusty, coal-fired neighborhoods). At this time there were a few skyscrapers, but you could pick them all out of the skyline. They were built in the southwestern part of the city first, the business district, financial district. At this time he felt as though he knew all the foreigners in the city, either personally, or by face. When you saw someone, you would stop and talk. Local people were friendly and curious about foreigners, asking you lots of questions, very willing to try to answer your questions, interested in talking. It's different now, or at least changing a lot. In 1997 there was a seeming stability in the architecture, the city. It seems like perhaps the city will re-stabilize after 2008 when all the construction aimed towards making the city look great for the Olympics is finished.

The area where I went in the morning, a huge fabric market and home goods (including cooking) market in the southern part of the city, was maybe more what Beijing used to be like. Winding dirty *hutong* streets, many fruit carts, tiny hole-in-the-wall restaurants. No one paid much attention to me here, even in the markets, no hellos, even in Chinese. Everyone was relaxed and not pushy. Most of the goods were sold in bulk – bundles of chopsticks for restaurants, plastic packages full of buttons or shiny accessories, rolls of fabric – any material, small nylon socks. The fabric market was contained under the roof of a number of sprawling warehouses. In some sections the shop fronts were shut off, metal gates over them, the space too big. But, it was huge, rows and rows of synthetics, silks, tacky flower patterns.

I ate at a Korean restaurant. Stir-fried beef with mushrooms and lots of pepper, rice with an egg and fresh herbs and spices in a hot, black, heavy bowl. Also, barley tea. The waitresses cooked both dishes for me after they were brought out. It was funny, because even though I've had Korean food a few times before, having it here, after eating so much Chinese food, it tasted really different. More masculine maybe, simpler, less sweet, more savory, extreme flavors in the little free side dishes – tofu, some kind of sprouts, spinach and egg, leaves that were marinated and tasted like spicy cheese.

June 3 – 4, 2006

Yesterday I did laundry again, I think the washing machine got unbalanced and then stopped in the middle of the cycle. I figured out, by twisting different knobs, how to make it do just the spin cycle, which is what it needed, and not the whole thing again. It's funny because even though I can read nearly all of the characters on the buttons of the machine, I can't figure out what they mean all together. I also went to buy some more

yogurt, and after finally having come to the conclusion that about 90% of milk cartons are actually filled with yogurt the milk carton I bought actually contained milk. I was really surprised when I opened up the spout and poured it into a bowl! I got it because it was definitely next to a thing of yogurt, was the same brand, but didn't have an extra small bonus package of yogurt attached, which I didn't want. But, I've also now figured out that the Hi-24 Convenience store up the road sells all kinds of small/large things of yogurt, and also soymilk. I missed these things the first time I looked. I also bought some bread from the "French" bakery nearby. It's good, but softer than I expected, it looks like it will have a really nice crust, but then, like all breads I've eaten here is soft and fluffy.

At night I went to Michelle's house where she was having a party. In her front room she had set up a long table with a mirror on top of it, long white candles in empty beer bottles, bowls of lychees and mangosteens and about 6 or 7 bottles of different types of vodka, cranberry juice, orange juice, ice. Rap was playing on a 15-inch silver Mac laptop. The party was about half foreigners – 7 or so Americans, a Serbian guy, a Danish guy, a Finnish girl, a Sri Lankan guy and half Chinese CAFA students, most of whom seemed to speak English better than any of the foreigners spoke Chinese. The boys got very drunk, dancing, mixing each other strong drinks, joking, wild. There were two Chinese women who, nearly the whole time, either sat next to each other, or shared a chair. They seemed very young, one was 25, the other I think about the same. They drank very little, or maybe not at all.

Today is humid and hazy, my nose had gotten lots of black soot or dirt inside, things are taking a long time to dry, the paint on my business cards is sticky.

满月 *man yue*

This morning I went to with Yan Li, her husband, and their son, who is just a little younger than me, to the *man yue* of a relative of Yan Li's. A *man yue* is a celebration you have when a baby is one month old. It was a big party, about 200 people – so big, lots of people told me at the party, because the baby was the family's son's first son. And, because the family is (or was recently) a peasant family they feel that having a boy is very important – (1) because this means that the family name will continue on, since only the sons of sons will always keep their father's name – girls also keep their father's name after they are married, but her children will usually take on her husband's last name. "Last name" shouldn't be the right term here! Maybe "family name" is better since Chinese "last names" actually go first – (last name) (first name). (2) Because, in the past, more sons meant more labor power, and maybe that the child – the son – would always stay with the family and not join another one after marriage. The festival, the *man yue* takes place after one month, because, in the past, after she gave birth a woman could not do a lot of things for one month – leave the house, wash her feet too much, do things that might give her a headache.

We first went to one relative's house, there were about 20 people there, milling throughout the different rooms and talking. We mostly sat in a small bedroom with a old woman and her 2 1/2 year old granddaughter, and various other people. The little girl was wearing a black and colors polka-dot cotton jumper and kept saying she wanted to go home. After this, we stayed about 10:15 to 11:15, there was a large van that ferried people to a big restaurant that the family had rented out. There were about 15 large, round tables, each table seating about 10. When the couple had gotten married, they

had a huge wedding, 500 or so people. Freddy seemed like he was being very polite, but was bored. What was strange was there was no real ceremony, or not a speech, or anything around the baby. People just came, ate, visited with each other, drank with each other. I saw the mother and baby only once – before people started eating, she walked with her son, casually, around the restaurant. People who wanted to see him came up to see him. As they came in everyone did give a woman (I'm not sure how she was related) red envelopes filled with money. She gave these to Yan Li, who was holding her purse, and Yan Li collected all the money for her. A boy, about 13, was helping with this too. Yan Li had Freddy, then me, watch her own purse so that people would not see that she had two purses, and know that she was the one collecting money.

One thing that surprised me was that there was so much toasting among the guests. There were no overall toasts, but after most people had finished eating people would move around to different tables to say hello, and maybe toast the whole table, or just the person or people they were talking to. Often men would toast with a small shot of *bai jiu*, showing each other and the company that they had indeed emptied the glass – but the amount could really be quite small. One guy poured a tiny bit from his glass into a tea cup so that the friend could have something to cheer with. Women could use soda, there was both Coke and Sprite, or sometimes they would use a little beer (Yangjing brand). It seems like in China women can drink, but there isn't the same kind of pressure to do so as at home. Here, I think it is seen as better not to drink if you are a woman. Even some men, like Huang Chen, drink very little, just to be social I think.

The amount of food was truly impressive. The waiters must have continually been bringing new dishes for about an hour and a half. The first dishes were sliced meats and candied walnuts, then came meats and fish and vegetables, then sticky rice, little tarts, sweet fried and filled rolls, and finally, slices of watermelon. There was no rice, except for the sweet sticky rice. There was so much food that by the time the deserts started coming the waiters began stacking new dishes on top of the corners of old ones. In the end, people packed up extra food in bags and in boxes to take home.

June 5, 2006

Yan Li invited Mike, Michelle, Aaron, Chris, Aaron's girlfriend Jackie to her house for dinner – all the young Americans. Yan Li's son was there too.

Apparently, Chinese weddings have changed a lot, become strangely Westernized. Aaron and Chris say that people now feel like there ought to be some "authority figure" at a wedding, like the equivalent of a priest, and since their father is a manager of a company people often invite him to be the sort of MC of their weddings – he has done this for 20 or so of his employees. Usually what they ask him to do is to look at the bride and groom's IDs and confirm to the crowd that they really are who they say they are. More traditionally, on the day of a Chinese wedding, the man would first go to the woman's house, where he would eat a meal with the family. They would pray to the ancestors, at the family shrine. Then, the bride and groom would go to his family's house, and pray there too. There would be no kissing.

I think that I definitely understand more than when I left Beijing in January, but it's interesting the way that you learn – slowly, by repeating things lots of times, like having more and more Chinese-style dinners. But, there are also things that you can go forever

for and not notice unless someone tells you. Like, for example, that you ought to get up when a host offers you a drink. The first time I came to China I thought that people were so impolite, but now, in some ways, I think that people are extremely polite, so much more polite, or politeness is so much more complex here. I think also, probably like anywhere, that if people know you as a friend, or you are introduced by a friend, people are automatically much, much more polite to you than were you a stranger.

I read today in "That's Beijing" that people in Beijing are obsessed with Korean soap operas – a guilty pleasure. Korean products/brands are becoming increasingly popular, and there is even Korean plastic surgery. Older people like the very "traditional" values of the shows: young people must listen to their parents, there is not just kissing. But, younger people like the shows too.

June 6 and 7, 2006

Yesterday I kept thinking, "how incredibly different China & Chinese culture is from home." I was really blown away with this thought with everything I saw, walking on the street and it was hot and muggy and polluted, and standing at the curb waiting for the light to turn watching a guy selling hotdogs on sticks unwrapped new ones from opaque packages and put them in the pan to fry, even though no one was buying and he already had 6 or 7 done. I was laughing at myself because this was something Drew said once, I was saying that I was interested in anthropology because I felt like people were more similar than is usually thought, and there are ways that we can learn to understand each other's points of view. I still believe that this is possible, a challenge. But, what Drew countered was that what anthropology was about was not just looking to find the similarities between people and cultures and places, but also the profound differences.

Or, then, I found my way to the Hairun International Condominiums on the other side of the Lido Hotel. I'd walked in front of them before, because that is where the good Jenny Lou's is (foreign goods supermarket), the French bakery, and a bunch of Western-style restaurants. But, I'd thought that this was just because the Holiday Inn Lido was nearby and was such a big hotel for foreigners. Anyways, I read about the Hairun Apartments, and the amenities around them in "That's Beijing". Around the corner, where I had not been before, were two more fancy cafes, a massage place, a two store small mall selling clothes and suitcases (only foreigners it seemed were inside, white women). I went to one of the cafes, Sculpting in Time, which I think is a small Beijing chain – recommended in "That's Beijing". It was lovely. It was like being in a laid back California café, couches, smoothies, stuffed animals for kids to play with, wine racks, high windows with colorful curtains, a long mirror on the wall in the back room. The patrons were also about 50% foreign, so you could quite easily imagine that, indeed, you were spending an afternoon in San Francisco.

At night I had an interesting time talking to Kassu, a Finnish girl, 22, studying for a year at CAFA. Finland sounds so beautiful and peaceful, wild places, clean land, people talking care of each other, crazy ambition not so important, slowness, looking. She was talking about seeing "The DaVinci Code" with her Chinese friends. Which, is mostly about Christianity, its myths, etc. She said that when she was watching it she realized how much background context you needed to have about Christianity to watch the movie in the way it was intended, maybe you could watch it otherwise and enjoy the story, but there would be so many details or small meanings that you would miss. She said her

friends' perceptions of the film seemed really strange. Like, saying, "oh, that part was so scary" when it didn't seem so at all.

Also talking about impressions of Beijing ... we talked about how things seem more possible, crazy, open, but also more dangerous. That maybe here you would live more fully, happily, crazily, but that you'd also be more likely to die sooner. Her saying this made me think that one of the most constant surprises, little shocks, for me here is seeing all kinds of things, all the time, that seem "unsafe". For example, a woman crouching outside on the window ledge up 3 or 4 stories to clean the window, people cramming into an old bus right on the steps in reach of the probably rather faulty door mechanisms, people riding in the back of bicycles as they weave through traffic, not even one bicycle helmet, very few seatbelts in the backseats of taxis and drivers that insist you don't need to wear them, people working on construction sites so directly with their bodies instead of machines, crossing the street – there are always tons of cars that are turning right across the pedestrian lane.

One thing I also realize is how important brands are, especially for certain things. I generally think of myself that I completely don't care what the brand of something is. I think with clothing, this remains true anywhere, I think you can tell the quality by looking and feeling better than by the label. But for other things, particularly things that go onto or into your body I find that I feel a lot more cautious. I bought Nestle cereal over any of the Chinese brands, or in Weston's Drug Store I notice I think only the brand names that I recognize and here I don't trust the others. I bought a brand of cleaning fluid that I don't know, but only because it was quite a bit cheaper than the others, and only after much agony, and how, having it I only feel like using it when really, really necessary. It makes me uncomfortable. But, I never think at all about using my Palmolive dish soap.

Today I went shopping with Yanglian. I bought a thigh-length tunic out of a very light dark blue cloth with buttons down the front and a drawstring at the waist.

We talked about America, Canada, and China. She usually lives in Toronto, where she is waiting for citizenship – one more year – but, her husband works in upstate New York, and she's spent a lot of time there, and also time in New York City. She said that her expectation of what America was before she came turned out to be true – I'm not sure what this expectation was, but it was a positive one. But, that her expectation of Canada was disappointed, in Canada the buildings seemed old, the streets narrow, people unfashionable – though she does like Montreal. She may have been comparing NYC and Toronto, and of course, here the two countries seem quite different! But, if you were to go so many other places in America or Canada the comparison could not be the same. She also said that "maybe it just rubbed off on me" (the idea of the US being better), telling me a story of going with her Chinese friends to Niagara Falls and her friends pointing to the other side of the falls and saying "look, that's America, everything is great, better over there!" This is strange to me because though I can see differences between Canada and America, they are not really physical differences. So, if you put me in a Canadian or American city and I didn't know which country the city or town was in, and if no one would tell me, I'm not sure if I could tell the difference – or, at least, I don't think most Americans could. For me the differences are more like what you hear on the news, a different perspective on America, Canadian politics, and also the health care system (better in Canada), people's attitudes (generally more relaxed and accepting in Canada), and maybe small markers like flag and regional chain stores.

We also went to a Tibetan store that sold jewelry and cloths that Yanglian had remembered from before she left 2 years ago. The owner was really friendly and remembered her. We talked for a long time, he makes and sells computer art – photo collages – he's got a show in Berlin at the moment. He's also making a film about train conductors on old trains in China. His face was very handsome and friendly. Somehow I think that many Tibetan or Xinjiang faces look more familiar than Han faces.

June 8, 2006

I spent 10-2:30 with Linda, filming about 40 minutes. She's a third year student at CAFA. She works really, crazily hard, and drinks 2-5 cups of coffee per day. It's instant coffee, you just mix some hot water in from the hot water dispenser. She's debating whether or not to work first before going to graduate school. To go to graduate school she must pass a written English examination, she says that her professors say that students should spend half their time learning English. You've also got to pass a politics exam. She talks a mile a minute. She was worried about her skin, it getting red and getting pimples and said that the doctor said she should not eat too much meat or spicy food, but she does anyway because she likes both. I think people here comment about others' bodies and their own bodies more. It makes you feel nice, but as though people are *looking* at you more closely.

I had another interesting conversation with Kassu, who, at home, is studying arts education, community arts sort of things. She is trying to do a small photo voice project, giving people in the neighborhood disposable cameras. She gave one camera to two construction workers, but they did not take any photos of where they live – these small sort of barracks. Instead, they went to a nearby park and took photographs of each other in front of monuments.

I asked Kassu to show me the pictures she's taken so far of Beijing, because she had said earlier that when she first came she took a ton of photos, but now they all seemed so boring! To introduce them she said, "You take pictures not of what you find interesting, but of what is easy to shoot." She said that, at first, she took photos not for herself, but to show people back home, other people, the places she had been, what they were like. There indeed were photos of China's flag, a series of big light green and white cabbages, a kind of red blow up banner that stands in front of buildings, a photo from a rickshaw, Tiananmen square, a cluster of messy electrical wires with a skull and bones stenciled on the electrical box, buildings at the Temple of Heaven, a group of old men playing Chinese chess, buildings with clothing hanging to dry in front of them, lights at night, also photos of friends, other foreign students.

June 9, 2006

The sky was very clear last night, you could see the moon and a few stars, and the clouds shifting in front of the moon. The air was relatively fresh, not so dusty, cool and windy. Quiet. The trees, small lights from the playing fields at CAFA, people wandering around in the dark.

June 10, 2006

A futile day in the city centre. I went to see if I could find street food to film, walking south from Dongzhimen, but I lost the route I wanted to go on, and there was lots of road

construction, new, partly empty tall buildings, very few people on the street, hot, sunny, blue sky, dry, hard to breathe air. At a subway station, after ending up at a large grocery store that I'd been to once before, I took the subway to the stop near the Kerry Centre, where I stayed in the winter for a week, and also where there is a mall, which turned out to be totally empty of people and quite expensive, the things no one can afford. Getting off of the subway a young woman's high heel got caught in the already-frayed heel strap of my shoe and it broke. So, on the way to the Kerry Centre, where I had to cross the 3rd ring road twice because of construction, I looked for shoe stores. But, that area is very barren. I did find a clothing store, more local, that had about 10 pairs of shoes. I asked to try on a pair of black cloth sandals with some shiny things on the tops of the feet, but the largest size they had was too small.

In the evening I met Derek and a Japanese man who works for the gallery where his show is. This man is 31 and is very thin. He crosses his legs a lot and is quiet. He asks interesting questions, and plans to stay until 2008. He has been here for about a year. We went to a little, bare dumpling place where men were drinking beer, watching the world cup, eating peanuts. He says that China seems very loud, like in Japan if you want the attention of a waiter in a restaurant you just use your hand, here you must, or ought to, yell.

Later, we went to his apartment, in a nearby building, for coffee – strong, black, made from real ground beans instead of instant powder. The far wall of the main room was completely covered by mirror. The wall opposite had a calligraphy painting, more like a poster in black and white, of running horses and two bunches of colorful fake flowers attached on either side of it. The bottom part of the walls was light green, the top white, with a double-line dark green border bounding the two. Around the top of the back wall of the room were yellow/beige colored cabinets. He said that he liked the room very much and felt very comfortable in it, but that it was quite unlike Japanese apartments. For one thing, such a big apartment would be quite expensive in Japan.

June 11, 2006

You can buy a huge flat screen TV here for about \$2,000 (13,000rmb). Is this the same as at home? You can also get, it seems, any type of cell phone, washing machine, CD player. I went to an electronics store that had multiple levels and lots of very shiny new stuff. Like most places here, there seemed to be about 3 times too many employees, milling around wearing dark blue smock uniforms, not especially aggressively trained in selling electronics. I wonder how people are hired here? How you find out about jobs, etc.

I'm going to film Tiantian tomorrow, a new media student at CAFA who lives nearby with her father. Tiantian is quiet and calm, and seems older than many of the other students, though I don't think she is. She says that she lives a simple life. She studies at school, and says she has a few good friends rather than many, does not have parties, or work on making connections so much, though she thinks this might hurt her career in the future. She also has a boyfriend who is just finishing his master's degree at Qinghua University (China's MIT) in virtual reality. She showed me his photograph and a drawing of a red flower he made for her, and a crocheted heart that she made for him.

Noticeable objects in Beijing:

Large metal thermoses with flowers, or in red
Cigarettes
mantou, dianxin
Sticky rice triangles wrapped in a green leaf
Chopsticks, plain white porcelain spoons
Teapots and small tea cups, plain white
Slippers, usually shower sandals, to wear inside the house
Steamed corn, bananas, cherries, lychees
Bicycle carts, bicycles
Meat kebabs, big green beer bottles, various kinds of peanuts
Steeping loose tea leaves
Workplace uniforms
Water coolers in houses
Bottles of golden cooking oil, mostly huge ones
副 signs, red and gold

At the architecture party yesterday people were saying that Northern Chinese (vs. the southern) have a reputation of being open minded, more accepting of outsiders, foreign things and ways.

June 12, 2006

I filmed Tiantian and her house in the morning. Her boyfriend was there, and they said they had never met a foreigner as shy as me. From my gestures I think. We talked between the filming. Her boyfriend spent a year studying in Germany and compared Chinese and German people – Chinese people are, now, very optimistic about the future, they feel that their children's lives will be much better than their own. In contrast, people in Germany, feel pessimistic, that things will not be as easy or as nice. Hosu (the Japanese man from 11-Art Gallery) said a similar thing. This was that, in Japan, on the train in the morning everyone looks tired, exhausted. But, in China, no matter how early on the bus, people look awake, cheerful, energetic. Tiantian likes to look at Vogue, as a fashion magazine. She likes Vogue because it has interesting articles about the fashion world and about travel, beautiful destinations.

In the afternoon the air was terrible, so polluted. I took closed-window air-conditioned buses around the city, ending up following the perimeter of the 3rd ring road. At night, there was a thunderstorm.

June 13, 2006

Today I smelled:

urine – in the main building of the school as you enter and exit, in the guard towers of the Great Wall

exhaust fumes – thicker and thinner clouds from buses and cars

roasting meat sticks – like hot dogs but with a different smell, at the Lido bus stop

The air *felt* cool and fresh, but it did not smell earthy, like it usually does after a rainstorm. I went to the Great Wall. I took the tourist bus from Qianmen to the Badaling section of the wall. It seemed empty because a lot of the spaces where there could have been small tourist shops were closed and the people selling things were really

hustling, rude if you did not listen sometimes, yelling louder and louder "hello", "lookie-lookie" or once, "hello, hello - hello, I love you". My most surprising impression of the wall was that it, it is steep! It rolls up and down with stairs and slanted bits, watchtowers, incredibly sturdy – though, here, the wall has been restored. I sat next to a friendly woman from Dong Bei on the bus. Li Bau is also from Dong Bei, from Harbin, he has a wife there, and the rest of his family.

Qianmen is as crazy and loud as ever, though not so intimidating, it actually struck me as one of the nicer places I've been this time, tacky but alive and lively. Cheap clothing stores, electric crickets, large old stores for cloth, Chinese medicine. I got caught in a rainstorm, the sky had been waiting all day. I ate one of those long and thick twisted sticks that looks like it is made from the same material as a plain, old-fashioned doughnut. It's texture was a little dry, which I liked, the outside tasted oily, likely better fresher, but I think they can be stored for quite a while given that most vendors have huge stacks of them, more than it seems like you could sell in a day. I bought some traditional shoes, which were very cheap (18RMB), and that really can't be found in regular shoe stores or markets, where cheap-looking shoes seem to range from 65RMB – 300RMB. The shoes I bought, plain black ones, are the kind that seem now to only be worn by female service workers, hotel maids, cleaning women, waitresses, ticket collectors. I like them.

"There is no denying that Badalling is swarming with tourists, and vendors who are convinced that everyone needs a "I Climbed the Great Wall" t-shirt. This is, after all, one of the world's top tourist destinations and you don't come here for serenity, but rather the overwhelming "I am standing on the Great Wall" sensation," (*Lonely Planet*, p. 48).

Joy Natural Beautiful Yourself

As oasis of cotton, wool and linen in a city of spandex and rayon. This brand from Hangzhou is everything Chinese fashion normally isn't: simple, classy and in colors to match the season... (Review in *Insider's Guide*, p. 385).

June 14, 2006

Barry invited me to a party that he was throwing for the foreign students who will be going home soon, and also because he is leaving himself on Saturday to work on a film project. I got there a little late, the apartment was already crazy and dirty, piles of noodle bowls and half-ripped bits of bread on the table, a mixed-punch with vodka, sweet juice, and fruits. Also, a TV with the soccer game, Chinese students I'd mostly met before, and five West Point cadets – Michelle's aunt is taking them on a trip here, they've been studying Chinese for a year. They all seemed very smart, forceful, and young too. I talked to one for a long time about politics and the media, he says that he's "very far right", but disagrees with Fox news, thinks it is terrible news making, believes the Republican party should not pander too far to the religious right. He was also saying that the reason they were in China (given, he'd had a bit to drink) was to "make sure that China and America would not go to war in the future." In his view a war would not erupt over Taiwan, but, if over anything, over Japan. Tensions between China and Japan have been rising over oil in the sea, this part of the ocean has traditionally been Japan's domain, but China has been doing things there. Japan has made a request to reinstate it's military because it is nervous about this. A war between China and America would be bad, but looking at history, whenever a new power has come onto the scene there has been a conflict. I think most of the cadets came from military families, they were

taking about this. But, mostly, among themselves, avoiding politics, the boy I was talking too said that most people at the academy felt that he was too narrow-minded. He thinks Condaleeza Rice is amazing, would vote for her for president, his mother met her at a breakfast for a certain rank of military wives.

June 15, 2006

In the morning I went back to Qianmen. Before I disliked this area, it seemed over built, touristy. It is touristy, but it's one of the places I think now with the most life in the city, chaotic, dirty, loud, fun. I bought some candies with shrimps on their wrappers that taste like peanut butter and look like oblong peppermints. They're crunchy. The candy shop that sold them sold all sorts of candy that I haven't noticed here before. Maybe because it is usually in larger packages, or perhaps because it is not that common. There were things that looked like dried and candied fruit wrapped in clear wrappers. Also, *youtiao* in small packages and larger, with no wrapping; packages of gelatinized colored spongy candy, about a third the size of a deck of cards, but the same shape, rectangular and 3D; those very sugary cakes with lots of little layers that are also small and rectangular; nothing, no brand that I recognized.

I went to a Peking Opera at Chang'An Grand Theatre. The building is big, downtown, new. But, the performance was nearly empty. There were about 30 people watching, and the musicians looked casual, bored, yawned. The stage and set were very simple, scene changes consisted of changing long colored back drops and small sets of furniture. We sat at the front at little tables, where, for this higher ticket price, you were served jasmine tea and a plate of 4 little cakes (*dianxin*). But, the performance was beautiful, delightful! The story was about a royal family, the brave daughter's marriage, a plot to murder her husband, war, traveling to his home, villains. The backdrops were designed to match the costumes, but not in an extremely direct way. The fabrics that were put together were surprising complements. Different sorts of silks, both plain and with patterns. The most beautiful was the first scene with the princess, where the backdrops were different kinds of pinks, and her clothes, her attendants' clothes had bits of pink, as well as pink/red makeup.

June 16, 2006

Lunch with Yanglian.
She paid again.

I saw Aniwar this evening. He says:

The most important thing is to know yourself. Most people spend a lot of time trying to know and understand other people, think of a party as an example. Most people go to parties to try to know other people, but what you really ought to be doing at a party is getting to know yourself.

Art is *not* about the artwork, it is about the artist. The artist should not make art to tell people about something or someone else, the artist can only make art that tells other people about themselves. e.g. a film can never really be a true representation of a situation, all that it can be is a reflection of, a statement about the artist and who they are as a person.

Using your body/heart to think and act rather than using your mind. Usually do you think with your body or with your mind? When do you think with your body? What things can help you to begin to think with your body, to overcome the fear of doing so?

Americans are taught to think about other people, to think about how to get along with other people, to be open-minded. But, Americans very rarely get to know themselves, either as individuals, or as a culture. How can we as Americans begin to know ourselves better? What importance does this have? How might this change the course of things in the world?

Art as a practice of getting to know the self, showing yourself, helping others to learn about themselves.

态度 = attitude, manner

The self that you can get to know is always at the same at the core, but you also can never stop getting to know yourself, you never know yourself with finality because you are constantly changing. Everyday you are different, every morning, or every time, when you wake up you are different. Pay attention to how.

Take 20 minutes each day to listen. Try to listen to the farthest sounds that you can hear.

When you look at a piece of an artist's art, you can understand them, or understand more what kind of person they are. Though, I think that you can't understand the whole person only a certain aspect of them. Perhaps this is their most "pure" aspect, but also it is just perhaps a particular aspect. In any case, it is interesting what aspect becomes apparent because when you are making the piece, you likely don't know what this aspect is that is emerging.

What is the one thing you want to do, accomplish, experience in your life?

June 17, 2006

Crazy day, from one moment/place to the other – the weather was very hot, sky extremely blue, extremely sunny, dry air. I went to visit Yan Li, her house changes with the season. They had drawn the blinds that cover the sun room most of the way past the windows to let less heat and light in, also they had put fans near the sitting areas. Edemame and early small corn-on-the-cob, dumplings filled with "chives", dense and sweet chicken on the bone, tart fresh apricots, sliced red and yellow peppers and small white onions with cilantro, vinegar and chili sauce.

Yan Li wanted to ask me lots of questions about foreign versus Chinese politeness. In particular, she wondered if she was too *rexing* if foreigners would think that she wanted something from them, was angling for something, had an ulterior motive. *rexing* more or less means, giving someone the best foods, helping someone by doing something like buying train tickets for them because it is easy enough for you to stop by the station, giving gifts. I told her that I did not think they would. I think that even if someone was doing these things because they did want something, an American would be much less likely to notice than a Chinese person. Because, in America, I don't think we have such an awareness of doing favors and *needing* to return favors. I think, in America this is

more casual, don't expect things back to such a large extent. We think people "do things out of the kindness of their heart". Yan Li also wanted to know how Eric and I met, whether Americans could work in Canada and Europe freely. She said that she thought that foreigners could just come to Beijing and work, no extra papers needed.

June 18, 2006

I have about 30 bug bites on the front side of my legs in the area around me knees. I think they must be from eating outside with Aniwar at the Greek restaurant, wearing knee socks and a dress, I did not feel them until yesterday, as the day got hotter. I needed to get to Dashanzi from Yan Li's house, and first took a little bus, the kind that are like a van, the first time I've been on one. They said that they went to the light rail station, but actually the stop for it was before the official stop, as the bus turned. I got off and did not see the station, walked towards the bus signs, in front of them was an pedestrian overpass. At the bottom of its stairs someone had lit a long string, maybe 15 or 20 feet long of exploding things, firecrackers? Which, was very strange, to have these in this place that is essentially on the side of a highway, extremely hot day, bright blue sky, dry, like the desert, heat. The firecrackers hadn't finished exploding even when I got on the next bus, blowing up bit by bit from both ends.

July 7, 2006

Overall, my impression of Beijing is of its hugeness, roughness, state of being in transition. The scale of the new buildings and roadways is very large, you often feel as though you are crossing roads the sides of highways, cars coming across the intersection from at least two directions, bicycle riders, maybe two people on one bicycle. Being there is also a very loud, ear-grating experience. Though it is quieter at night, and in parks, it seemed like there was a constant sound of things clanking in construction sites, birds, beginnings of summer insects, traffic. There is a hustling energy in Beijing, an energy of making it for yourself, whether by selling Styrofoam boxes full of steamed corn, teaching and consulting on the side, being young and working late and sleeping little.

A diverse mass of people: Chinese tourists visiting the capital, workers with ruddy sacks, strong bodies, tanned skin, Tibetan woman with bright orange blankets selling jewelry in the shade, quiet. Men in slacks and short-sleeved collar shirts, hanging on to the subway handles, the fans blowing air strongly from the ceiling that smells like there are many people.

The aesthetic of things also seems in transition, awkward, experimental, but in a rapid, do-what-you-can-now way. Plastics, nylon, ugly flower patterns, plain restaurants, clothing made from cheap fabric, uncomfortable high-heeled shoes, dull or light colors, shiny but not distinctive new buildings and offices, brushed, straight, neat black, shiny, hair, Western college-style bars. Part of the experience of being a Westerner there is also *luxury*, bending the rules, smoking and drinking, foot massages, taking taxis, renting any apartment you like, ordering 10 dishes, finishing only 5. Speaking with people who would like to practice their English, words spoken so clearly and nervously, replying to or ignoring the "hellos" as you walk, bafflement, help and kindness.