

Yin-Yang

By Kali Zhou

China is a yin-yang.

I love watching my aunt's hands. They're full of wrinkles with hidden crevices, each line the vestige of a beautiful motion. I'm sure they've been through tough times, but that's a secret too. Her hands are soft but deft, hands made for art but honed by labor. My aunt's hard life is her *yin*, her lovely hands are her *yang*, one cannot exist without the other. She quickly twists a small piece of wire, pulls light pink mesh tights over it, and a petal miraculously appears. All around her quaint and modest home in the outskirts of Beijing, there are vases full of flowers – pink cherry blossoms, white daisies, yellow daffodils – shaped alive by my aunt's hands. How much I've treasured these hands. When I was little, they knit brightly patterned sweaters to keep me warm. As I grew, they crocheted cats and dogs as gifts. Now, these same two hands thrust 2000 Chinese Yuan in mine, possibly more than she could afford to give but enough to let me know that I've grown up now. I want to force it back into her hands, tell her to use it on herself, on her sister who's battling cancer, anyone else but the one person who needs it the least. But that is the Chinese way. Chinese courtesy means to accept it with humble appreciation, but always keep it in my heart, so that one day I can return it in my own way. When I look into the faces of the Chinese, in each I see my aunt, those same supple hands, the same strong, vigorous heart.

China is a yin-yang.

I love the brightness in an orphan boy's eyes. His name is 天多多 (Tian Duo Duo): the sky, so much, so many. So much what? Stars, perhaps. Love, maybe? Joy and perseverance and courage. He has eight toes so they had to amputate his foot. A small blemish in his complexion and his parents left him. Here, at the ChinaCare orphanage, his smile is wider than the sky. At the instant I look into those precious brown eyes, I know: Tian Duo Duo may be crawling now, but one day, he will walk on his own two legs. His *yin* may be his disabled leg, but from that comes his *yang*, his intelligence and will. I reach out, and he grabs my finger. With the other hand, he makes a fist and pumps it up and down in the air as if saying: “加油! Kali, keep fighting!” I promise at that moment to keep fighting, to work hard to achieve my dreams. If a one-year-old Chinese orphan can have such unwavering belief, I can too. Tian Duo Duo has taught me that China may have its blemishes, but beneath them, there is a nation with the strength and audacity to thrive.

China is a yin-yang.

I love the scent of China as I step out of the airport. The air is thick here and the world passes in a haze. Somehow the tangy smoke of cigarettes, the delectable flavor of fried dough, the primal scent of human sweat has all melded into a concoction that one could never forget. And I – standing still – can see the whirl of cars, motorcycles, buses, bicycles, people passing by as if they are the ones that are still – and I as on a merry-go-round – whirl about until all that is still is but a passing blur. It's evening and I'm standing at the top of the Pearl Tower in Shanghai, looking out. In that moment, the lights below me are the throbbing souls of each Chinese man and woman, shining. I think I can almost make out in the distance those familiar narrow alleyways of the past, with mangy street cats strolling down them for their nightly hunt. And the same feeling, a feeling of something, some intangible essence beyond oneself, visits me as I'm at the top of Hua Shan in Xian, finally. I'm barely standing but the surreal vision before me keeps me from buckling. Who knew mountains could build, layer upon layer, centuries upon centuries, toward the heavens? And trees could perch so precariously, so peacefully? Standing here, I too am at peace. The ancient mountains are China's *yin*, the lights it's *yang*, and there's beauty in both old and new.

China is a yin-yang.

Once, China to me was a land of pickpockets and Communism, but now here, I find that it is a land of arching stone mountains, graceful green lakes, and people. Majestic people. People like my aunt and Tian Duo Duo, full of a liveliness and strength that inspires. They go to and fro with dirt upon their skins and talk rowdily with booming voices and gesticulations. And each person is a tiny piece of rice, filling the copious rice bowl called China, a rich bowl of many cultures, languages, and appearances. We may be loud, rude, and at times downright shameless, but underneath that, emanating from every person, is an everlasting love of life. Like a body that dies without its *yin* or *yang*, every part of China - each tree, each billboard, each person, young and old - can be no other way. China is an amalgam of black and white, blending together to form a perfect whole.