China

“When the Chinese feel anxious they say, ‘There is a tiger in my heart.’” --C. Brown.

I.

Peter Hessler is an American who not only served in the Peace Corps in China, but learned the language. When he told a fellow American this the reply was, “You speak mandolin?” Hessler and his wife Leslie wrote that young Chinese women who work in factories are required to live in the factory’s dormitory. Their futures are bleak. They have some of the highest suicide rates in the world.

He tells us the Great Wall cannot be seen from the moon; that the wall is uneven even degraded in portions that he drove. His several books about China are available through our public library.

*Thin ice is only a problem for those who choose to go ice skating. –-Chinese saying.*

II.

“Americans are as ignorant of Confucius as the Chinese are of Jesus,” Pearl Seidenstricker Buck wrote. Her Christian Missionary parents gave her the opportunity to live there although she challenges Christian intolerance of other religions.

When she was no longer welcome in China under the communist regime she said, “You can keep me out of China but you can’t take China out of me.” House of Hope Church on Summit Avenue, in St. Paul, discussed Pearl Buck’s book. For me the sad part of The Good Earth is how the wife helped her husband when times were poor, but he discarded her when she was used-up. I am the ignorant she referred to, but I used to read the Asian American Press because I found it so well-rounded. I’ve read the books of our Viet Nam POWs, Stockdale and John McCain. I attended a Veterans for Peace event and the monthly Viet Nam Roundtable event. Nearly every man I ever dated was a Viet Nam Era veteran. I often cite Kao Kalia Yang’s vignette in The Late Homecomer that neighbors told Yang’s mother she could buy a whole tub of ice cream for what those ice cream trucks that troll our neighborhoods charge. My impressions of the Korean Conflict came from my friend Scottie. He suffered frostbite there and I met the Korean woman he married. The problem is constructing good guy/bad guy, humanity/inhumanity for U.S. soldiers’ involvement in these countries. When we strip people of their identity and their voice they have lost the power to be heard as civilians. The Patient Advocate at the medical center where I worked learned to distinguish one Asian culture from another and not to lump them all together. My own overseas experience and marrying into another culture widened my eyes as well. Being required to learn someone else’s language was humbling. A Hmong bus driver told me the young Hmong want to assimilate to the U.S.A. while their elders want to them keep the Hmong culture alive; not to lose the elders’ language, beliefs and traditions. Language is a bridge to sharing. Neither of my two next door neighbors (Hmong? Viet Namese?) has spoken to me for the nearly ten years I’ve lived there.

*Eat bitter, is Chinese advice for tolerating hard times.*

The contemporary movie, Raise the Red Lantern explains that where the lantern hangs each night is where and which of Chinese man’s wives the master has chosen to sleep with that night. He alerts his other wives which wife he had chosen that night. He chooses women while they are young; discards women when they are old and spent.

She who knows she has enough is rich. –the Tao

III.

“What mattered was my intention, my will to keep trying, always keeps trying, no matter what,” Macalester College Professor Wang Ping wrote in American Visa, available at public libraries. She has written about the Three Gorges Dam along the Yangtze River in China.

The point in life is to know what's enough.  –Gensei.

Wing Young Huie, who lives and works here in Mpls/St. Paul, and is the first American-born of his Chinese family, has recently received an Artist’s grant award for his photographic oeuvre.

*No self-respecting Beijing resident would work in a public toilet. Peter Hessler*

The most spoken language in the world is Chinese since theirs is the largest population in the world. I once asked a young Chinese woman, “Is ‘Suzie’ your Chinese name?” “No,” she said, “Americans cannot pronounce my name.”

*Care about people’s approval and you will be their prisoner. Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching.*

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