San Xia: Three Gorges and
The People's Republic of China

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for my mother, grandmother and Teddi
and for those of you who are a part of this journey,
you know who you are...
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June 5, 2000

In point.

Over there, on the monitor furthest from me, was the Temple of Heaven, a magnificent tribute to China's dynastic past. On another was a big city airport with dusty mural, depicting a historic battle leading to the eventual downfall of the Ming Dynasty. And on the last one was Nancy, relating an experience she had had on my last trip over.

I had been there twice, I think, twice to the People's Republic of China, but maybe more often than that.

The edit session had been long and the dreams were slowly starting to set in. My eyes were teary and red with fatigue. The video of China caused melancholy to overtake my heart.

The machines went into edit, backed up for five seconds and then moved forward to get up to speed. At the precise frame of the edit point, I began to feel a tempo, a speed I had not felt earlier. Suddenly there was
understanding in hindsight, clearness where confusion had once rested, and love where it had not been revealed before.

Centering Dreams

As I lay looking at the ceiling, the bed was bouncing. There had been two plane rides, totaling about sixteen hours a flight. Everything was hard to grasp so I was unable to get to sleep. I had been hoping to fall into dreams, but with my eyes open, I felt as if I was dreaming. I began to wonder if the experiences I was remembering in the places I had been had ever happened to me at all. Time was passing quickly and, to borrow the words of Jack Kerouac, I was off of my thread. Maybe by clearing my mind, I would be able to center myself and come to grips with my reality. So onto the floor I fell, begrudgingly. Zazen was a discipline I knew and occasionally took for granted. I was embarrassed by my lack of discipline, feeling as if I was the worst horse in the zendo. I sat unsuccessfully at first, thinking back.

In China there was laughter. I was holding on tight to my friend, riding over the back tire of his bicycle. At first, I was surprised that it supported me. He was thin, probably weighing only about one hundred and ten pounds and I weighed at least one seventy. Darkness surrounded us, but the streets were alive with many other bicycles. Every now and then the gentle ringing of a bell on another bike would tell us of its closeness, sounding a warning for us to move to the side. Our laughter was spontaneous and every now and then I thought the bike would fall over, slamming us to the ground. James' girl friend, his usual rider, was lighter than he was so I knew my weight had to be something of a strain. And maybe this was what we were laughing about although sometimes I thought it was something else all together. The movement was sensual and slow and the darkness of the night was calming.
Xi'an was hot that night and the moon was not visible. So we rode in the darkness. James spoke beautiful English although he wouldn't admit it. Next month I would be leaving to return home so maybe we were laughing to cover our sadness. But we weren't talking about my leaving that night. James shivered a little from nervousness, guiding the bike, thinking back in the black night to the Cultural Revolution. "My father was a leftist and killed," he said.

I could barely hear him. And, at first, it took me a while to piece together what he had said. Maybe it was because he had not muttered those words in English before; therefore, it was a struggle for him to pronounce them. I didn't respond. I didn't know how to. I just held on tightly as we continued forward, toward a bus stop on Chang 'An Avenue where I would catch bus number three back to my university. It was close to curfew and our night together was about to end.

I reached over and rang the bicycle bell and he giggled a little. "Will you come back to China?" he asked later as we approached the bus stop. I told him that I really didn't know. I had come to China in the hope of discovering answers but as the days had come and gone, each day had only brought more questions. So we laughed some more saying good-bye knowing we would see each other on Sunday if not sooner. He shook my hand and pushed me onto the crowded bus. Then I was off, bumping down the street. The bus seemed out of control.

Then I was falling, back in my room in the United States, in New Orleans, Louisiana, feeling sick from the sixteen hours of flight. Zazening, hoping to get back on my thread and maybe hoping to get a good night's rest. My second trip to China had been different from my first and after thinking about that night on the bicycle, I stared at my ceiling for a long time.
Ni'en Three

I could see the hardwood floors with the sun falling down, reflecting upwards, and casting yellow upon the walls. My mother and grandmother were teaching, leaving me at my aunt and uncle's with my cousins who were like my brothers and sisters. Then the years passed and I was in second grade, getting ready to go out to dinner that evening with my mother and one of her teacher friends. On Transcontinental Drive was a Chinese restaurant that they wanted to try- which was fine with me because I didn't know any better.

The place was dark, with no windows and red tassels hanging everywhere. I remember walking in, looking around, and feeling terrified, falling, with a sickening feeling in my stomach. The shape of the lights with painted courtyards and dragons scared me and the food was unfamiliar and remote. The Coke tasted funny and my mom's friend convinced me that I would enjoy the boneless chicken. All I really wanted was a hamburger which sat safely listed under the "American" section of the menu. I didn't think I could eat so it really didn't matter what I ordered. The pains in my stomach were almost too much to bear and all I really wanted to do was to retreat to the bathroom and rest my head on the cold toilet seat. While they ate yellow looking soup, a flaming pot emerged from the kitchen and was brought to the table next to us. A burning smell filled the restaurant and people ate fanatically while I dreamed of escaping. I was closed in, trapped in the booth, sitting next to a ceramic dragon and a statue of a smiling fat man with a big stomach. Couldn't everybody feel the uncertainty and insecurity of the restaurant?

The rice came with a silver thing with my chicken in it so I ate it. It wasn't bad, mixed with vegetables that were strange looking, soaking in a tasty sauce. But I wanted to see outside, to see the moon or the sun, so I could feel that
something was secure and that there was life somewhere out of this strange, dark restaurant that caused me to be filled with fear. Above me was the lantern with red tassels, reaching down to get me, to lift me off my feet and take me away, perhaps to return me to a place I had come from. And the sight of the red lanterns made me want to cry.

**Horizons**

Grandmother had a blue station wagon and Mom had a red Delta 88 and every year at Thanksgiving one of those cars would carry us to Walt Disney World. Usually one of my cousins would go with us so there would be four of us who made the pilgrimage annually. The drive used to take us two days but in later years, as the interstates became complete, we could make it in a day. The Magic Kingdom would open one or two new rides every year, but that was not the reason we continued to go. We would still have gone no matter what. Sometimes we would stay in one of the Walt Disney World Resort Hotels, but then when my entire family would go, including my aunt and uncle and my five cousins, we would stay at the Holiday Inn right at the entrance. The Inn had reasonable package deals for a family of our size.

Tomorrowland was our favorite because every year it was the land that would change the most. I can remember that when Space Mountain opened we stood in line for hours. The waiting made us afraid, reading all the warning signs posted throughout the line, thinking that we would never live through the experience. The music was exciting and there were RCA signs everywhere since that company had sponsored the rollercoaster through space. And right before we boarded our rocket, one of the astronauts would pull up in his rollercoaster rocket and tell us how this was the most realistic space experience he had had on Earth. We were scared. But we did it anyway and lived to tell about it.
Afterward, we would stumble across Tomorrowland and decide if we were ready to ride it again. I remember two of my cousins once claimed they had ridden it six times in a row. When we had ridden Space Mountain enough, we would crawl across Tomorrowland to the Magic Carpet around the United States, a 360 degree film exhibit. Once we were inside the auditorium, the host or hostess would warn us not to sit on the lean rails because they were not built to support our weight or the weight of our children. Then she would tell us to rest assured because even though we would feel like we were moving, nothing in the theater moved. The lights would dim, the projectors would roll, and we were given a bird's eye view of the United States. We seemed to float and zoom by and across our country. It was all rather disorientating so I would usually walk out sick and would promise not to go back to the film on our many return visits.

Years later the Walt Disney World Resort opened EPCOT Center, a wonderful showcase of countries and communities of tomorrow. I can still remember the excitement we all felt the first time we walked under that huge golf ball called "Spaceship Earth." It was a sensory experience that stimulated every part of our being. World Showcase was my favorite. Around a beautiful lake, the world's countries came together side by side. Some countries had boat rides, but I loved the countries that exhibited movies. Movies at the Disney entertainment resorts were always perfect. The prints were always fresh and the sound was wonderful. It was here that I was first seduced by the landscape of China. In a 360 degree theater modeled after Beijing's Temple of Heaven, the T'ang dynasty poet Li Bai takes the audience through the scenery of modern China. It was the countryside of Guilin, the inspirational landscape of many artists and poets, that convinced me that someday I would have to look at the wonders of China myself. The familiarity of feeling the film caused me to feel was
unsettling the first time I saw it. And each time following, the movie pavilion began to feel like a home away from home, a place that evoked sadness.

**Challenge**

Thinking about college now, it seems as if that experience passed by in a matter a seconds. Sometimes I can remember many difficult assignments and the nights I picked my nails until there was nothing left but pain. But on one rainy night in January, sometime during my sophomore or junior semesters, Matt and I went to the Film Buffs Institute to see one of my favorite films *Ugetsu*. Matt had probably seen every movie there was to see, but he hadn't seen this one so I was really excited about introducing him to a new film, especially a good one.

I could remember when I met Matt. He had long hair and attracted the attention of every girl on campus because of his "artsy" look and demeanor. He reminded me of Bono from U2 and evidently he had been told that many times. He always knew the right thing to say to anybody and he usually meant it. He never lied and didn't really like to think about unnecessary conflict. And I looked up to him, sometimes wishing I were as calm as he was in every day life. We met in a scriptwriting class because he sat in front of me. Every now and then the girl sitting next to me would say something really stupid so Matt would have to turn around to see who had said it.

And one day we were talking about music so I told him I was into Kate Bush. I even went so far as to explain that I had convinced myself at a young age that I was going to marry her. But, I went on, in later years my practice had caused me to examine that high school reverie from the perspective of reality. I don't think he could believe what he was hearing. Who was the stupid one now? The boy who
thought he was going to marry Kate Bush or the girl who said stupid things in the scriptwriting class? We had to write a soap opera and Matt and I were leaders of separate groups. As group leaders, we would meet after class and discuss the progress of our stories for continuity's sake. And from these discussions we became friends. Even though we had very little in common, we never ran out of things to talk about. And for some strange reason, when I first met him, I felt as if I knew everything there was to know about him and I just assumed he knew everything there was to know about me.

We arrived at the screening room about fifteen minutes before the film started so I went to go to the bathroom while Matt paused at the bulletin board to see what was going on. When I walked out of the bathroom, he had a big smile on his face as he pointed out the "Heidelberg in China" program. He asked if I had seen the announcement and I had to admit that I hadn't. According to the poster, the program was new. Students would be selected to go to Xi'an, China, the home of twelve dynasties, to study history, language, and culture. It was a twelve-month program offering fifteen to thirty credit hours. Blood seemed to rush through my weakening veins causing my eyes to squint from the pain. The thought of going excited me. To be away for a while, to look at things from another perspective, these ideas were very appealing. But I wasn't quite sure if the idea was so very appealing because it meant that I was leaving important decisions on hold for a while or because I really wanted to discover the China I had studied about in the history books.

After the film, we went to Cuco's. We discussed the film for hours and then shifted the discussion toward a China experience. Matt was very supportive of my going, pointing out that I had lived and studied in New Orleans for all of my life. He also pointed out that the year had been a time of painful discoveries for me and that looking at it all from a distance could be very beneficial and rejuvenating. I
appreciated his advice and concern and agreed that it was probably suitable for me to go to China so I applied.

Three months later, after I had completed my shift at Sound Warehouse, my mother was still awake when I got home. She handed me the mail. In it was a letter from Heidelberg College congratulating me on my acceptance into their China program. My mother and I were happy, but we both cried. And I was excited and sad, but scared most of all.

**Blackboard**

I would be leaving soon so this would probably be my last formal dreamwork session. I was tired and overwhelmed and feeling somewhat unprepared for the journey. The reality of it all was settling in and suddenly the Global Village had become a very big place.

I saw myself as a young boy, sitting in the classroom, attentive and open, surrounded by my friends. My spine was upright and I remembered the laughter. We laughed through twelve years of school together, reading and writing on the blackboard. In seventh grade we switched to J.V. Fairchild Junior High where most of my friends were athletic, dating, and I was alone. But my friends were still there laughing. Then we moved to Riverdale High School, the land of the rebels living in the myth of Archie and Sabrina. We danced through the halls filled with booze and drugs, learning about existential nausea but together all the same. I had been friends with the same core of people for most of my life.

And the blackboard always changed but what had been written and erased always seemed to linger, to remain. The blackboard was in every room, an integral part of the communications process, black, sturdy, and full of knowledge. Sometimes the desks were constraining and we would slide them across the floor and out of the classroom because it was funny and we could get away with it. And in
between the laughter there was always the silence, a quiet friend taking over, acknowledging my self and everyone else's. I saw it, but went back to the drinking, running out of the work place yelling loudly and waving my arms in the air.

After the twelve years, they all went to L.S.U. I went to Loyola, but the laughter remained and so did the blackboard. I met several great teachers there. Dr. Patricia Green taught me about communications, about television, about an ever-changing technology, and about how to deal with myself. She called herself mother confessor. Sometimes she seemed to like that self-appointed title, but sometimes it seemed to get her down. Dr. Robert Morris taught me that it was possible for even drunk little me to be an intellectual if I set my mind to it. When he wasn't overwhelming me with his extensive vocabulary, he was teaching me about film artists and film history. And then there was Father Jacob Robbins, S.J. passing on an appreciation of silence, discipline, and Christianity through Zen meditation. He would say that he could point to the sun, but that he wasn't the sun. It would be much later that I would realize he was pointing to the part of God that was in each of us and that it was possible to love one's self.

The blackboard was written on, then erased, then re-written on again, but it was always there, a gentle reminder of where I had been, where I was, and where I was going. And when it was erased again, I was standing in the airport crying with my mother. She was the chalk, the eraser, and the blackboard. It was a long silent walk down that corridor after I told her good-bye. Nothing remained but the sound of my heartbeat. The blackboard had been erased and what was about to be written could only be determined by me. But on it were the remains of all that I had been taught. I could see everything and everybody. I could see everything and yet I couldn't see anything at all. But now the chalk and the eraser had been passed on to me. And I was the blackboard where all would be written, and erased, and written again.
"And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, speak to us of children. And he said: Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, And though they are with you yet they belong not to you."

My mother had given me this quote from the literary masterpiece *The Prophet*, which I hadn't opened to read until I had boarded the airplane. It was a cloudy day that morning as I took my last look at Louisiana that I would see for a long time. Some people would say that leaving Louisiana was a step in the right direction, but it wasn't for me. I loved my hometown, I loved New Orleans, and, in spite of all the cloudy politics, I loved Louisiana.

I spent a lonely evening in a cheap hotel near the Los Angeles Airport, where I spent most of the night trying to
avoid lying in the remains of cigarette ash burns. I got up, took my last shower in the United States, and headed for the International Terminal. When I walked in, it looked as if I were looking outward through a magnifying glass. Everything looked minuscule and people were quickly walking here and there, bumping into each other, but perhaps not exactly sure where they were going in such a hurry. I was to meet my party from the University at the Korean Airlines Ticket Terminal and I was right on time. We were to identify each other by the name tags we had been given, something I refused to put on.

Suddenly, as if the crowds had parted, I saw the fearless leader of our group, Dr. Vernon Hu. Standing next to him was a middle-aged woman of Hispanic descent. She had sunglasses on, maybe she was loaded, and seemed disoriented. I introduced myself to Dr. Hu, who did nothing but smile and then walked off. The older lady introduced herself to me as Estella Sanchez Parsons from San Francisco and after she did we both went into hysterics. She couldn't stop laughing and neither could I. A few weeks ago I had gotten in the mail a piece of paper with the participants from Heidelberg University, a group of four people, and finally I was able to identify one of the names with a face.

"I teach elementary school," she said. "And you're a student?"

"Yea, just became a junior, I guess. Why are you going to China?"

"I don't know really."

When she said that, we both went into hysterics, laughing at us, at the airport terminal, at our fearless leader Dr. Hu, and probably at the mere fact that we were going to China.

"And so where are the other two?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think Dr. Hu cares?"

"I don't think so!"
"So what are you studying in school?"
"Communications, television production. But my minor is in Asian studies. So I just thought that after reading about it, I ought to just go and check it out."
"You are so right."

Behind us in line was a couple returning to China for the third time. They were on their way to Hong Kong to do some shopping and then the husband had some business to take care of in some small city called Dali. They loved China very much and seemed envious that we were going to experience the country for the first time as students. "What an opportunity!" they kept on saying as their eyes filled with nostalgia and they recalled various little adventures they had had in the Middle Kingdom.

After obtaining our seat assignments and checking our luggage through to Hong Kong, we had only fifteen minutes left to board the aircraft. The other two persons from our group hadn't shown up and Dr. Hu had gotten separate seating assignments, away from Estella and I. So we sat in the middle, the last aisle before the kitchen, with me sitting on the aisle. Service on the aircraft was incredible. Food, water, drinks, snacks, movies, entertainment, and amid it all, a Korean couple was fucking, sitting right next to Estella and me. And they thought we didn't notice.

Estella was a teacher at an elementary school just south of San Francisco. After finishing up the year of study in Xi'an, she planned to travel extensively in Africa where she had several friends. Her family was originally from El Salvador and had moved to the United States about twenty years ago. She had strong feelings for English as a second language programs and I had a feeling something really traumatic had happened to her during her study of English. Talking about the ESL classes caused tears to well up in her eyes. She would look off, distant, lost in thought. Her skin was dark, full of experience, and seemingly heavy with
sorrow. She found life amusing and it was probably this attitude that allowed us to get along so well.

We had to change planes in Seoul, Korea, which was gearing up for the Olympic games. The airport runways were under construction and there were mounds of dirt piled up everywhere. The airport was rather old. We had landed in the country of “M*A*S*H” only for a brief moment, then on to another plane for the three hour flight into Hong Kong, where we would spend the night before our entrance into China.

We managed to get seating together, our fearless leader sitting on the aisle, then Estella, then me. Next to me was a young American lady, probably about my age. After taking a heavy swallow, I got the nerve to speak to her. "So where are you going?"

"China eventually, sort of wondering if I'm on the right plane though."

"What's the trouble?"

"Well, I was supposed to meet my group in Los Angeles, but they never showed up so I hope to meet up with them in Hong Kong."

"Oh, really, where are you from?"

"Ohio, Heidelberg College."

"Well, I'll be damned, you're supposed to be meeting us. I'm Tommy Marshall from Loyola University in New Orleans and this is Estella."

"Anne McIntire."

"Hey, Dr. Hu, this is Anne McIntire, one of the others from the Heidelberg program."

"Oh, you're Anne McIntire," he said as if coming out of a dream. "What a coincidence to be sitting next to you on the plane."

Estella and I just looked at each other and laughed. Anne continued.

"I thought there were supposed to be four of us."

"The other didn't show up, we guess."
Dr. Hu just laughed. "I remembered on the other plane that the other one, Trang Huang, is meeting us in Hong Kong."

"Oh."

Then suddenly the plane began its descent. And there were lights and buildings, skinny buildings shooting straight up, windows reflecting in water that seemed to be everywhere. There were hills with houses and antennas. Thousands of boats were docked someplace below and the plane went between the city, through the buildings, passing a Coca-Cola sign, then touching down suddenly, as if on an interstate. We had landed in Hong Kong.

**Hong Kong**

The heat of Hong Kong hit us the minute we walked out of the airport.

"Oh, God, the humidity," Estella exclaimed shocked and grasping for breath.

"The moisture is so thick you can cut it with a knife."

"It feels like New Orleans to me."

Dr. Hu just laughed as he seemed to be walking in circles. He was looking for our ride. Suddenly a van skidded to the curbside and Dr. Hu was waving madly. A man walked over, shaking Dr. Hu's hand and hugging him as if he hadn't seen him in years. The two were laughing, talking in a foreign language that sounded Chinese to me. The man was introduced to us, but since he couldn't speak a work of English none of us really knew what to say to him.

He threw the van out into the crowded streets of Hong Kong swerving in and out, honking, talking and laughing. I just hoped he was watching the road. It must have been twelve o'clock midnight, but the city was alive. The sight of the neon lights, the crowded streets, and new smells seemed to make my jet fatigue completely disappear. There were street markets, electronic stores, restaurants
representing all nations, people "dressed to the nines," people dressed in what appeared to be the familiar Mao outfit, all of this passing by outside the van window. Every other car was a Mercedes and it appeared as if all the people were happy, enjoying every second that life had given to them.

After emerging from a tunnel and after a few sharp lefts and rights, we pulled up to a building which we were told was where we would be staying for the night. We were staying on the ninth floor so we each had to take the elevator up, one at a time with our luggage. Anne and Estella would share a room and I would share a room with Trang, who was from Singapore. His plane had arrived early that morning. Dr. Hu laughed. He had thought that Trang was meeting us in Los Angeles.

When I entered the room, he was already in bed. I thought he was sleeping, but he wasn't, for when I walked in, he sat up.

"So you're here. I'm Trang Huang. You must be Tommy Marshall from New Orleans."
"That's me."
"Well, it's nice to meet you finally."

Dr. Hu, Anne, and Estella came in and after all of the introductions we decided that we were too tired to go to bed so we decided to hit the streets. Dr. Hu reminded us that we had to be up early and at the train station by 7:00 am. We would be entering China by train through the port of Guangzhou.

Once I was outside the hotel, my imagination began to soar. Hong Kong was wonderful. It reminded me a lot of New Orleans because it was full of life during late hours of the evening. The people were friendly, talkative, and eager to sell something.

Once we returned to the room, it was hard to get to sleep. Outside the noise was enticing. People were laughing, traffic was moving about, and my mind was racing a mile a minute. Twenty-four hours from now, I would be in
the People's Republic of China, and I didn't speak a word of Chinese, Mandarin nor Cantonese. The train ride would take us through a five-hour excursion through the New Territories and into Guangdong Province. We would have one night in old Canton before traveling to Xi'an by plane.

**Breathing Sensations**

Our small group arrived in Guangzhou, China, late in the evening. Our first night on "Mainland China," the first of many nights, was finally here. As we parted the train, we were calm, but once our feet hit the pavement, we were swept into the quickness and immediacy of the moment. Like waters gushing to a flood, we moved forward, part of a large group, rushing into the darkness that had enveloped our train. Everyone seemed to know where they were going or maybe there was only one place to go. Our group was rushed through customs and rustled through a small gate leading to a dark street. Every now and then cab lights would streak through the darkness to reveal thousands of people talking and moving.

Dr. Hu looked out into the crowd insisting that our contact was going to be there to meet us so we waited while Dr. Hu smiled. Then through the crowd, approaching us as if to hit us, a van cut through the darkness, its lights blinding us. The vehicle stopped at Dr. Hu's feet and he hugged the skinny young lady who emerged from it and greeted us. Our luggage was juicily loaded and our van was enveloped by the night and the crowd. People and bicycles were everywhere, cutting here and there, amazingly never getting hit, but coming frighteningly close. I couldn't see much of Guangzhou. There didn't appear to be any street lights to provide glimpses through the dark. From what I could see of the road, we appeared to be going around and around in a circle on an overpass.
We finally exited and pulled up to what looked like a Hyatt Regency-type hotel, immense with fountains and marble floors in the lobby. The Ocean Hotel stands on Huan Shi Road greeting foreign guests to the People's Republic. The room had a television, radio, air-conditioning, and two phones, one by the toilet. I guess that was for when important business couldn't wait. I had a severe pressure headache. I hoped it was just from exhaustion and would be gone the next morning. Trang gave me some type of sinus medicine he had.

Shortly after our arrival a young porter boy came and turned down the beds and dispensed chocolate. He spoke little English and would not make eye contact with me. My whole head was numb from whatever Trang had given me. When I finally crawled into bed, the room was spinning and the blood was pumping through my eyes. I remembered Dorothy and The Wizard of Oz, that crazy movie I had seen so many times as a young boy. It seemed as if it came on every Easter and it was a ritual for the family to sit and watch it. Black and white then color, it never made much sense to me. I always found the transition somewhat distracting. But it never distracted me enough to keep me from enjoying the movie.

When the sunlight hit my face, it seemed as if I had just fallen asleep. Trang emerged from the shower and told me that we were expected to be at breakfast in about thirty-five minutes. My head was feeling like a boulder, but I was determined to take control of my own body. I had never had sinus problems like this before. I was moving in slow motion. The water was hot and the shampoo provided with the room had a pleasing odor. The soap made me feel cleansed. When I was finally dressed, I began to expect that I could probably make it through the day. We would tour the city of Guangzhou this morning and then take off for Xi'an at one o'clock in the afternoon.
After breakfast, we embarked on a sightseer’s introduction to Guangzhou. Modern Guangzhou was China's ancient Canton. According to tradition, Guangzhou was so named after the five heavenly creatures who fell to earth atop five goats bearing rice stalks. The rice symbolized the blessing of heaven upon the region. Guangzhou is still sometimes referred to as the goat city because of its mystical origins. We visited Yuexiu Park, which has a statue depicting five goats, celebrating the birth of the city.

Our next stop was Liurong Si or the Temple of the Six Banyan Trees. This was my first visit to a Buddhist temple and I was extremely eager and excited. In Fr. Robbins' Chinese history class, as well as in the Zen classes, I had studied and discussed the explosion of Buddhism in ancient China. It was partly because of my fascination with China's religions that I was in China. Just like any tourist traveling to Europe and visiting a Cathedral for the first time, I found the first temple is always the best before a long tirade of chapel indoctrinations. The Temple of the Six Banyan Trees is the modern headquarters of the Guangzhou Buddhist Association so I was expecting to see some hard core stuff.

Our van pulled through the crowd and stopped at the front gate of the temple. Visitors were everywhere and between them were people selling postcards, maps, orange drink, square containers of milk and fruit juices, and black sunflower seeds and offering bicycle spoke repair. The people smiled and tapped us saying things like "two for one" and "very cheap." Trang seemed very unmused, but Estella and I laughed our way into the temple. Dr. Hu decided that we would split up and meet again in about twenty minutes. He had to be kidding. Twenty minutes was not a whole lot of time to spend in the temple but he reminded me that we had a plane to catch in about two hours. And we still had to eat lunch.

The temple was divided into several courtyards. Each had a huge incense pot in the center burning the