

III HINTERLAND

November 22, 1994

Foster awakens at 6:15 am to attend the perfect temperature 104°(?) hot springs. As he undresses and enters the pool before dawn, three young men arrive wearing swimming suits. Soon a middle aged man arrives to also enter the pool naked and exonerate Foster's nudity. Foster borrows some soap and shampoo and departs at dawn. Morning overcast hangs high in the canyon.

At breakfast, Zhang reveals that he is either too busy, in his older years (he is probably 40), or too reluctant to make the five day round trip trudge to Tsemei and instead offers the services of his younger brother for the same wages. The hikers agree to the new arrangement and return to the hospital to repack and consolidate the tent and two full stuff sacks of food for younger Zhang.

Outside the hospital, a ping-pong table constructed out of a four-inch slab of concrete atop a laid stone foundation with a single wooden "net" upon it alleviates the wait for young Zhang while he organizes his things. Six people including the doctor and Mr. Feng take turns competing. Foster and Downs are simply no match for the Chinese, particularly the intimidating heavy set woman who demolishes her opposition with perfectly placed power shots slammed from eight feet behind the table. Concrete provides the perfect medium for a responsive ping-pong table.

Finally, at 10:45 am, they bid farewell to begin the walk, with Mr. Feng carrying a 30 pound bag of oranges on his back and accompanied by his aunt, both of whom travel up-canyon to their family residences at a small village named Xiaoreshui (small hot springs). A mist still hangs in the air intermittently exposing portions of the tree shrouded cliffs, pinnacles, and beautiful waterfalls.

After a couple of miles, the group crosses a suspended bridge which is well built with cable handrails and two or three wide planks to walk upon. Two cables anchor the structure in stone at each end, where occasionally there is a five-pointed star etched into the anchorage. Four more of these bridges span the Bushu between Caoke and today's destination of Jinwo.

Downs is not entirely comfortable crossing the cable bridges, for when three or more people cross at once, the structure gyrates in figure-eight convulsions threatening to toss the pedestrians into the torrent below.

Soon a group of people panning for gold are encountered and introduced as Feng's cousins. Foster and Downs are later introduced to Feng's family in his pleasant little village surrounded by fields in the Bushu River canyon, where they drink tea, pass out cigarettes, photograph the family, and finally bid adieu to Mr. Feng, after thanking him profusely for his assistance.

Another four hours of hiking along the raging Bushu takes the trio further into the canyon, where they are surrounded by 2,000 ft. sheer cliffs with ramparts overflowed by frequent waterfalls. It is beautiful here but absolutely hopeless for conducting paleontological research due to the lack of appropriate exposure and the nature of the sediments. Soon the river bends to reveal further habitation of attractive stone houses with waterwheels. The hikers then traverse a one-mile wide alluvial fan of a major tributary. Simply exploring this immense side canyon would be an interesting endeavor in itself. They continue into a moss carpeted dense forest of thin deciduous trees with abundant lichen ornamenting the



branches (actually a fungus combined with an alga).

Mr. Feng

Eventually, the trio takes a rest stop at another river crossing where stone steps are hewn into a massive boulder. They continue to a point where the Bushu pinches down to pass beneath a large chock-stone boulder at an absolutely tumultuous rate. Off the main trail, there is a tiny precarious cable bridge that crosses 40 feet above the torrent. The trio meets three hunters with rifles and dogs. When asked what they are hunting, they reply, "Anything."



Mr. Feng & Family

Arriving at the tiny village of Jinwo at about 3:40 pm makes it a moderate five hour walk from Caoke. Young Zhang praises Downs and Foster as “fierce” hikers, but they realize Zhang is merely being polite to a couple of worn out old men. Zhang’s friends here in Jinwo provide the

Chinese equivalent to a bed and breakfast. They are an older couple that live in one of only two residences in the narrow canyon’s settlement. The couple has a huge stone oven with three four-foot diameter woks imbedded in the top, no doubt to provide banquet services for large groups. (How many large groups attend Jinwo for banquets per decade?)

That evening the travelers dine on millet, absolutely delicious wild bighorn sheep, and a variety of vegetables, after which hosts and guests sit around a fire in a small room adjacent to the kitchen where burning bamboo occasionally explodes like one-inch firecrackers. Young Zhang informs the Americans that even though they hiked like tigers today, tomorrow will be a 12 hour hike ascending to nearly 10,000 feet in elevation to reach the next place of human habitation. The region to be traversed is very wild. Downs informs Zhang that as they are equipped with a tent and food, it would be no trouble to camp in the forest, but Zhang is adamant and insists they go the distance, particularly because of the bears. He also claims that if the weather is good, Panda may be in the vicinity, and that he saw a tiger in this wilderness last April.

Today it would have been possible to use a pack animal between Caoke to Jinwo, but apparently not on tomorrow’s hike. It is still not clear to either of the Americans why tomorrow’s hike will be difficult or dangerous. Foster’s back is a little sore and Downs’ feet are a little tender from just the five hour walk today. Twelve hours and a 4,000 foot increase in

elevation tomorrow might be stretching their endurance a little, but Zhang insists it’s important to reach human habitation. It is now two days to Tsemei. The trio plans to be walking by earliest dawn into the wilderness. Zhang remarks that it may snow tomorrow.

Zhang also states that there were foreigners on Mt. Gongga Shan this year. Whose expedition could it be?

Downs is first into the guest chambers to arrange his bedding. He has been traveling in China now for six years and is not easily intimidated, but upon noticing the condition of the bed he is absolutely appalled by its slovenly condition! If Foster sees this he’ll have a cow! There’s no place to pitch the tent in the immediate vicinity, and he promises himself not to make this mistake again. The hell with it, sleep on top of the apparently clean coverlet in sleeping bags. Upon unfolding the quilt, a large black spider escapes from a fold into the wall by the head board. Now, what could be contracted in this bed? Scabies, bedbugs, crabs, fleas?

At least this isn’t the habitat of the dreaded and fatal Baringo sand flea. And certainly this can’t be as nerve wracking as sleeping in a side canyon of the Grand Canyon during tarantula migration season, when hundreds of the large heavy arachnids are tromping all over the sleeping bag all night long. (“And you know what was really funny about it?” said Billingsley. “They were all going in the same direction!”) China is also blessed by the absence of caterpillars with silica spicules. In Kenya one night, one of these insects, which resembles the friendly and tactile woolly caterpillar in the U.S., crawled across the face of a young lady in her bungalow to leave numerous spicules embedded in her eyelids. Eventually, the filaments worked their way through her eyelids to abrade her eyeballs. Although doctors were able to extract nearly all of them from the inside of her eyelids, one escaped and penetrated her eye. At this writing a silica spicule is traveling down her optic nerve toward her brain.

Agricultural products are transported by foot from the fields





*Quarry
workers*



*Leaving
Caoke
on foot*

It turns out the bed in Jinwo is infested with nothing, but is merely cramped.

November 23:

Mrs. Li, the proprietress of the abode, awakens the trio at 3:30 am. The two Americans are under the impression they were to be called at 6:00 am, which is raised at breakfast in a discussion by candlelight. Zhang confirms the intended wake-up call and inquires into the current time. When he is informed it is 4:00 am, he looks surprised, exchanges a few unintelligible words with Mrs. Li, and laughs loudly while remarking, "She doesn't run on time because she doesn't own a clock."



Zhang in bamboo forest

Foster finishes breakfast and returns to bed in disgust. For the next two and a half hours Downs remains awake talking with Zhang and Mrs. Li, and drinking tea around the open fire in the next room. He searches his pocket dictionary to decipher precisely what taxa constitute the upcoming wilderness fauna. When pressed about the animals that live in the wilderness Zhang recounts: golden fox, wolf, three kinds of monkeys restricted to the Jinwo region, two taxa of wild sheep, another wild bovid (Takin?), deer, snow leopard (in the highest elevations), and a couple of animals he couldn't remember the Chinese characters for.

Downs presents the impoverished Mrs. Li with a pack of Y20.00 Red Pagoda cigarettes which Zhang informs her cost Y1.00 each. This impresses her greatly and compels her to smoke them sparingly and with great pleasure, as some would enjoy a fine Cuban cigar. At this point Downs requests that Zhang please speak more slowly and distinctly in order to better understand him, and lo and behold! Zhang begins speaking like a Chinese CNN anchor-man! From this point onward he is completely intelligible. Why isn't Zhang the broadcaster in Caoke?!

The trio is on the trail at 6:30 am in the moonlight. The first river crossing, over the furious Bushu on three ice-coated timbers, occurs at first light when it is still basically nighttime. There is the semblance of a handrail, though if one required it for support, he would fall into the freezing waterfall and be swept to his doom. It is probably fortuitous that they can not see the danger clearly.

On the opposite bank, Zhang darts ahead leaving Foster and Downs floundering around the thickly wooded river banks searching for the trail. Dawn is breaking to reveal a primeval forest dripping with lichen. This is allegedly the site of monkeys although none are witnessed.

After ten minutes of hooting and hollering over the roar of the river the trio is again united and continues up the moss laden path to a more difficult crossing. At least the scenery is now visible.

The crossing begins with a Chinese ladder (an eight foot long 10" diameter lodge pole with notches cut into it that leans against a boulder) to ascend to a boulder bar which one traverses to a newly constructed three-timber ice-covered span crossing the river.

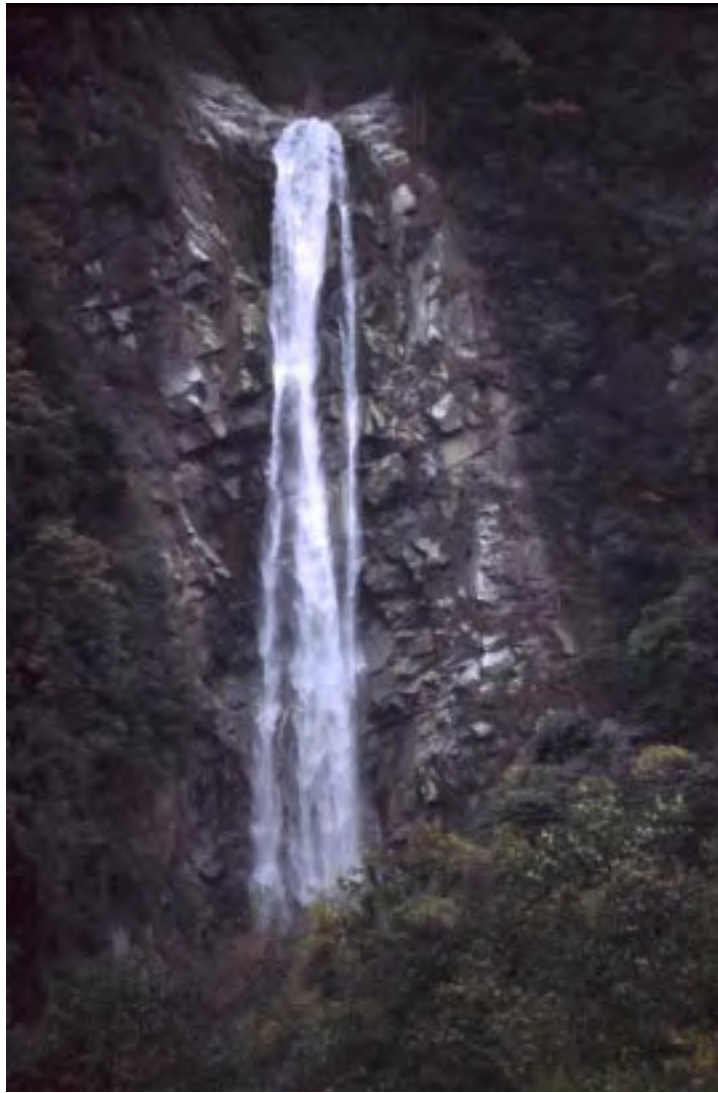
A two-inch green-sapling handrail sags in a very disheartening looking parabola where, at the center, it has sunk to beneath foot level. Zhang veritably skips across the logs, but Downs, admitting his intimidation, sinks to his hands and knees when crossing the center section. (Later, he will cross these structures with alacrity, he just needs practice.) Foster thinks it is difficult but does not humiliate himself as Downs did.*

**Downs believes that much of living life consists of conquering one's fears, and since he is afraid of virtually everything (i.e. climbing precipitous cliffs, turbulent white water, tribesmen with AK-47's pointed at his chest, or exceptionally beautiful women) he conquers a lot of fear. The only beings he is not intimidated by are administrators and executives, for they hold no authority in the natural world. As he has been educated in the respect for true authority, Mother Nature is the only being to whom he plays the sycophant. Additionally, he also maintains that he is a failure in life due to the end results of his efforts. He has nothing to show for his entire life, neither a family or home to call his own. He would prefer, at this point, to find respectable employment, remain at home with a loving wife and raise a family, but is afraid his ensuing kids would probably scare him too much.*

Now on the opposite bank of the river, Zhang extracts a bottle of rocket fuel and presents it to Downs in a congratulatory gesture. (Rocket fuel is not a bad breakfast drink!) As the bottle makes its rounds, Zhang informs the two that normally a toll must be paid to cross this bridge, but because they are such honored foreign guests the likes of which have not been seen before in the canyon, (and also gave the proprietress such fancy smokes,) the toll fee has been rescinded.

He takes another pull on the bottle and passes it to Downs who refuses politely, not wanting to become too intoxicated for the upcoming rest of the day. (Did Downs really think that?). Foster and Zhang continue passing the bottle. This crossing was just recently reconstructed due to a washout by the floods earlier this summer. If this bridge were absent, Zhang states, there would be the delay of an additional 800 foot high climb and an extra two-hour long detour.

It is time to resume. The rocket fuel turns Foster into Astroboy, motivating him to blast high up into the forest leaving Zhang and Downs in his wake. The morning's clouds have scattered to reveal a beautifully clear day. Again they hike through more dense bamboo and deciduous forest but this time with a higher canopy. The trail continues in a regular pattern of climbing several hundred feet and descending 75-100 feet as it traverses river meanders. Foster finally waits for the others before continuing with several tributary crossings. The Bushu itself will not be crossed again until their destination at Tsemei.



High peaks and bare rock ridges come into view as the forest vegetation keeps changing with every bend of the river: now a bamboo forest, now a deciduous one, now it's a different type of bamboo forest, now conifer, now another bamboo. How many varieties of bamboo forests are there!?!?

Toward midday they trek nearly an hour through another fairly dense bamboo forest with new growth, when they notice to the south a high volume waterfall pouring over a low cliff at its confluence with the Bushu.

Zhang claims this to be the site where he witnessed four Panda with young, which sounds a bit suspicious for Pandas are solitary and raise one cub at a time. Nevertheless, the ecosystem here is a perfect Panda niche, and Zhang did indicate a Panda evasion chute just previously. (Pandas use evasion chutes?!) He is probably exaggerating a bit as he has not been disingenuous or prone to creating real falsehoods as yet. At least several days of observation would be required to document the presence of these animals here.

At one point on a return to the river, a 60 foot stairway of laid stone descends to a boulder bar but services no man made structure. Perhaps there is something special here that is unobserved. It is regrettable that there is no time to stop, relax, or explore.

They take a quick lunch at the river where the guide explains that from Jinwo down canyon the river is named the Tianwan, but in its higher reaches it has numerous names, one of which is the Bushu.

Niece



Then back on the march. There is more of the same ... it is all different. There are excellent and beautiful places to camp, but Zhang won't consider it due to his fear of bears. It is late afternoon, when traversing a meander of the river, they enter a distinctly characteristic bamboo forest consisting of large widely spaced four to six foot diameter clumps of mature bamboo stalks which ascend high enough to form a canopy and which is surrounded by a soft carpeting of grass. This is unique and quite special. It would be ideal camping but there is no nearby water. Who would imagine that bamboo forests grow at 10,000 foot elevation? This is rather disconcerting toward paleoenvironmental reconstruction, as will be noted later.

Approaching 5 pm the tired trio reaches a herdsman's camp, but it is unoccupied and they must continue on. At approx. 6:30 pm the troupe finally slogs into an inhabited camp (precisely a 12 hour walk, just as Zhang predicted)

Cabin Interior



to be welcomed by colorfully dressed attractive women with ivory rings in their braids and embellished with necklaces of silver, bone, or glass beads. These are obviously Tibetans, but of course they must simply be nomadic herdspeople and not native to the region as this is still well into Sichuan Province.

The trio is welcomed by an older couple with a 10 year old girl who is undoubtedly their niece and with whom Foster falls platonically in love. First order of business is to erect the tent behind the cabin and corral of Yaks (Yaks!?) where a large vicious dog on a stout chain attempts to attack the hikers. The cold prompts Downs to shed his red army hat for his turban, which is a much more functional headpiece.* When not walking and until they return to lower altitudes, this will be his headgear of preference.

They now break out of the forest to cross three or four timber-bridges that lead to a scrub land covering a wide hanging valley or ancient glacial moraine.

The gradient of the Bushu is now much lower, but there is still a continuous gradual ascent up the valley. Here, where occasional horses graze off the now expanded trail, is the first real view of snow covered peaks. The wilderness area is behind them.

All day the rock exposures have been either vertical or vegetated with those that are exposed representing marine flysch (an uninteresting uniform gray unfossiliferous siltstone).



*This item is a multi-functional square piece of cloth which may be utilized as a scarf, headpiece, sling, tourniquet or for endless other applications. If in a cold wind one corner may be looped under the chin and attached atop to cover the ears. Blowing ones nose in it prior to donning it as a headpiece is not socially acceptable here in the Orient, although it is acceptable in certain parts of Asia. It is not advisable to wear this through U.S. immigration and customs.

They enter a log cabin to be offered Tibetan tea, which consists of yak butter, salt, and black Chinese tea that is blended in a tall bamboo churn. As it is more like a broth, Foster thinks it is not as bad as he has heard described, while Downs thinks that it is fine tasting nourishment and must definitely be good for the constitution. They are also offered yak cheese, which Foster initially believes is bread. He is surprised to find the texture juicy, or somewhat similar to the consistency of mozzarella but with a mildly sharp taste.

Tsamba is then provided to the guests, which is maize or barley flour mixed with tea to create a bread dough and eaten as such. Tsamba and tea provide the staple diet for the entire population on the Tibetan plateau. Downs makes a complete mess of his bowl, (but it is not as embarrassing as when he manually eats couscous,) and is impressed that it is absolutely the most bland fare he's ever put in his mouth. But it is ritual and it would be an affront to refuse it. Presently, they are served absolutely delicious baodzes (baodze singular), which here are stuffed with the meat of wild big-horn sheep.* Several are thrown into the central fire to bake which will preserve them for tomorrow's lunch.

Zhang presents the old woman with cigarettes, herbs, and pills (probably aspirin). In addition to carrying the Americans' supplies, he has been packing herbs, drugs, cigarettes, two quarts of rocket fuel, and other presents for his friends here.

After dinner the matriarch sprinkles a small ladle full of tea over a picture of the Dalai Lama as a small offering. The Americans return to their tent where Foster scribes: "This has been a long but incredible day!" Downs concurs. They sleep comfortably and soundly in the crisp air on the outskirts of the Tibetan Plateau.

November 24:

A heavy frost blankets the morning, but it is warmed by a delicious breakfast of hot chili noodles, after which time is spent socializing while Foster photographs the personage and encampment. Downs presents a pack of Red Pagodas to the grandmother and pays her Y25.00 for the meals. She makes an appreciative gesture to Zhang with the cigarettes and money, suggesting that every time he visits, gifts and funds such as these are presented to her. Foster presents the adorable young niece with his small Swiss army knife. Although the most effective way to ingratiate oneself

into Oriental society is to be generous, the presentation of the knife is a bit excessive, but Foster is entirely enamored with this beautiful nymph, particularly when after viewing the pictures of his children, she gave him a big smile and a double-thumbs-up gesture. The Tibetans speak very little Chinese, preventing Downs from describing his cat.

The travelers depart at 10:00 am after providing a demonstration of collapsing ones bedding and home into their backpacks to the wide-eyed stares of the Tibetan onlookers.

They hike only a short distance in sunlight that is just clearing the high peaks to illuminate the valley when two young boys approach Zhang, and then depart and return with

Zhang's old friends, their parents. Rocket fuel is extracted to celebrate the reunion and all sit down talking and drinking amidst the comfortably arranged boulders of a fluvial outwash.

Zhang complains of his sore shoulders while informing the Americans that pack horses are available for rent here. This subsequently provokes a bargaining session that culminates in a price of Y60.00 for one



*These delicious meat dumplings allow cooks to spice and disguise offensive meat during times of famine. It was not unheard of in distant Chinese history that occasional travelers would be poisoned by an inn's proprietor to be later used as baodze stuffing for future meals to unsuspecting travelers.



On the trail with Zhang

A 12-year-old boy finally arrives with the horse and secures all three loads upon it. The boy's mother provides her son with a provision of tsamba in a woven bag prior to departure, and finally at 1:00 pm, the quartet with the horse departs half stumbling down the trail (after "just one more round, then we really gotta go").

The landscape now changes dramatically. The river flood plain has been completely inundated by gray silt with hundreds of dead trees protruding from it. It is obvious something drastic has occurred which is probably related to the disastrous summer floods of several months ago which caused intense mudslides and destruction in south-west China.

horse and attendant to pack the gear to Tsemei. As far as the Americans are concerned this rental is not necessary, as the horse trails from this point onward are well maintained, facilitating an easy walk. But it would be polite to Zhang to ease his load, and it is a gesture of gratitude to leave some money with these poor nomads.

There is a small village up ahead where a number of women are threshing wheat by the use of a putt-putt engine turned on its head, and which is connected to a thresher by a long conveyor belt. This must be the only gasoline engine in the entire valley. Both the engine and the fuel must have been brought in by pack animals over the 15,400 foot Tsemei La pass.

As it turns out, the owner of the horse is the regional Party Census Taker, and when Downs asks him if he can provide change for a C-note, the official fingers through a wad of large denomination bills (so much for the poor nomad concept). Zhang states he will later introduce the Americans to his friend the regional Party Secretary, who also happens to be the Mayor of Tsemei. These encampments are registered on the Sichuan map as Mogangling.

One more hour to Tsemei proper, which is visible two miles distant, while passing large fortress-like homes built of stone and timber, and occasionally large mounds of rocks inscribed with characters that are not Chinese but resemble a Southeast Asian language (this is no longer China proper, and after all, if it smells like it, looks like it, and feels like it, it probably is Tibet!)

While the horse is fetched, all retire to the family's cabin camp and drink tea, corn whiskey, rocket fuel, and eat tsamba. It becomes a four martini lunch with everyone getting completely shit-faced and engaging in jovial conversation. As were the prior hosts, these are all true Tibetans with the women dressed predominantly in black and festooned with bright red and green, or beautiful shades of maroon. Some wear fur boots, silver earrings, pendants, and large beads.

Threshing wheat





*Drowned trees
in river
flood plain*

What the hell are we doing in Tibet? We're supposed to be in China! Downs is quite aware that formerly, the Chinese government did not want foreigners wandering at liberty around politically sensitive Tibet. The official map however, indicates this region is well into Sichuan Province by 150 miles.

It is another revelation that the wilderness between the bed and breakfast at Jinwo is also a cultural boundary between China and Tibet.

The Bushu river again increases its gradient in a narrow valley when the travelers finally arrive at the village of Tsemei. None of the largest snowy peaks is visible, but there are many high mountains with a sprinkling of snow upon them. Rock exposures are still precipitous. Now there are conspicuous bedding planes and structural features, but the disinteresting marine flysch is still the predominant

matrix. Downs recalls that in some places on the Tibetan Plateau these uninteresting Triassic sediments attain 60,000 feet in thickness!

The gang of four with their horse crosses the Bushu river on a sturdy log bridge to enter a courtyard and unload their luggage.

The boy departs with his horse to stay with family further down the valley, while the others ascend steep steps from within a dark manger to enter a large darkened smoke filled room infiltrated with the musky aroma of incense and resonating with the intonation of chanting Buddhist prayers and bells emanating from a side room. This ambiance inspires the feeling of being in an Indiana Jones movie such that the paleontologist in the trio decides to add a bull-whip to his gear and to start searching for golden idols with ruby eyes instead of continuing his impoverished career solving the enigmas of earth history.

A middle aged and attractive slender faced Tibetan woman offers tea and tsamba to the trio while they allow their eyes to adjust to the firelight and mere shafts of light that enter from the deeply set windows. Most of the fire smoke ascends into an eight-foot-

Family



Livestock often live outside the home

diameter open chimney as firelight illuminates the decor of beautiful dark wood paneling, lengthy two-foot diameter beams, hardwood floorboards, and three foot thick rock walls. It is a veritable fortress.

A 13-year-old girl dressed in western clothes (slacks and a suit coat with a red “Young Pioneer”* scarf) leans upon the sill of the inset window studying Chinese lessons by the light from the recessed window. This is interesting, for while the young one studies, her two elder sisters, who are elegantly garbed in traditional Tibetan costume, card and spin wool.

It is later learned that here, many kilometers from even the closest dirt road, the Mayor’s youngest daughter is also studying English, just as does everyone in school. Hence, she is learning to read and write Chinese in addition to her native Tibetan (which is a member of the Burmese language group and as different from Chinese as German) and she learns English! Education and overpopulation indoctrination are the extent of the Chinese government’s influence upon the region, however there are no Han Chinese that dwell in this valley.



The Mayor’s youngest is also reminiscent of the dedicated children encountered two weeks ago in the remote canyons of the Yangbi River in western Yunnan Province. These children walk 18 miles, traversing two or three thousand foot deep canyons, to attend school for three days every week to study English, among other subjects.



Corn harvest

A handsome middle aged man donning a long brown robe, and speaking Chinese with a very heavy western Sichuan accent enters to be introduced as Mr. Deji, the mayor of Tsemei. The continuous chanting of “Omini-Bomini,” accompanied by the occasional clap of a bell, eventually ceases and, robed in red, an older Buddhist priest and his young disciple enter the large common room.

Tibetan beer is poured in a four-inch diameter red lacquer bowl with a gilt interior of gold and is offered to the travellers. It is flavored much like a flat home brew with a very low alcohol content. By dinner time the assemblage consists of the family matriarch and her three daughters, her husband the Mayor, the two Buddhists, and the three travelers.

The women wear large stone inlaid earrings and have braided red and green yarn into their long hair, which is then strung through ivory rings and wound up on top of their head. Occasionally, there is a long tassel descending down one’s back. The matriarch is appared in a rough leather vest over a raspberry colored sweater, a long brown skirt, and red and blue heavy cloth Tibetan boots. One of the daughters wears green socks and blue Converse-style tennis shoes. Most wear an inexpensive watch (which has long since stopped), and bracelets. One wears a small decorative knife in a silver sheath attached to a silver chain at her waist. The traditionally dressed suspend a cluster of nail clippers (some picture Mickey Mouse) from their belts.



The young disciple has added a black leather motorcycle jacket to his attire, as if he will ride his Harley upon the rays of the sun to enlightenment.

Just prior to dinner, a tall melancholy man dressed in western clothing enters to ask the foreigners for medical assistance with his bedridden seven-year-old son who has fallen off a horse. Shit, they're not doctors, although Foster has had some EMT training. The two extract their first-aid kits and, accompanied by Zhang, head downstairs through the yaks and pigs in the manger, exit the courtyard to cross to the next house, and ascend another flight of steep steps. This house has a floor plan similar to the mayor's house, but lacking in the abundance of material goods.

A young boy lies next to the fire propped up by pillows and covered with blankets. His right ear is encrusted with blood and there are several superficial wounds on his forehead and face.

Foster calls for boiled water and clean cloth. Fortunately, the home contains a bolt of gauze which Foster tears into strips. What a mess. Downs hates the sight of blood and is on the verge of fainting when the father approaches him with a bottle of rocket fuel. After taking a big pull, he is bolstered to join Foster in spreading out their inadequate first-aid supplies.



Young women knit while tending Yaks

Foster washes his hands in the hot water and commences cleaning the encrusted blood off the child's ear. Shit! The ear is still bleeding from internal damage! The nearest hospital is a two-day journey by horse over 15,400 foot Tsemei La pass. The hospital down canyon at Caoke is not an option. The boy appears not to be in any pain, although he does appear a bit frightened by the sight of the hairy foreign devils.

The facial wounds are cleaned and antibiotics applied. The child screams in pain when an alcohol swab touches his bloodied forehead which is an encouraging reaction. Foster displays a state of the art multi-color kids band-aid before placing it across the child's forehead, which

brings out a slight smile from the child. The medics don't dare prescribe any drugs.

Foster and Downs discuss the situation and with the aid of Zhang inform the father that they cannot stop the bleeding. The father, through Zhang's interpretation, asks how bad the damage could be, and Downs replies that the child could become permanently deaf in his right ear, which the father shrugs off as nothing. Of course this would be a best-case scenario. At worst the child could die this evening from basic cranial damage or cerebral hemorrhaging.



Foster & Zhang

Foster stresses that it is essential the ear be kept clean to avoid infection and that the parents must stay up all night with the child as long as the bleeding continues and with sterilized hands they must keep the ear clean. With the help of his dictionary Downs conveys the concept of infection to Zhang, who takes the theme further by suggesting to the father that after the ear is cleaned, the parents should ream its circumference with rocket fuel as an antiseptic. The travelers feel helpless and depressed that they can do no more. The father tries to press some money into Downs' hands who adamantly refuses to take it, and the saddened trio returns to the mayor's house.

There is a long dinner awaiting which consists of rice (which is rare here), greens, a stew, and too much to drink. This

is the last night with Zhang, who heralds the Chinese proverb that "three days on the road together creates a lifelong friendship."

Prior to dinner, Downs unpacks his Dom Perignon of rocket fuel he purchased at Caoke, and pours a round for the hosts. (After seeing the label the elderly priest also requests to partake.). Then, corn whiskey is poured and later ginseng wine (at 80 proof, it is one of Downs' favorite). The women do not drink, but sit quietly talking and knitting among themselves until the meal is served.

After dinner, various types of snuff are offered. Prior to inhaling it, the snuff is placed in the small pocket made by curving ones index finger around the distal end of the thumbnail. One snuffbrand, which is the favorite of the matriarch, is from India and consists predominantly of camphor. Downs inhales too much and, as if he had eaten too much wasabe, tears stream down his face, to the laughter of the others, which prompts him to wait a while before requesting more.

A mixture of Tibetan and thickly accented Chinese is spoken among the locals. At one point Downs catches bits of conversation about a 175 pound wolf. The matriarch claims to have seen snow leopard in the region this year. (How genuine is all this wildlife?)



Later, there is a discussion regarding the next day's acquisition of one of the Mayor's horses to pack gear to the Gongga Shan Monastery, and a price is agreed upon. The young Buddhist disciple informs the Americans that the monastery is still inhabited and very active, and that the Lama is minimally conversant in Chinese. The Mayor states that he will send his wife with the two hikers to introduce them to the Lama, which will continue to link the chain of introductions for them.

The Americans then take Zhang aside to settle their account with him, which amounts to Y150.00 plus 50.00 gratuity. He has been an invaluable guide, good company, and a fine friend who carried a third of their load. As he is completely out of cigarettes now, Downs presses his last pack of Red Pagodas into Zhang's palms which he does not refuse for a third time. Foster gives him two pens, one for himself and one for the boy who led the horse, with an additional Y5.00 gratuity for the boy.

Zhang then departs to visit the family next door to evaluate the condition of the hurt child, and upon returning states that the bleeding has now stopped. It appears the child will recover.

Zhang and his older brother are a vital cultural link between the Tibetans here and the Han Chinese down canyon. How long these families have interacted with mutual assistance is anyone's guess, and it is indeed heartening to see friendship and cooperation between the populations. Media, independent personal reports, and historical accounts generally depict these two cultures in a virtual state of war, which is genuinely not the situation here.

China subjugated Tibet under its sphere of influence in the Tang Dynasty (approximately 600-900 AD) and has since not expanded its borders.*



Tibet, recognized as part of the Chinese dominion (but with a degree of autonomy) for over a millenia, has no more right of succession than does Texas from the United States (although many would similarly argue this to be beneficial).

Currently, it is fashionable to believe that the government of China is in the midst of an official pogrom to subsume Tibetan culture. If this were true, then instead of recently expending the equivalent of millions of dollars to renovate the Potala Palace in Lhasa, the Chinese government would have destroyed it, or left it to degenerate on its own.

The political and cultural conflicts between these two societies will eventually be solved between themselves, and not by New Age fanatics in southern California sporting "Free Tibet" bumper stickers. These bumper stickers are so offensive to Downs that he aspires to create one proclaiming "Fuck Tibet" just to irritate a new age bliss nunny in his car. This would be safe enough, as it is not equivalent to displaying a potentially hazardous "Fuck the Aryan Nation" bumper sticker.

This evening the guests in Tsemei are provided individual sleeping accommodations of animal skins and heavy blankets on the floor of the common room, and they retire wondering when they will ever use their sleeping bags on this endeavor. Others in the household stay up very late knitting and socializing. The blankets are heavy and warm but the floor is hard.

It must have been after 1:00 am when Downs awoke briefly to observe the standing silhouette of the mayor's oldest daughter, the only one still awake, spinning wool with a spindle whorl by the light of a dying fire. It then becomes a restful night's sleep.

*An exception is the 1980 Vietnam incident, in which the territory was restored to Vietnam, and the war with India which was due to the arbitrary drawing of India's borders by the British Raj, provoking the Chinese to reestablish their Tang Dynasty boundary in the 1950's.