

Thirty Days in China

By H. Tracy Hall

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Like all communist countries, 95% of the Chinese population is controlled by a privileged class of people, namely the Communist Party Members. Only a small segment of the population is allowed to belong to the party. Communist dictators have discovered that about 5% of the privileged can effectively control the lives of the underprivileged. The party owns and controls everything including the land, the buildings and the factories, and the best jobs go to the communist elite.

Nepotism abounds. If the top official is the director of some institution, you can be sure that his wife is the deputy. "Perks" go along with these jobs. Government vehicles are also used for private use and the communist have special privileges at the stores. In China this is accomplished by having two types of money. The "People's Money" for the 95% underclass cannot be used at the higher-class stores and has value only inside of China. The FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificate) money can be used outside of China and can be exchanged for U.S. dollars and other foreign currencies. This makes it possible for the ruling class to put FEC money in Swiss banks etc. Loyalty to the hierarchy is of course, maintained by the better jobs and perks that party members have over what the common man is given.

One person, a "Captain", is the watchdog over about 20 people. One thing that he does is see to it that parents have only one child. The people that we met generally resented this restriction. If a woman becomes pregnant with a second child, she is forced to have an abortion. On the farms they may have two children. If you have twins, you are lucky and do not have to kill one of them. However the strong Chinese preference for male children does lead to some dastardly deeds such as the killing of a female baby.

In this respect, a recent Reader's Digest article has detailed the tragic results of China's one child only policy.

If you somehow escape your captain's notice and have more than one child you are in serious trouble and may be fined and even lose your job. Getting a new job may be next to impossible.

China's population is enormous. One quarter of the world's total population (1.2 billion people) live in China.

As an aside, the subject of the AIDS disease came up in one conversation where there were three Chinese men and three Chinese women present, and Ida-Rose asked if AIDS had reached China. The answer was, "yes". Ida-Rose then said, "Well you know how to keep from getting it don't you? You do not have sex before marriage and you remain faithful to your spouse after marriage. Our church teaches that."

In one voice, the Chinese incredulously exclaimed, "What, no sex before marriage!" So there are many pre-marriage pregnancies.

Thirteen and 14 year old marriages are common in the rural areas of China. This is also true in the communist countries of Zimbabwe (where Ida-Rose and Tracy served their mission) except that girl babies are highly favored because of the labolla tradition (buying the bride). Tribal rules preclude marriage before the labolla is fully paid. It sometimes takes twenty years for the father to pay-off his father-in-law and by then the couple may have a

dozen children. There is a further difference in Zimbabwe in that polygamy is still practiced there.

In addition to overseeing the “One Child Only” policy, the captain oversees all of the policies that the underclass is to carry out. As an example, my interpreter and his wife wanted to invite Ida-Rose and me to their apartment for dinner. But he had to ask his captain if this was all right. The captain said no, because we were foreigners. My interpreter felt very bad about the decision and expressed his deep regrets to us but there was nothing that he could do about it. There was no appeal from the captain’s decision.

China does not have an independent judicial system! There are no judges, no juries and no lawyers. There can be no such thing as a lawsuit. Criminal activity is handled by the communist police force and the 4,000,000 man-woman army. The policemen, customs agents and army personnel are primarily young people. I would estimate the average age of such personnel at about 25 years. Additionally, their educational level is usually low.

It is actually difficult to get into the 4,000,000 Chinese Man-Woman army. Exceptional physical prowess is absolutely necessary as well as extreme loyalty to the party, but there is no literacy requirement.

The Chinese people are a beautiful people and they look younger than their years. In this connection, the first question that a Chinese person will ask is, “how old are you” and their second question is “how much money do you make?” We always tried to duck the second question because the salary of a technical engineer is only \$12 U.S. dollars per month!

The People are generally clean and neat, particularly the women who are quite petite. You wonder how they do it because soap is almost unknown. There are only two soap factories in the country. Dishes are wiped off with a cold wet rag that may have been previously used on the floor. At meal times in our hotel we surreptitiously wiped off our chopstick and dishes under the table with baby wipes, hoping that no one would see us. One day, however, some Japanese engineers sat at our table and then took out some baby wipes and used them in front of everybody. From that day forth we did the same. The Chinese didn’t seem to mind.

Chinese toilets are interesting to say the least. They are just a hole in the floor or alternatively, just a trench to squat over. The Chinese have no trouble at using such facilities because they spend a great deal of their time talking or resting in a squatting position.

But for Westerners, this makes problems. We once went to a public pay toilet expecting to find better facilities, but the lavatory equipment was the same except that they were collecting the liquid and solid refuse to sell to farmers. You can always locate a toilet in a Chinese building. Just follow your nose!

There is no potable water in China. To take care of this problem, people drink tea made from boiling water. If you can afford it, you also drink Coca Cola which comes in aluminum cans just like in the USA. Coke and other carbonated drinks also come in reusable bottles but you avoid buying it in these containers because of what you expect the bottle cleaning process is like, and in addition the bottle cap does not often seal very well. We have seen green mold under the caps of some bottles.

When I was very young, my father told me to never drink Coca Cola because it was not good for me. So I never did; that is, until I went to China. I hope Dad will forgive me. Sometimes, we could get an orange drink.

Hotels and trains provide you with two large thermos jugs containing near boiling water. They are provided in order to make tea, about the only liquid consumed by the Chinese. We used the hot water to make hot chocolate and Lipton's chicken noodle soup. We also would pour the hot water into another container to cool but this water had a very bad taste.

Speaking of trains, we had two train rides; one from Beijing to Zheng Zhou where we were located. The "Institute of Abrasives and Grinding" was located in this city. Pronounce it "Chen Cho". I had been invited to come to Zheng Zhou by the government to lecture in the field of my specialty in high pressure, high temperature and diamond synthesis. The Chinese government paid all of my expenses and some of Ida-Rose's.

Getting back to the train, it took 12 hours to travel from Beijing to Zheng Zhou. We traveled first class. First class compartments are all sleepers and carry four people, three of them not necessarily of your choosing. Two lower seats face each other and each has a bunk above the lower seats that also double as a bunk. When a person leaves the compartment another may use it at a later station stop. Modesty is rather informal in these compartments so we chose to sleep with our clothes on. Our second first class ride lasted for 17 hours (Zheng Zhou to Shanghai). China's trains despite the lack of amenities do run on time. Move over Amtrack!

The Chinese people, in spite of having a very low standard of living compared to the USA seem very happy. They smile a lot and are generally very friendly. Ida-Rose and I may have been the only two westerners in Zheng Zhou which has a population of about one million people. This city is quite a distance a way from the beaten tourist path. We never saw a single westerner on the streets beside ourselves.

On Sunday, September 18th, I left our "Old White Dove Hotel" at about 9:00 AM with my Cannon Sure Shot camera to take some pictures of some streets scenes. The Chinese work six days per week and Sunday is their big holiday. So people would be out in force with their bicycles. Often father is pedaling, mother is riding "side-saddle" on the rear fender and baby is riding on the handlebars. It was a very dull overcast day with a chilly wind. There was hardly enough light to take a picture with the 100 speed film that was in my camera. I walked down to the corner, crossed the street and started taking some pictures. I saw a fairly new diesel tractor – actually the newest one I had seen parked on the side of the road. Most of them are so run down that you wonder that they work at all. This seems to be the general characteristic of third world countries. Nothing is ever repaired. Equipment is just used until it quits working. Behind this newer tractor was a load of coarse, grey limestone aggregate. I would guess that the crushed stone weighed three tons. I examined the tractors engine as best I could as there was a shroud hiding the engine.

Although today is Sunday, we have no place to go to church but have heard there are a few members in Beijing meeting in a home.

Our travel guide book told us not to take any church literature to China so we didn't. In retrospect, however, I doubt that we would have gotten into any kind of trouble. Our bags were not examined by Chinese customs on entering or on leaving the country. They would have probably ignored a Book of Mormon but would have confiscated a Bible.

A word about our White Dove Hotel. By American standards it would have been about 3rd or 4th rate. This hotel was owned by the Zhengzhou Abrasives and Grinding Institute. Most experts such as myself would be housed at this hotel. It provides limited maid service and all of your meals. The food is genuine Chinese and is rather hard to

stomach. The sanitation is poor and the food is unusual. Ida-Rose and I both lost five pounds during our stay because there was little that we felt like eating. How we longed for a Big Mac!

Incidentally there is a second, newer White Dove Hotel located about twenty walking minutes from our hotel. The following is taken from Ida-Rose's diary of September 18th. "As mentioned above, Tracy said that he was going out to take some pictures. It was about 11:00 AM; I was lying on the bed and drifted off to sleep. About noon, I woke up and wondered where Tracy was. I was surprised that he hadn't come back for lunch as he said he would. The attendant knocked on the door and indicated that it was time to eat. Not a soul speaks English at the hotel so they indicate that a meal is ready by shoveling a hand several times towards their mouth. Before going to lunch, I walked down to the corner and looked for Tracy—no Tracy! So, I went back to the dining room to eat. Getting more nervous and worried all the time, I finished eating and went back to our room and prayed for his safety."

Meanwhile, you will recall that I had gone out on my own to take pictures of some street scenes and was examining a tractor parked by the side of the road. Its shroud made it impossible to get a good look at the engine, but from what I could see, it appeared to be a single cylinder device—probably about ten-horse power. The horizontal piston lines up with the direction of vehicle travel. The flywheel is very heavy and is about 18 inches in diameter. It is grooved for a multiple-pulley, belt drive which goes to the gear box. The engine is cooled by a water jacket but there is no radiator. Water just boils off as the engine is operated and is replenished from time to time. It is very similar in design to an irrigation pump engine that I examined on a farm in Marriott, Utah back in 1927. The tractor had a small 3-point hitch similar to that on an American tractor. Also, the rear wheels were larger in diameter than the front. I took a picture. Then I wandered in and out of several small stores along a side street. There were several plumbing shops and one automobile parts store with a very small selection of parts. The last plumbing shop that I went in had a very friendly man in it. With gestures, he invited me in, stood up and gave me his stool to sit on. He could, of course speak no English and I could speak no Chinese, but even so, we felt a kinship in the human race. I pointed to my camera and motioned for him to go behind his small counter. After some hesitation, he did and I took his picture. Cameras in this part of China are almost as scarce as westerners.

He then motioned for me to follow him out of the store and led me to his small home which was behind the store. His grown son was sitting on the edge of the bed smoking a cigarette and watching TV on which Ancient Chinese characters in armor were beating each other over the head with big swords and axes.

The father motioned for me to sit on the bed also and watch the TV, so I did. I was then offered a cigarette which I declined as politely as I could in sign language. The father then went out of the room. At this moment, the deadly show on TV reminded me that I had \$2000 dollars in \$100 bills and \$2000 in travelers checks as well as both our passports in the money belt around my waist under my clothing. So I beat a hasty retreat in what I hoped was polite body language. Both men caught up with me before leaving the path to their home, but I kept on going, turning a couple of times to bow slightly in departing.

You may wonder why I had \$2000 in my money belt. Well, to my surprise, shortly after our arrival, the Chinese government reimbursed me for my airfare in cash rather than with a check. As soon as possible, we went to a bank to have this money converted into traveler's cheques. We found however, that the banks in Zhengzhou do not issue travelers

cheques. Banks and stores gladly exchange U.S. Travelers cheques for Chinese currency but are not empowered to issue travelers cheques of any kind. Consequently, I was stuck with carrying this money around until we returned to Provo. One other thing worried me concerning these one hundred dollar bills. The Russians and Chinese reputedly forge our U.S. paper currency. On return to Provo, however, Zion's bank accepted the bills as genuine.

After leaving the plumber and his son, I hopped across a small open sewer and hastened onward to the next group of shops. These little shops display their wares outside their place. I passed a mirror shop, a window glass store and a corrugated concrete roof shop.

I need to tell you something about the corrugated roofing. It reminded me of similar products used in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Our EPA bureaucracy wields a tyrannical hand over business and all American citizens. If a pound of something will kill a mouse we can't use a speck of it. I am speaking in this case about asbestos. This is a wonderful mineral fiber for which no adequate substitute has been found. The only people who have died from asbestos lung disease are persons who smoke and have worked in an asbestos factory for more than 20 years. Non-smokers don't get the disease. If asbestos is mixed with Portland cement, along with sand and water, a concrete is formed which is extraordinarily strong because of the reinforcing action of the strong inert, fireproof, thermally insulating, microscopically fine hollow fibers which tie the cement particles together. This enables the cement to be cast in thin sections and still remain remarkably strong. Third world countries such as China, do not have an EPA and thus use this inexpensive material to great advantage in housing and industrial construction. It is particularly useful as a lightweight, nearly indestructible roofing material that will last several lifetimes. We should still be using it in the USA.

Well, continuing down the street, I took pictures of electric trolleys, and unusual electric power line transformer and some man-pulled two wheeled carts with long lengths of heavy iron pipes on them. Then I came to the Exhibit building of the China Abrasives industry. I had passed this building everyday as my driver was taking me to my continuing lectures at the Zhengzhou Abrasives Institute Laboratory and wondered what might be in it. However, this rather new building had large Venetian blinds covering its huge plate glass windows and I could not see inside. On rounding the corner to the left, I encountered a taxi parked on the sidewalk. There was a driver in the front seat and another man sitting in the back. They both motioned for me to get in along side of the driver. Neither man spoke English, but were very friendly offering me a cigarette as is customary. It is amazing that when third world countries get a little progress and begin to earn ten cents an hour or so, that they take up two expensive (for them) bad habits. They start drinking Coca-Cola and smoking cigarettes. The Coke, because of its high phosphoric acid content, eats their dentine away leading to tooth decay. The cigarettes give them heart and lung disease.

I never got fully into the front seat of the Taxi. Because of my experience with the plumber, I sat sidesaddle with my legs and feet hanging out the door. The driver kept motioning for me to get fully in and go for a drive so I eventually go out and walked away.

I never took a picture of the Exhibit building and the New Dove hotel that I found to be adjacent to it. The top brass from the Institute and its adjoining factory had taken Ida-Rose and I to this hotel for lunch about a week ago.

I should mention that the Grinding Wheel Factory No. 2 adjoining the institute is huge. It is one square kilometer (about one half square mile) in area and employs 6,800

people. They have at least six grinding wheel factories and they name them by the numbers; i.e. Grinding Wheel Factory No. 1, Grinding Wheel Factory No. 2, Grinding Wheel Factory No. 3. etc.

Oh, I must tell you of a satisfaction (maybe pride) that came to me on our Chinese visit. I learned that there are more than 700 Cubic Presses at work in China manufacturing industrial diamond. I had no idea! I would have guessed maybe a half dozen. The cubic press is one of my two inventions that can make diamond. The other is the Belt Press that I invented for General Electric. Early on, GE licensed DeBeers to use my Belt Press for 25 million dollars. General Electric and DeBeers, together have manufactured over 25 billion dollars worth of industrial diamond in my Belt Press. I never received anything beyond my GE salary for this invention.

Ida-Rose knew the “lay of the land” much better than I because she and her interpreter, Mrs. Yong, would be out walking or driving around (when an institute car was free), or taking a bus somewhere while I was at work. Without any mountains for me to tell directions by, I did not know what was east, north, west or south. But down this road on both sides of the street there were about a dozen small grinding wheel and abrasive shops. I poked my nose into every one of them. Some of them were actually manufacturing wheels on a small scale. Others were merely selling them. These shops reminded me of East Los Angeles because of the Mural-like paintings on the building in vivid bold colors. Yes, there was even a little graffiti too. I took more pictures.

Then I crossed the street to the other side opposite the new Dove hotel, stopping in the middle of the street to get some shots of an overloaded trolley where people were hanging on to the outside of the car. Then I took pictures of the abrasive shops on this side of the street. In the process, I came across an old brownish, dirty motorcycle, which had a sidecar. I looked over its engine. It was a “two-banger” with opposed cylinders lying crosswise to the frame. I took a picture of it and moved on towards the corner opposite of the Grinding Exhibit building where there were some open air fruit peddlers.

A man was opening up an elongated cantaloupe type of melon and selling slices to passersby. I had previously seen this melon at another fruit stand and, being an avid cantaloupe grower, was quite interested in this different variety. I was about to buy a slice, but knowing the health risk, decided that I would not. Anyway, it was time for me to head for the old Dove Hotel for lunch. I reasoned that I would buy a whole one later so that we could wash it before cutting and eating it.

Then, just as I turned to go, someone laid a firm grip on my upper left arm. It was a Communist policeman and I was being arrested! He had three gold stripes on his cuff, a red lapel on his khaki coat, shoulder boards, brass buttons, a visor hat and other paraphernalia to indicate his authority, but if he had a gun, it was concealed. He pulled me away from the fruit stand and marched me down the street while gesticulating wildly with his free hand and talking loudly. I could not understand a word he said and he obviously did not speak any English. A crowd quickly gathered and began to follow us. I did not have the foggiest notion why this uniformed boy (I don't think he was over 20) was taking me away. I was afraid to offer much resistance but did hold back a little so that he had to force me along. He continued to shout wildly and wave his free arm both at me and the crowd. I gathered that he was telling them about some terrible crime that I had committed. I kept asking him what was the matter and also started shouting at the crowd asking if anyone spoke English. No one did. As the crowd now surrounded us, the policeman stopped and released his grip on my

arm. He pointed to my camera. This gave me my first inkling of the problem. I had no doubt, taken a picture of something forbidden. However, I could not imagine any of them being a threat to China's national security. I offered my camera to him but he did not take it. I was about to open it to take out the film and expose it to light to destroy any photo that could have been taboo. But I changed my mind and didn't. Then the officer pulled out two passport type documents fastened to a chain around his neck. One was red and the other was white. He then gestured for me to produce similar documents. As you know, I had both of our passports, along with \$4,000 in cash and travelers cheques in my money belt next to my skin around my waist. I knew that he wanted my passport but I could not have taken it out without him discovering the money. That amount of money would have been like millions of dollars to him and the crowd. I could imagine a number of horrible things that might happen if the money were discovered. This young man had probably never in his life seen an American. The evening before my arrest, there had been an anti-American, Chinese TV show about the CIA and the US military. He probably saw it and envisioned a big promotion for himself for catching CIA agent Tracy Hall red-handed. I played dumb and never made any move to retrieve the money belt.

Next, I was again gripped by my arm and steered across the street to the New Dove Hotel. We entered and encountered three pretty Chinese girls who were the receptionists. The reception room was small. There was a great deal of talk between the officer and the girls. A chair was provided, next to the girls for me to sit in. I sat. None of the girls spoke of understood English. Then I remembered that sometimes people can read and write English but can't speak it. So, I took out one of the "three-by-five" cards that I always carry in my shirt or coat pocket and wrote the following, "I am a guest of the Hennan Provincial Government. I am Dr. H. Tracy Hall, a Professor at Brigham Young University in the USA. I am lecturing at the Zhengzhou Abrasives and Grinding Institute and I reside at the other Dove Hotel." The girls couldn't read it so they took it to others working at the hotel but to my dismay, no one else could read it either. Meanwhile I was engaged in a lot of silent prayer.

Many people walked right past me in and out of the hotel. I asked every one going by if they understood English. Not a soul did. The girls and the policeman continued to talk and at times small crowds would gather in the lobby. The policeman would wave his arms and shout loudly to them, obviously about me. At one point the girls and the officer walked out the front door of the hotel onto the stair's top landing where the officer with much animation and loud talk was pointing across the street. I could not see what they were pointing at from where I sat. Incidentally, I had checked my watch when they sat me down. It was 11:30 AM. I was now 12:30 PM and he had kept up his dramatics all this time. At times the girls seemed to be laughing at the officer. He would then take them out the door again and point across the street. When the girls laughed, he would shout louder and become even more dramatic. I knew that Ida-Rose at the Old Dove hotel would now be very worried since I should have been home for lunch by noon.

I wondered then and still wonder now, why the policeman was keeping me at the hotel. He made no phone calls nor did he send out any messenger. But the girls started to try to get someone on the phone for me that spoke English. Several calls that they handed to me only had a Chinese speaker at the other end of the line. In one instance however, English was spoken for a few seconds and then the person hung up. At this point, the policeman said something to the girls and departed. I had now been sitting in that chair afraid to move for

over an hour. Gathering courage, I decided to get up, walk to the door and see if the policeman was out of sight. He was, so I considered making a break for it.

Before continuing, I just remembered another incident. Soon after arriving at the hotel and after they had sat me down in the chair, I pointed my camera at the policeman. Most people in China never had their picture taken and like the idea. But he waved his hands in front of his face indicating that he was not interested. So, I pointed the camera at the three receptionist girls. I'm sure that they would have liked to have their picture taken but felt that they had to follow the policeman's lead and they all waved their hands in front of their faces.

I was somewhat motivated by the fact that I didn't believe he had a gun on him (of course, it could have been in a holster under his topcoat). But reason got the better of me. If I were a fugitive from "justice," I might be in still bigger trouble. Then to my astonishment, the policeman, a woman and a child emerged from the building across the street and got into a motorcycle, the very motorcycle that I had taken a picture of. The woman and child got into the sidecar, the policeman mounted the motorcycle and they all drove off. At last, I had a clue to my problem. For some obscure reason, I should not have taken a picture of a policeman's motorcycle. But this motorcycle did not have any markings whatever indicating that it was a police department motorcycle. It was just an old, dirty, brown, rundown motorcycle as I previously indicated.

After they were out of sight, I walked out the door and stood on the bottom step of the hotel entrance. I figured that I had a better chance of finding an English speaking person coming along the sidewalk than I had experienced in the hotel. No one made any attempt to block my leaving the hotel lobby. I asked the first person who walked by if he spoke English. He cupped his hand to his ear and said, "I hear a little." I explained my problem to him and he seemed to understand. But he was very cautious. I told him that I was lecturing at the Grinding and Abrasive Institute. He asked me who I knew at the Institute. I gave him some names whereupon his initial, cautious approach vanished. He asked me to go into the hotel with him and he would try to help. He talked with the girls and then asked me who the top man was with whom I was working at the institute. I answered, "Mr. Lu". I also told him that I was staying at the "Old Dove Hotel". The girls never heard of the Old Dove Hotel but my benefactor knew of its existence. It took a while for him to locate its telephone number but, when found, he called it. Now no one at the Old Dove speaks English but he conversed with personnel there who managed to get Ida-Rose on the phone with sign language. How sweet it was to hear her voice!

At this point, I had been detained for about two hours. My benefactor who had such a difficult name, I cannot remember it, then got on his bicycle and went out to find Dr. Lu. I later learned that this man was a former deputy director of the Zhengzhou Abrasives and Grinding Institute and that he knew Dr. Lu.

At about 2:20 PM, Ida-Rose and the Old Dove Hotel manager arrived and the policeman returned about one minute later. The Old Dove Hotel manager engaged the policeman in conversation and the policeman again began his histrionics, pointing to his motorcycle that was, once again, parked on the other side of the street. The manager seemed to be telling the policeman that I had not committed any crime.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Lu and my benefactor arrived. A heated argument ensued with the policeman talking loudly and waving his arms. But the men on my side finally prevailed and the cowed policeman calmed down like a dog putting his tail between its legs.

Then I was released. Dr. Lu apologized, saying that the young man was just doing what he thought was his duty. Then we all shook hands.

The news of my arrest quickly spread throughout the laboratory the next day. They all thought it was very funny. If only I have been able to understand what they were saying in Chinese!

For Ida-Rose and I, this incident is another living testimony of the efficacy of prayer!