

Annie Le Cage

**Turbulence  
in a Clear Sky**

In Beijing  
at the Dawn of the Cultural Revolution

*Translated from the French by Anne Ferrato*

Lacurne

*Turbulence in a Clear Sky* was originally published in French in October 2013.

© *Lacurue*, 2014  
8, rue de Courcelles 75008 Paris France  
[www.lacurue.com](http://www.lacurue.com)

## A JOURNEY TO CHINA

**I** WAS SEVEN, I think. My elder brother, my little sister, my cousin and I were spending the holidays with my maternal grandparents, as we did every summer. One afternoon the four of us slipped out, unnoticed by the adults, and started down the road towards the neighbouring hamlet, heading... for China, the mythical country of our dreams and our games. Jacques led the expedition, pointing out new Chinese things along the way. The fields and meadows were no longer quite the same, they were already Chinese, and beyond them we could see the outline of a different, Chinese village. My brother's voice was indeed more excited than usual and I could see little change in the landscape, but since he said so, I was ready to believe him and follow him to the end of the world.

The adventure did not last long. The first farmers we met – Chinese, of course – questioned our tired, dusty group in a surprisingly familiar language and took us back home. *A Journey to China* took on a special meaning from then on and our escapade became a sort of odyssey in our family history.

Many years later I really did take off for China. After studying Political Science and Oriental Languages (Chinese and Japanese), I had just joined the Quai d'Orsay (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs). I was about to take up a post in Beijing, at the French Embassy which had opened the previous year when diplomatic relations were resumed. What follows is the diary I wrote during my stay. I have left

it unchanged, with its naïvety, its contradictions, its doubts, and its questions. It covers two periods : one, apparently calm, when unforeseeable events were in preparation, unknown to us ; and the explosion of the Cultural Revolution.

## FIRST YEAR IN CHINA

### *Paris-Hong Kong, 23-24 March 1965*

Paris, Tel Aviv, Teheran, Delhi, Bangkok, Saigon, Hong Kong. When I came back from the United States at the end of my student life, I completed a tour of the world. This time I'm going in the opposite direction. Hopping every three hours from one capital to another, from one airport to the next, aboard a plane which left Paris with scarcely twenty passengers and filled up in Saigon. I'm happy to be in Asia again and my first impressions come back to me, as fresh as ever. Stella, a Chinese friend, meets me in Hong Kong. I stay with her, in a vast flat at the top of an apartment block. View over the bay on one side and the race course on the other.

### *Hong Kong, 24-30 March 1965*

A week of visits and encounters. A week meeting new people or seeing others again. English and American friends. French people whom I knew as students and who are now posted here, at the consulate or in business. Diplomats working in Hong Kong whom I haven't seen before, and others from Beijing who are on holiday here for a few days, in charge of the diplomatic bag. They all look after me and give me advice as though I was leaving on a dangerous mission. A week to shop, with Stella, and buy everything I need. An iron, a hairdryer... Beauty products, toilet articles. Medicine. Fabrics. I order half a dozen

summer dresses from Stella's dressmaker who comes to the flat for fittings. Forty-eight hours later they are ready.

A week as intense as the eve of a battle.

*Hong Kong-Guangzhou, Tuesday 30 March 1965*

I must be at Kowloon station at 8am. I haven't got a ticket, but everything's been arranged. Someone will meet me. Stella accompanies me with my three suitcases, my bag and three big boxes full of the things bought in Hong Kong. T. has most kindly come to see me off at the station. We worked together at the Quai d'Orsay over the last few months and he's passing through Hong Kong on the way to his new post at Tokyo. When we say good-bye he says: "Be prepared for the worst!"

The train leaves at half past eight. We cross the New Territories. All change at the border. Few foreigners. Eight Japanese businessmen and a few westerners who have to fill in forms, which are not required of us – an Indian diplomat and his wife and me. We are in a sort of ante-chamber before entering the station and China proper, I suppose. Mao's portrait. The Indian couple and I are taken to one of the waiting-rooms on the first floor. My luggage is there. Armchairs with white cotton covers. We arrive before ten o'clock and leave at half past twelve after lunch in a bare, austere dining-room. Square-shouldered waitresses in white jackets, blue trousers, with plaits or straight hair.

We get into the last coach of the Guangzhou train. Some peasants get into the same train, carrying their bundles on a bamboo pole. Perhaps they're going to visit their families in Guangzhou!

I'd been told: "You'll see, it's very clean now." Let's say that the train isn't dirty. I can see a fly on the window-pane, though, but there's just one. I thought there weren't any left! I go to the restaurant-car to have a glass of beer. The Chinese eat as messily here as elsewhere and shout, as they do everywhere. The countryside is the same as on the other side of the border. Ricefields. As yet nothing looks differ-

*Saturday 4 December 1965*

Chairman Mao's China has just added a new hero to its socialist paradise. Soldier Wang Jie is taking over from soldier Lei Feng. And the slogan "Learn from Comrade Wang Jie's spirit" replaces "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng's spirit" and his name relays that of Lei Feng in slogans. Within a few weeks this hitherto unknown person has become a familiar figure in the new Chinese mythology. The two stories are fairly similar. Little is known about these very ordinary lives transfigured by the ideal which possessed them. They were lives of simple soldiers who always chose to put themselves last, carrying out their daily tasks with zeal and humility. Stories worthy of Lives of the Saints, only the works of Mao have replaced the catechism and the Gospels.

I go to the embassy towards five o'clock to check one or two things before the bag is closed. Night is falling, and the last icy daylight highlights the buildings, making them stand out starkly against the dark sky and Beijing looks strange, almost unreal. I'm not used to seeing the city at this time. Usually it looks empty when I come back. Tonight people are everywhere. Endless caravans of cyclists on either side of the street, all in blue, dark blue like the darkening night.

Dance at the French cultural centre. Buffet dinner with cheese brought by the exhibitors. Very Parisian decorations. Photos of some of the embassy staff, heads and bodies made of black paper. Street lights of black paper.

*Sunday 5 December 1965*

Drive in the country. Gale. Dusty little villages where my presence arouses immense curiosity. Wretched lives. Hard work. Frozen ricefields. Yellowed shoots piercing the ice. When I reach the Azure Clouds Hill the wind has dropped. When I saw the temple in the

distance, it seemed best to aim for it. It's easy to lose the way among all these tracks. Earlier on I took a road where there was only room for one car. With traditional friendliness, a villager explained that I was heading the right way. I was afraid of reversing on such a narrow road.

The Azure Clouds Temple is beautiful in the winter sunlight but it's very cold and my mocassins are no longer adequate. I came here on a torrid day in July. Today three French exhibitors are visiting the temple accompanied by a guide and an interpreter. One of them asks me for a lift in my car. They are frozen stiff in an unheated taxi. We all go to the Reclining Buddha Temple on the way back. Magnificent tiled roofs in the pure light. The bells hanging from the corners tinkle in the wind.

*Monday 6 December 1965*

Dinner with French visitors lost in admiration for China. "At least their feelings towards foreigners have changed. Now they acknowledge our lead in the technical and material fields and are ready to accept instructions and advice." Really?!

I'm reading *Chinese Characteristics*, written in 1890 by A. H. Smith, an American missionary who lived here for twenty-two years. No, nothing has changed.

*Wednesday 8 December 1965*

Permission granted to visit a people's commune at two o'clock this afternoon. The Evergreen Commune, to the west of Beijing. At least the temples and people's communes have poetic names. They make up a little for the harshness of life.

A cluster of buildings. We are welcomed by the director. The usual speech over a cup of tea. The shelves are full of jars of peaches, pears, vegetables preserved in alcohol (?) The jars are round, so the fruit is magnified by the liquid. Now, on the spot, I understand at last what



a people's commune is. Several hamlets where activities are grouped, rather like one of our communes.

We visit workshops. Buildings round a courtyard, in which tyres are mended here, tools repaired there. A workshop making small tools. Like a cottage industry, very primitive. Party slogans on the walls. We are taken to the fields by car. Flat, grey land as ever. Very long greenhouses made of dried mud, with glass on one side. They are covered with straw mats at night. Green vegetables are grown in them. Superb French beans, tomatoes and aubergines. Damp, warm air. Heating. A smell of human fertiliser. Who buys these vegetables? The Beijing hotel or the shops for diplomats? The leaders? In a corner I see a raised platform of wooden boards and a mat. It's a bed. Another greenhouse. Unheated. It's piled high with tons of cabbages, the long Beijing cabbages which you see by the cartload in the streets, or put to dry on the windowsills for the winter.

Visit to a school, half-work, half-study, which the newspapers have been talking about for months. About fifteen men are watching a tractor in one corner of a field. "They're learning." We visit a girls' dormitory. A dozen beds placed around the room. We go back to the car, stop to look at some pigs. A well-kept shop, a sort of village shop selling groceries and basic necessities.

Then we visit a house. One large room. The huge bed, *kang*, built in brick, like a platform, in one corner of the room. Underneath it is the fire. (And often a cricket, according to Chinese stories.) On top of it lie four parallel mats and four folded blankets. Two or three pieces of furniture, a cupboard, a chest. A radio set. An alarm clock. And Mao's portrait. A beaten earth floor. It's clean and poor. I saw no sanitary facilities. A young woman, very young, is squatting in front of the fire, cooking in a pot on the ground. She does not even look up. The grandmother / mother-in-law smiles, a crying baby held in her arms. The grandfather, a sturdy man with a weather-beaten face, smokes his pipe. It's all conventional, embarrassing. The guide recites his speech, quoting one statistic after another. I probably ought to say something to the grandmother, talk to the baby. I'm paralysed. I'm thinking of

the life led by this girl, still adolescent, imprisoned in this room. This evening the grandparents and the young couple will lie next to each other on the brick bed. Tomorrow the two women will look after the house and the baby. (You'd better come across a nice mother-in-law. Rarely the case in Chinese novels!) And then? I think no further. I'm longing to leave, to have left.

We visit two or three more houses, all similar. Outside them are hens and little patches of field. And all around, a vast expanse.

I was relieved to get back to Beijing and the weak city lights. At nightfall, in that little village belonging to the past, surrounded by flat fields, I felt lost. It is, nevertheless, a Beijing commune which is shown to visitors, in other words an advanced, model commune, and I wonder what the others are like. I was less moved by the physical harshness of these lives than by the personal aspect. But does that mean anything?

What also struck me there, as everywhere else, is the impression of slowness, almost of idleness. I know it's the dead season. Even so! There were few people in the fields and villages, or at least few to be seen. No, my picture of China is not one of intense activity. It's slow, very slow. The climate? Habit? Tradition? How can you tell?

*Saturday 11 December 1965*

I drive round the north of the city. I had never before ventured into this area built round little lakes. Sunny winter days under a clear sky. Pretty little streets lined with well-kept grey walls with red doors, many of them freshly re-painted. (Rare.) It must have been, and perhaps still is, an elegant area. How charming Beijing must have been! I get out of the car to peep round the stone screen just inside an open door. This house looks particularly beautiful. A sentry stops me. I just had time to glimpse a group of soldiers sitting at desks behind large windows.

I drive at walking pace through tiny streets, then alongside a little lake lined with grey trees. Beijing is a city asking to be sketched. The Bell Tower north of the Forbidden City. You can see a big bronze bell at the bottom of the tower. A little square behind the tower. Little shops. A stall selling shoes. I buy a pair of black velvet lined slippers, as worn by all Chinese. They're lovely even if your feet look like Micky Mouse's. It would take a month to have boots made, and what's the use, it never rains. A friendly, smiling crowd gathers.

Then I drive as far as one of the 25 km limits. I wanted to see the canal that's being dug. The pyramids must have been built like this, with means just as primitive and hundreds and hundreds of workers, kilometre after kilometre. It's impressive, especially when you see the result a little further on, where the ground has been levelled, bordered with freshly planted saplings. The work sites look fairly chaotic with the coming and going, the soil carried in little baskets or hand carts hauled by labourers while loudspeakers relay revolutionary music. But faith moves mountains.

### *Sunday 12 December 1965*

The newspaper gives +3° and -9°. It's very cold now and the blue sky is deceptive. I haven't put on enough clothes to go to the Bridge of Heaven area which is still rather like a funfair, with tumblers and acrobats. Junglers, imitators, wrestlers, storytellers. Everywhere people make way for us and the Sunday crowds smile at us. The Temple of Heaven is more beautiful than ever beneath the winter sky.

### *Monday 13 December 1965 +5° -6°*

A sudden gale covers everything with dust, like a storm. The temperature falls immediately and the wind penetrates into my room, in spite of the joints stuck round the French window. And the sand blows across the floor. I haven't yet understood how.

*Tuesday 14 December 1965 +1° -8°*

I go to the Chinese city to dine in a little eating house which I'm now getting to know. Restaurant is a big word. It's tiny, fairly working class and pleasantly shabby. It serves ravioli, not very good soup, and thick pancakes, impossible to swallow. Until now I've never seen a westerner there. Children were gluing their noses to the window-panes and one of the cooks kept throwing ladles of hot water at the window from inside. Everyone roared with laughter.

I walk through the dark streets. Not for long, because it's cold. There's an inn on the way. Can I stay here? Just to see what they say. The innkeeper's wife hesitates and then opens the door, very kindly. At least I can have a look inside. A big stove in a little glass-roofed courtyard, its walls lined with balconies with rooms giving on to them. Heads look out. The innkeeper comes up, very friendly but surprised. "Can I stay here? Not tonight, another time?" It can't be very warm here. The innkeeper hesitates too and asks: "Where are you staying at the moment?" Oh! I understood all right. He repeats it, unsure of himself; the answer bothered me. "At the Beijing Hotel," adding quickly: "it's nice, but here it's really Chinese." As I said it I thought of a stranger arriving in a little hotel in the Latin quarter and saying: "I'm staying at the Crillon, but I'd like to try your little place, it's so much more colourful!" Everyone laughed. The only thing to do. One of my rare incursions into Chinese life. Perhaps we don't try often enough, but how can we, and for what reason? We are just as unpredictable for them as they are for us. Who are they? Who travels and why? All these little hotels look full.

Outside the night was bitterly cold. The wind had got up again. The Beijing Hotel seemed more majestic than ever.

*Wednesday 15 December 1965 0° -10°*

The temperature falls day after day and doesn't rise above 0°. It never stops freezing. I don't think the newspapers give the lowest night temperatures.

When I left the hotel this morning I didn't notice anything in particular. When I got to the embassy, I saw that everyone was late. I haven't got the excuse of a car which won't start. Mine is new enough to be extremely docile still. A faint hiccup at the most.

The Japanese restaurant in the Covered Market this evening. I think it's the only one in the city and it's frequented above all by the countless Japanese who come here. Apart from the main room, it has three small rooms with *tatami* and a much larger one, but you have to book ahead.

*Thursday 16 December 1965 -5° -15°*

They say it was -18° last night. Yesterday, in Omsk, where I forget who stopped off, -45°. Even so, since it's been so cold, Beijing seems to live with a special intensity. A happy atmosphere reigns in the streets and in the crowds. People don't seem tense and anxious to go home. It is probably not much warmer in most homes. So... Beijing is a winter city, made for winter, and seemingly born of winter. I wonder if a regime as merciless beneath the smiles could survive elsewhere, other than in this icy, pure climate. All orders are born here, and emanate from here, from Beijing.

At midday I go back to the Chinese city to look for a fur lining. Crowds of people in the streets, their felt soles moving noiselessly over the icy ground. They stare at me in astonishment. It's a bit crazy to go out in cold like this in nylon stockings and low-fronted shoes. I'm going to buy a pair of shoes without laces that I can leave in the car for driving and going shopping. It's so cold that my legs hurt, but it's

so fine that it's like a feast day. (At week-ends I always wear trousers and I rarely come to this area apart from week-ends.) I notice that all Chinese, whoever they are, are well-protected from the cold and the wind. Padded overcoats or cross-over jackets, padded trousers, lined shoes, fur hats with the brim turned down over the nape of the neck and the ear-flaps turned down too when it's cold. When the flaps aren't tied together on the crown of the hat or under the chin, the wearer looks as though he has long rabbit's ears. And everyone wears a cotton mask over their mouths and noses. The wind can't get in anywhere. It looks like a science fiction town.

*Friday 17 December 1965 -4° -12°*

Lunch at the Beijing Hotel to take leave of a Nepalese diplomat. Eight people in all, and among them a Pakistani couple. She is beautiful, but never says a word. The Nepalese diplomat is thinking of taking a trip to his native province in the west of the country. You can go there by plane, or on foot... a twenty-eight day journey. He intends to go on foot.

Buffet dinner at the Indian embassy, one of the rare embassies still in the Legation Quarter. I know some of the guests, but only by sight. After dinner, rows of women in saris sit on sofas in silence. In one room, people are pretending to dance. It's impossible to leave early unnoticed, as the sofas are on either side of the door.

An icy cold night outside.

*Saturday 18 December 1965 +5° -9°*

A leisurely look at the shops selling seals. I already have one with my name in old-style characters.

I buy some delicious toffees and nougat. The inner wrapping is rice paper, and edible.

I go and have dinner in the little eating house in the Chinese city again.

*Sunday 19 December 1965 +7° -7°*

A wonderful drive. I leave towards midday, and get a little lost, driving along tracks through fields and villages. The car doesn't suffer because the ground is frozen. I may be beyond the 25 km limit. I cross a railway. Bridges. Then I follow a bus and find myself going towards the Marco Polo Bridge. I buy some biscuits (salty). It's impossible to buy anything else without coupons and there are no restaurants in the area.

In Beijing skating has begun on the little lakes.

*Monday 20 December 1965 +6° -8°*

This morning the embassy sends me to visit an exhibition of photos marking the fifth anniversary of the South Vietnam Liberation Army. Guo Moruo is present. Anti-American photos which I'd already seen here and there in newspapers and magazines. I skipped the worst atrocities.

*Tuesday 21 December 1965 +6° -8°*

I'm moving out of my room this evening as the hotel has agreed to re-paint it. They've promised to do it in three days. It's been decided that I'm going to stay on at the hotel as the Department has accepted the arrangement. Consequently I'm closer to the heart of Chinese life (as far as that's possible!) I'm not sure that I'd manage to survive as well alone in a two or three roomed flat. There are only three of us left at the hotel. The First Secretary, his wife and me.

*Friday 24 December 1965 -7° -14°*

This afternoon is a holiday. I can move back into my room from five o'clock onwards. The bathroom has been painted with oil paint

which is barely dry, but everything has been well done. The floorboards have even been sanded down. I couldn't get them to paint the walls grey as I'd hoped. Everything in the hotel and the diplomats' flats is painted the same yellowish beige. However it's clean and the white ceiling is restful. I've managed to get rid of one or two things I didn't like. A table, a lamp.

Midnight mass in the old cathedral, which isn't very big. A dense crowd of contemplative Chinese in blue working clothes and padded overcoats. Numerous men. In the organ loft a wheezing harmonium plays *Adeste Fideles* and the melodies of *Il est né le divin enfant*, *Les anges dans nos campagnes*. Mass in Latin. Everyone joins in to sing the *Gloria* and the *Creed*. I don't know where I am, or what to think. If I shut my eyes I could imagine myself at midnight mass somewhere deep in the French countryside, but when I hear the *Creed* I think I'm in Beijing where every day the newspaper preaches the word of Mao, the only one. Who are the people around me and what do these foreign hymns mean to them? On average they seemed to me to be fairly old. Perhaps I was wrong. No matter. It was very moving. Almost the whole embassy was there.

Traditional Christmas Eve buffet dinner at the Consul's flat. I left at four o'clock in the morning.

### *Saturday 25 December 1965*

I've received several invitations for today. Everyone kindly asked me what I was doing today so that I wouldn't be alone. The Commercial Councillor even came to the hotel to make sure. In the end I had lunch with Jean-Pierre and Odile. Small Christmas tree, presents, chocolates. In the late afternoon I drop in on the Commercial Attaché and together we go to a buffet-dance organised by the French students in Beijing.



*Sunday 26 December 1965*

Long walk in the Beihai park. Part of the lake has been enclosed for skating. It hasn't begun yet, and lasts only a month or two. Before spring the ice is cut up and buried to keep until the summer. Carpenters are mending boats on the bank. Brief glance at an exhibition in one of the pavilions. The resistance to the Japanese (anniversary of the 9 December Movement). Photos of atrocities have little appeal for me.

Once outside again, the lake was so beautiful, and the walk was worlds apart from the tales of war. To the north, five little pavilions form a backdrop to the lake and I admired the wonderful wooden architecture, the amazing open framework of the building beyond them. When you leave the Beihai park you find yourself in tiny streets and little courtyards where as usual you arouse intense curiosity.

*Monday 27 December 1965 0° -8°*

We all feel like school children on holiday this week. Two long week-ends put everyone in a good mood. I lunch at the Peace Restaurant, peaceful, as its name suggests, in its courtyard beyond the moon-shaped gateway.

*Friday 31 December 1965*

The bag was closed yesterday evening, luckily, and this morning was quiet. It's a holiday this afternoon.

At half past nine, the embassy personnel arrive before the other guests invited to the dinner dance to wish the Ambassador and his wife a happy new year and present their gifts. (All the women at the embassy were given Dior scarves and perfume.) The students, the teachers and French people passing through or living in Beijing arrive at half past ten. Several rather pathetic, elderly mixed couples. At almost midnight everyone is still having dinner. A gong strikes. Exchange of good wishes. And the ball begins. It would have been lovely, if it hadn't lasted until

five o'clock in the morning. When I saw some of the gentlemen who had left for other embassies return accompanied by the Moroccan and Norwegian Ambassadors, the Indian Chargé d'Affaires... and then our Ambassador sitting down with them all at a table, I thought to myself that we would be on duty for some time. How right I was.

*Saturday 1 January 1966*

The day began very late.

I went to order some flowers, mainly pots of pink or white camellias. And in my room I found a little cherry tree whose buds are beginning to open. The hotel never misses a chance to show me real kindness.

*Sunday 2 January 1966*

A short drive in the bare wintry countryside round Beijing. I just wanted to go to the end of a road I didn't know and when I saw it ended at a barracks, I was going to turn round. Instead of making countless manoeuvres in the narrow road I thought it would be easier and perhaps more amusing to turn in the open entrance to the courtyard. Just as I was about to go back through the gates, the sentry's bayonet was placed horizontally, barring the way. And that was it! An hour and half later I was still there. Numerous telephone calls were made at the entrance post. Soldiers came and went. I got out of the car. I showed them my diplomatic card. I got back into the car. I was cold. I switched the engine on to heat the car. Immediately orders were shouted to the sentries. There were now two of them and they lowered their bayonets at the slightest noise. I told myself stories to pass the time. I recalled memories of detective stories and cars ramming roadblocks, but I'm no stuntgirl, I've no experience. It was better to think about something else. Sensible colleagues reading or listening to classical music. Paris, now waking up lazily in the morning of a festive week-end. While there I was, stuck in the middle of nowhere, in a bleak landscape in the freezing cold.

Night fell. Lorries drove in and out. And the whole incident seemed more and more stupid. I was in the wrong, it's true. Completely in the wrong. I just wanted them to let me leave in time, so as not to be late for the dinner I'd been invited to. I didn't want to boast about my adventure. What was the point of writing a protest note. Obviously if it was to go on all night, I'd feel less guilty.

It didn't last all night. After an hour and a half, a police car arrived. Its passengers disappeared into the entrance post. A quarter of an hour later one of the soldiers came and gave me a long talking-to. It was clear that I was sincere.

I got to the dinner on time.

### *3 to 9 January 1966*

On Wednesday I gave a dinner at the Japanese restaurant. There were ten of us, sitting on the floor on *tatami* eating sea urchin pâté, raw fish, riceballs wrapped in seaweed and drinking saké. It was quite a success, although I'm not too sure that westerners really like sitting on the floor.

The charm of the Beijing winter has suddenly crept up on me, gradually and almost unawares. I noticed one fine day that in spite of myself I was beginning to like this country, or more precisely, this city. When it occurred to me that in a few months half of my stay here would be over and that the stay itself would end one day, I thought: "Already! I know nothing about China. I can only speak two or three words of Chinese." I wonder if the attraction of this country isn't partly due, hasn't perhaps always been due to the fact that the goal remains as distant as ever just when you're beginning to feel you might attain it one day. In *The Tartar Steppe*, the soldiers go back to the fort almost in spite of themselves. And I've sometimes heard people say: "When I last left this country, I swore never to set foot in it again."

Even so I can't be completely under its spell. One fine morning I suddenly felt low. I felt a prisoner once again. To hell with China

and the Chinese. Long live the normal life and countries where you can go beyond the 25 km limit at week-ends instead of going round in familiar circles. It was almost reassuring. I needn't worry. I would leave without looking back. The country doesn't really interest me, since you can neither get to know it properly, nor get fond of it.

But I'm no longer sure whether I really think that. I don't know. The Forbidden City is still there, as beautiful and changing as ever, and its name needs no comment.

*Tuesday 11 January 1966*

The embassy is entertaining a little group of French teachers who have just arrived, and who are on their way to several Chinese towns, Shanghai, Guangzhou...

Dinner at the Peace Restaurant, the nicest Chinese dinner I've ever been invited to. The place is delightful with its courtyards and pavilions, its round moon-shaped doors. Excellent service, the waiters presented the dishes to each person instead of placing them in the centre of the table and leaving the guests to help themselves, as happens in restaurants here. Remarkable variety and beautiful presentation. To begin with the dishes were placed on the table, arranged according to their colour for the guests to admire them. Lastly, it was a lively evening with witty, amusing conversation. Eight of us were French and two English. The end of the meal was particularly successful. After pastries, or rather sweets that I'd never seen here before, candied fruit and pyramids of little Chinese petits-fours, a Mongolian hotpot was brought in, as the Chinese end their meals with soup. The lights were switched off and the scene was lit by the orange and green flames in the copper pot.

In the fine, cold night I drove a student back to the Friendship Hotel after the dinner. It was a real pleasure to drive the 35 km there and back.