

Peking at China

Bruce Gates

Students from abroad who study in China probably come the closest of any foreigner to observing the Chinese way of life, said York Professor Peter Mitchell, who spent the last two years at the Canadian Embassy in China as first secretary of cultural and scientific affairs.

"Students live in the universities, and basically live in the same type of accommodation as Chinese students," he told an interested group of former students at an informal discussion during York's second annual homecoming last Saturday.

"The only difference is that the foreign students' quarters are slightly larger than the Chinese students' and there are usually three students per room instead of five or six." Some 25 Canadian students study in China in exchange with Chinese students coming to Canada.

Professor Mitchell also made note of a situation many students can relate to when living on campus: finding a decent meal. The foreign students have their own cafeteria "but the food's lousy there, so most of the students eat on the Chinese side instead," he said.

During his two-year stay in Peking, Professor Mitchell negotiated and administered student exchange programs between Canada and China, as well as exchanges in professors, science and technology, and culture.

Culture is a very important part of our relations with China, he said, noting that the Chinese regard it more highly than do other countries in their international relations.

Since the Cultural Revolution of 1966, Professor Mitchell noted that there has been a "gathering of steam" in China's opening up to the West culturally.

"When the Toronto Symphony Orchestra went there, it was the first time Tchaikovsky had been heard there since the fifties. And Mahler had never been

heard there before," he said. During the Cultural Revolution, very little western music was performed.

It was during this period that the late Chairman Mao Tse Tung was trying to move China along a new pathway by banning foreign books, clothing and haircuts, and by taking control of the media. At the same time a series of purges, including that of now vice-premier Deng Xiaoping, were undertaken in order to consolidate Mao's control of the Chinese Communist Party.

"It was a total repression," Professor Mitchell noted. Even universities closed.

But now China is in a stage of deMaoization, Professor Mitchell said, explaining that those years were not necessarily all Mao's doing.

"What we thought was Mao from 1966 to 1976 was really the Gang of Four misinterpreting Mao," he explained.

"Mao was a symbol of what the revolution had gone through--both its trials, its tribulations and its triumphs, but as such he was a distant symbol--one to be held in awe."

Ironically, the deMaoization is being undertaken by a government whose vice-premier was one of Mao's purge victims.

"Deng Xiaoping is one of the most popular Chinese figures today," Professor Mitchell said.

"To most Chinese, Deng is an incredible example of hope and resilience. He was purged several times but was always able to bounce back.

"He is probably the most known person in China and the sparkplug behind the current Chinese expansion."

Part of that expansion will involve Canada quite deeply. Mitchell said that during his stay, the three chief areas of exchange between China and Canada are now geology, transportation, and communications, which is one area in which Canada will contribute heavily, Mitchell believes.

"Most people don't realize this, but China's population is scattered, which makes communications a problem," he said. As a result the Chinese are very interested in Canada's communications technology.

"It's one of the areas in which Canada is a world leader, and satellites are part of it. And that is a technology we can sell around the world."

But, he points out, China's new openness to the west is being undertaken with a certain amount of discretion.

"China is not going to become dependent on the west again," he said. "She did it with Russia in the fifties, but she's not going to let that happen again."

Going, going, gong

Elena Naccarato

A set of rare musical instruments was recently stolen from York's music department. The set consisted of three Phillipine gongs which were the property of Professor Steve Otto, an ethnomusicologist who used them in teaching his music classes.

The gongs were antiques which were presented to Otto during his travels in the Phillipines in 1971. Although they do not have a high market

value their personal associations for Otto make them "irreplaceable" in his estimation.

The set was kept in a locked room in Winters College. In order to give the persons responsible the opportunity to return the instruments, Otto has refrained from changing the room's lock.

Otto has warned that if the stolen gongs are not returned drastic measures will have to be taken.

Slumming in style

Larry Kredl

For many young actors the thrill of taking part in a hit theatre production and experiencing the excitement of standing ovations and media exposure is only a dream. For Robert Parson, a graduate of York's acting program, it has become a reality.

The play is **Balconville** and Parson is one of the eight main characters in the tragicomedy set on balconies of tenement slums during a hot Montreal summer. A huge success in Montreal, it is currently playing before sell-out audiences at the St. Lawrence Centre.

Although **Balconville**, written by Canadian playwright David Fennario, has received national critical attention, Parson was not aware of the play's potential when he took the part. "The script just wasn't there initially," reflected Parson just prior to an evening performance last week. "But it seems when you do one of Fennario's plays it builds during the rehearsals. At the time I needed work so I took it."

After graduating from York in 1977, Parson, also a singer and lyricist, needed to gain experience. He first worked for Theatre New Brunswick's Young Company before returning home to Montreal where he performed in various theatre productions and appeared in the films **Agency** and **City on Fire**.



Parson concedes he was lucky to get involved with such a successful play. "As a young actor **Balconville** has been an invaluable experience. Not just because it's a hit play, but because it's given me a chance to perform and learn from more experienced actors."

Balconville has already brought Parson much needed exposure in the theatre circuit and will be an asset as he pursues his career. However he is the first to admit professional acting is not an easy life. "I work about six months of the year in acting which is considered good in the acting circuit," reveals a friendly and articulate Parson, a far cry from the abrasive, but shy, backstreet character he portrays

in **Balconville**.

Even with regular work, acting sometimes becomes a chore when performing the same play for months at a time. "In Montreal we did the play eight times a week and seven times here in Toronto. Sometimes you just don't feel like going out there," confides Parson. "You have to look for new ways to do things, to change it, keep it fresh."

A French-Canadian, Parson hopes to pursue his career in Quebec. But even in his quiet, confident manner, the insecurities in the future are apparent in his words, "After I'm finished with this tour I have no more work. It's a crazy business. You don't count on anybody... the only certainty is you."

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RM 038, ADMIN. STUDIES

AGENDA:

Discussion of Negotiations

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