



waited and waited, and no one ever came to pick us up. The person who organized this went there to find out what happened, and she said that no one would tell her anything. She said, "I think that someone didn't want you to play, and so — to save face — they didn't send a car to pick you up."

I guess the student council that sent the invitation didn't have enough money or the right connections to pull it off. Or someone higher up decided that they didn't need me there at that time.

But generally, the media was very good for me. After that newspaper article, I had people come up to me in the street and say, "Hi, you're Morgan. I love your music." I was famous in that city.

**Excal:** Did you meet other Chinese musicians?

**BM:** Yes. I met a flute player and a pianist. I really got a feel for what it's like to be a musician there. It's funny, but in many ways it's better to be an artist in China than in Toronto. The notion of an artist doing valuable work in the community, as a job, exists in China.

If you are accepted into the Academy of Arts and you have talent, you'll be given a job and a salary and respect. You are legitimate. You have to produce work and teach — that's your job. You're given a place to live, and the irony is that it is no different from anyone else's. You get the same apartment as the banker or the stockbroker next door.

The musicians I met were making their money from teaching. However, the nightclub scene is slowly starting up in China. There are dance bands in the big hotels in the big cities.

**Excal:** Has this travelling affected your music?

**BM:** Almost everything I've written recently has had to do with China. I plan to make it all into an album. I'm making a demo in two weeks and I have plans for a video — with footage I shot in China — to be made withing six months.

**Excal:** Do you plan to travel again soon?

**BM:** We'll see. When I travel, it helps me get a sense of Canada. I get a chance to appreciate what is Canadian. Right now I'm going to stay in Toronto. I'm confident that — given the chance — it'll work. I want to do something that no one else in Toronto is doing and I think that I have a body of material that will help me do that. It'll be sink or swim. Somebody has got to like it. My long term goals are modest. I'd like to be able to do the stuff that I write in a public forum. I'd like to be able to release, in some kind of permanent form, the material I'm doing and have the chance to perform publicly on a regular basis. I'm notoriously impatient, though. I want success now, or I'm leaving!

**Excal:** Do many students want to leave China?

**BM:** There are two groups who are really interested in leaving. First, the academy. It is really difficult to be an academic in China. Being an academic is a real privilege, yet academics are frowned upon. You can see why they would want to leave once you are in the university system. There is so little of your own input into what you teach. They are really restricted as to what they teach. If they do get to go abroad, they rarely get to contribute that knowledge of going abroad into the school system.

The second group that wants to get out, I would say, are women. They are in a very difficult situation. It's interesting that the highest percentage of mixed marriages in China are between foreign men and Chinese women and, almost certainly, these relationships are liasons that began in academic situations. That is the only way that would happen.

If you are a woman and an academic, you are less appealing to marry. To have a university degree marks a Chinese woman. It is rare for a Chinese man to marry a woman who not only makes more money than him, but who is smarter than him. She's not a desirable mate. Academic women have to narrow their field down to professors, often foreign professors. In fact, women are worse off now than they were before reforms. Because now, the economy is liberalized and the managers have more freedom to hire and fire.

Women are still viewed as people whose commitments to their jobs are secondary to their family and, therefore, will not be hired immediately. So, at least during the days of heightened egalitarianism, women were protected because that ideology took more of a precedent of equality that what's now become a more pragmatic approach to economy.

In the past, gender politics were never treated as an issue, because women's liberation was sort of subsumed into the emancipation of the workers. And now that the new pragmatism is coming out, the gender attitudes have

not changed. The changes that are occurring are archaic.

The new Chinese perception of women is that they need to learn better grooming. They need to learn more about fashion. And that's what's happening. As a composition teacher, I took certain liberties and I had my students write down what they couldn't say. What I discovered is that the biggest problem between men and women is their attitudes. One topic was "Do Women Have Difficulty Finding Good Positions in the Work Force?" Most of my answers were No, they just don't want to work, and I got that from a lot of women, too. You don't aspire to a whole lot because there's no chance of getting there. It's a big reinforcement. And, for those that do get somewhere, there's a lot of pressure against them.

A lot of discrimination exists there, too. In my class, 25 men and two women were selected to go abroad. Going abroad is the highest prestige and it was 10 to one, men to women. They younger women couldn't help but see this, and those who had aspirations were disappointed.

**Excal:** What resources are available to the students?

**BM:** York University has donated all sorts of books. Ironically, students aren't allowed to take out those books. They have so many restrictions on books that it is unbelievable. There is a Canadian Studies Library full of York books and none of the students can take them out.

The catch is that there is this symbiotic relationship between Western and Chinese universities. Western institutions like to think that they are contributing to a modern, liberalized society, so you've got people at York running programmes and they get caught up in the excitement of dealing with another culture. They like to feel that they are bridging the gap. People are full of idealism and refuse to deal with what is actually happening.

For example, books are just sitting in China collecting dust. *Maclean's* magazines are there, and students can't get to them. Why? Because, we get to maintain the façade that we are doing a lot of good things and are a Westernizing influence when, in reality, Chinese authorities are extremely intelligent and shrewd and manipulative, and they are making sure that none of our contributions threaten their status quo. They only want the goods that increase the material standard of living, not books with ideas.

**Excal:** Is this another example of "face"?

**BM:** Definitely. The Chinese don't want to publicly say, "We don't want to read your books" even though, in reality, the students aren't reading them. The other reality, of course, is that the people on this end refuse to see it. Things like funding and prestige get in the way. The prestige of having Chinese scholars and you together on campus in a photo, and tours of the city, is great. They get to present the façade of having expertise in diplomacy. It just feeds on itself. You can bring a lot of pressure on these people. It's just not happening, in Canada, anyway.

I met an American woman who had a super system. The American law schools hired an organization to send representatives to monitor what they give to Chinese law schools. I met the lady, and, boy, did she give the Chinese hell. They had given the school four computers that just sat in boxes. She went to the law school and threatened to cut off every last penny. Now that's guts. But you know what? The school listened to her. You'll talk to some people who say, "Oh, the inscrutable Chinese, we cannot deal with them," but that's not true. Here this woman was "monitoring."



She walked into the law school again and found out that they wanted a new photocopier. She discovered that they already had three or four that had broken down. Rather than have them fixed, they wanted to get a new one.

It's just like the satellite dishes. The problem is that a lot of people in charge of the exchange programmes aren't clear as to what is going on. The leaders have tremendous prestige yet, generally, they are people who have never actually worked in that environment, never have been to China, never worked there, never lived there. There were four or five exchange programmes at my school, and basically, we all had the same problem. None of our leaders had been there. When we called back to complain about situations, they were deaf to it. And we were also threatening to their position.

**Excal:** Did you have difficulty getting people's attention and finding places to play your music?

**BM:** Much to my surprise, it was really easy. It happened almost in my first week there. People found out that I was a singer and a musician-songwriter. And the kind of thing that I did was the kind of thing that they liked, so it snowballed quickly. Originally, the school approached me. They have a foreigners contest every year that is like the Gong Show.

They'd also have things like talent night and I'd go and play three or four songs. Before I knew it, enough people asked me to play an entire evening. It just took off. I was shocked — what a difference from Toronto. I put up one poster the night before a gig and there'd be 1,200-1,400 people that night. It was packed solid, absolutely attentive, dead silence. Here, you could put up 10,000 posters, and maybe 30 people show up and are completely indifferent unless someone has told them, "Hey, this guy is really good. You better go see him."

**"They only want the goods that increase the material standard of living, not books with ideas."**

**Excal:** What were your perceptions of the media in China?

**BM:** Again, some of the media treated me exceptionally well, and some were indifferent. It's just like here. Some people have the time, some don't. At the Chongqing radio station I was treated royally. I really had the run of the place. I was able to use a 24-track recording studio and my tapes were played at a couple of other stations. I really had a good friendship with a couple of the engineers there. I did a couple of interviews that went very well.

**Excal:** Did you experience any distortion within the Chinese media?

**BM:** Yes. The time gap between my interview with the newspaper and the actual publication of the article was four months. That's interesting that it took so long to be published in a daily paper. But the time span, I'm sure, had a lot to do with the content.

Another experience that I had was with an interviewer who was taping our conversation. He asked me about popular music in North America and I explained my views to him that it was mostly determined by record companies. An important aspect of our popular music is distribution — distribution controlled by companies who are out to make a profit.

Then I asked him about the situation in China with popular music and traditional music. He shut off the tape recorder and leaned over to me and explained that there is a real concern in China that pop music is being embraced by young people and that the authorities want to promote more traditional Chinese music. Their media doesn't conform to market pressures in the same way that ours does, but to other pressures — vague, political pressures.

There was a time when traditional music was seen as feudalistic. During the cultural revolution, you weren't allowed to play traditional opera — you had to play one of the operas that Mao's wife wrote. It's funny how things change. So, in a sense, the authorities are quite conservative. They're kind of nervous about things that they don't control, like tastes in popular culture.

On TV they have lip syncing contests and it's really popular. The winners are almost always the traditional opera singers — not the pop singers. You kind of wonder about the judges. However, the university has a talent night where there is *nothing* traditional represented on stage. You've got modern, impressionist dance, guys lip syncing to rock and roll, leather jackets, plays, and standup comedy, but nothing traditional. So if that's any indication, it doesn't gel with the lip syncing contest where the opera singer wins all the prizes.

The authorities are nervous about the consumerism that's taken hold and the loss of idealism. The party really feels that there is a lack of legitimacy in their social dominance. There've been so many reverberations in the system — campaigns, anti-campaigns, revolutions, anti-revolutions. The political leaders are here and then they're gone. The wise bureaucrat does nothing to get any attention. You do nothing because "a fat pig gets nervous."

**Excal:** Did the media restrain you in any way?

**BM:** Again, the concept of "face" surfaces. For example, my concerts at the law school. They could've put it on any night of the week but they insisted I play on a Friday night — the night that there was not only a dance, but a movie on campus. They didn't advertise me very well. I was a last-minute attraction. I still had a good crowd, but it wasn't full.

My other concert was packed and this one wasn't. You almost had the impression that "Gee, maybe they didn't really want a packed concert. They were just letting me play to be polite." The students wanted it but the authorities wanted to let me know that it wasn't that great an idea to play.

Another incident that I also found fascinating was when I received a written invitation from the teacher's college in Bei-Bei to perform at Arts Week at their final concert. That's like getting to play the final set at Mariposa. It was really an incredible honour. They sent a formal, gold-leaf invitation that said come perform and give a lecture on popular guitar. They promised to send a car to pick me up.