

# The Panda and Monkey King Christmas-

## A Family's Year in China



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**Nelly Maude Case and Stephen F. Ledoux**

Published by *ABCs* of Canton, NY, USA.

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## Dedication



This book

is dedicated

to both our children

*Miles Lincoln and Susannah Kay,*

*and to our very good friend Mary Johnson.*

May Miles long remember his experience with us in China;  
may Susannah, born later, not have to wait long for the next trip to China;  
and may everyone remember how Mary's life-long wisdom and humor  
so enjoyably multiplied the benefits of our stay in China.∞

**N.M.C.**

**& S.F.L.**

## Preface

Given that the journal which recorded our experiences during the year we spent in China was originally written to assist our later private recollections, one could reasonably wonder why we are making the story more widely available. Indeed, some might even wonder what prompted us to go in the first place. While Chapter One begins by introducing our story with some background information to address the latter, here we consider the former.

To make a trip to a place like China worthwhile takes preparation well beyond packing activities. We felt we were at least somewhat prepared since one of us had been to China twice before, once for a three-week visit and once for a stay of several months. Yet we found that we would have benefited from even more preparation. In addition, we came across many foreigners in China who were not enjoying or benefiting from their trip, at least not as much as they might, because they had arrived even less prepared than ourselves for the conditions and cultural differences they faced. They had little understanding of what they experienced, and so disliked it. In this context we thought that the story of our stay might be of interest and value to others, so we make the story available here in book form.

It took a long time to get the journal record of our stay into this form, much longer than we expected. However, while China the country is changing rapidly, the Chinese culture is not, and this stability convinced us that the book would still very much be able to assist anyone who was going to China, or thinking about going. This book could help them to be better informed about, and more prepared for, a wide range of conditions and differences which they might encounter. Increasing their preparation in this way could increase the benefits and enjoyment they derive from their trip. (If things are better now in China than when we were there, how wonderful! Besides, if you get to go there, being a little over-prepared can only be an asset.)

We also thought that those who prefer to do their traveling from within the comfort of their own homes would probably at least find our story educational. We even hope to take our own lessons to heart, and return to China for another extensive stay someday. We hope you,

the reader, get to do the same, and that this book makes it more worthwhile for you.

So join us now through these pages. We shall review, recall, and retell many of the unique and exciting—as well as some of the troublesome—adventures that we had during the year we taught in China. ☺

N.M.C.

January 1997

S.F.L.

## Special Dedication

As we neared completion of the work of producing this book, we were deeply saddened to learn of the death of one of the persons who helped us so much during our stay in China, as well as after our return. This person had been one of our graduate students. His name:

**Ji Yi zhi**

Ji Yi zhi evinced a concern for others that seems all too rare in today's world. We have therefore decided to include a special dedication of this book to Lao Ji to encourage others to share his concern.

Yi zhi had a physical handicap due to hemophilia; he could not bend his knees. The crippling attack came after he was married and had fathered a child and after he had passed the entrance exams for graduate school. After the disability developed, his wife divorced him and would not let their two-year-old son see his father, because of his disability. (Some attitudes in China are way behind the times and need critical attention.)

Thanks to Yi zhi, his nephew Ji Cheng and our son Miles became good friends. They got together often while we were in China, and they continue to be pen pals, regularly exchanging both letters and small gifts that would be hard to find in the receiver's country.

Yi zhi was the most outgoing of all the students in Nelly's history of arts class, and his skills in written and oral English were by far the best in the group. He also had musical skills, which he shared by playing the violin for people at different gatherings. He helped Nelly arrange to give a lecture at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, and translated her talk for the students and faculty there. After we returned

to the United States, he continued to help her, obtaining some musical compositions by a composer at the Conservatory for her. She performed these on the piano and talked about them in a scholarly report.

Yi zhi was also one of Stephen's best students. He was very committed to learning. And he was very committed to doing something with what he learned. Most importantly, he wanted to do things that benefited not just himself but others, as many others as possible. People with this trait are very much needed in today's world...

That is what we will remember most of all about Ji Yi zhi, how devoted he was to helping others, as well as what a good friend he was to all of us throughout our stay in China. It is very hard to believe he is gone. We hope his example prompts people to similar inclinations of concern, and similar actions to benefit others.☺

## On This Book, Typography, and Other Books

The second author designed and executed the layout of this book on an early Apple Power Macintosh computer with a QMS PS-410 printer, using the Microsoft Word 4.0, Aldus SuperPaint 3.5, and Adobe PageMaker 5.0 programs. The book uses the Rickshaw and Present Script typefaces to supplement the Adobe Garamond and Adobe Garamond Expert collections of typefaces.

The authors have resided in Canton, NY, since the early 1980s, teaching at one or another of the four local colleges. The publisher requests that readers finding errata send corrections to the authors for inclusion in a future printing.

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In addition, a valuable basis for the typographic decisions followed in this work deserves acknowledgment. As much as possible, this book follows the practices described in two highly recommended little volumes by Ms. Robin Williams (both published in Berkeley, CA, USA, by Peachpit Press). One is the 1990 edition of *The Mac is not a Typewriter*. The other is the 1996 edition of *Beyond the Mac is not a Typewriter*. (For example, on page 16 of the 1990 book, Williams specifies practices regarding the placement of punctuation used with quotation marks, an area in which some ambiguity has existed over what is "proper.")

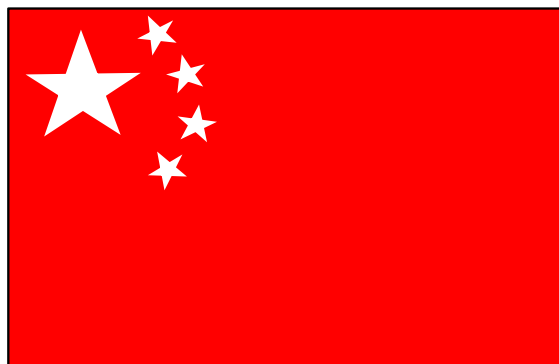
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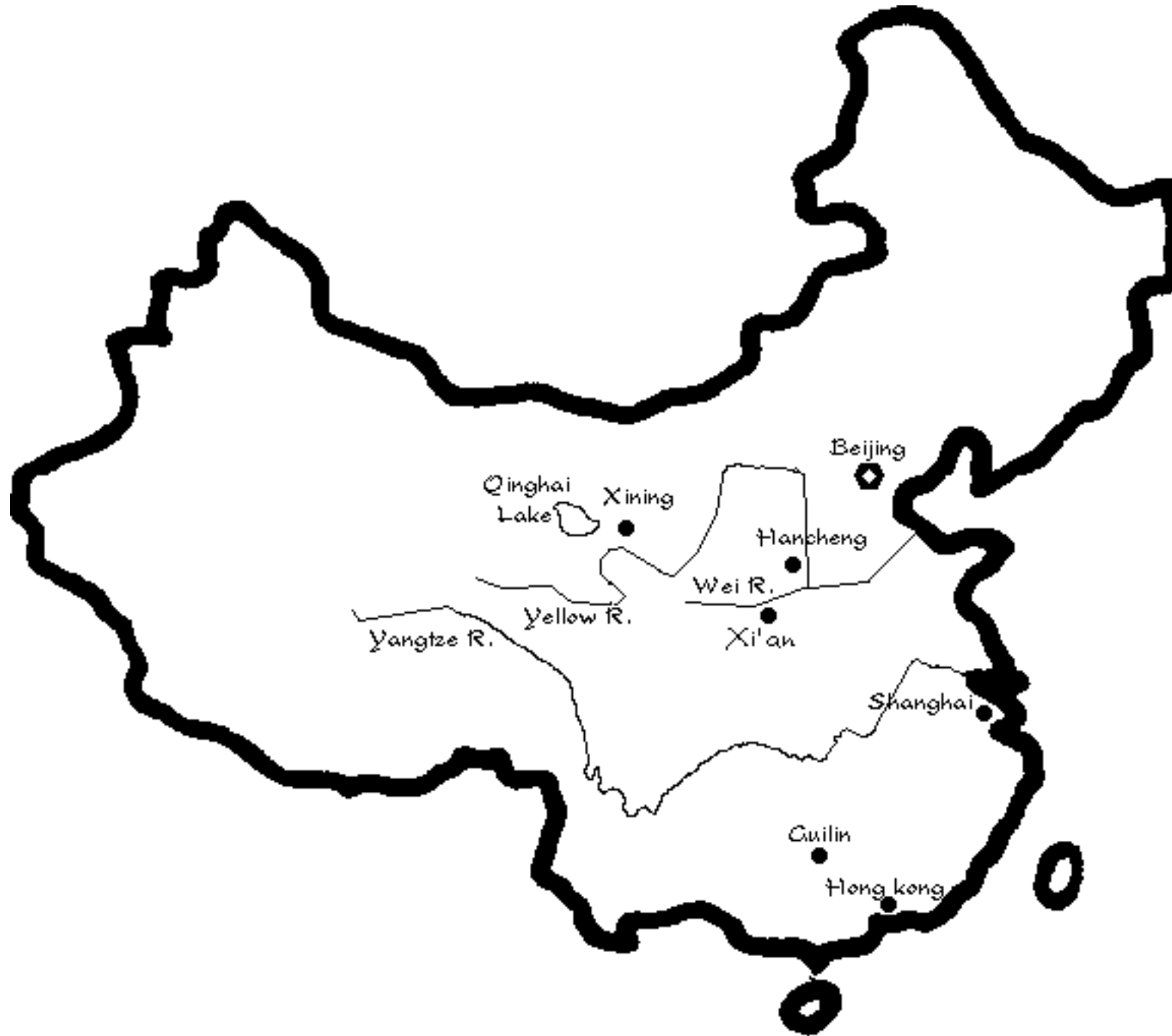




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# Chapter One

## Four Quick Months of Preparation

### Introduction

We, Nelly M. Case and Stephen F. Ledoux, spent the 1990–1991 academic year in the People’s Republic of China. By the Chinese sense of history, this was only yesterday. Nelly was part of a faculty exchange, and we both taught a variety of courses in English at the Foreign Languages University in Xi’an, a city of several million people in the south-east corner of north central China. We travelled with our five-year-old son Miles who attended a Chinese kindergarten. All in all, it was a year of continuing discovery—so much so that we adopted the motto, “expect unique experiences daily,” for such is commonplace (to Westerners, at least) in China.

Herein we relate the experiences we had on that ten-month visit. Note therefore that this is not a book *about China*; it is only a book about *our experiences* in China. The difference, while subtle, is meaningful, and comes from an “old Chinese story” told to us by a very learned Chinese friend and colleague. According to the story,

Some people come to China for a year and go home and write a book about China. Others stay for five years and have second thoughts about writing such a book. A few stay for ten years or more and come to realize that it may be impossible to write a book about China...

Luckily, our friend agrees that ours is not a book about China.

This book *originated* in Nelly’s daily and weekly recording of events in her journal entries throughout our stay; she intended the journal to assist our later recollection of events. (We already addressed, in the Preface, *why* we have converted that journal into this book.) The value of such a diary was anticipated by our friend, Betty Coots who, just before we left, gave Nelly a blank, inch-thick volume—the first of three needed to hold the whole story. To Nelly’s chronicle, Stephen added missing episodes and details, and made other author, editor, layout, and

graphics contributions. For the convenience of the reader and out of respect for the personal nature of this material, we decided to retain the first-person narration and changing verb tenses that Nelly had used when reflecting on events and writing her journal, usually before retiring for the night. (We “retained” these even for material that Stephen authored.) We also decided to retain as much of the original wording as possible because it captured, between the lines as well as in them, the feelings and thoughts—both positive and negative—that we experienced along with the reported events. Some of our feelings and thoughts reflected misperceptions or problems that we had, and some reflected misperceptions or problems that others had. We have included both for the lessons they provide.

The story begins near the end of April, 1990. This was about four months before our departure...

### April

My husband already had some experience teaching in China. In 1979, some years before we met, he taught in Xi’an, at Xi’an Jiaotong University. He had often bicycled the couple of miles from there to the Xi’an Foreign Languages University (XFLU) on his days off. I knew he had always hoped to visit China again someday. So when I found a notice in my campus mailbox about a visit from Dr. Sun Tian yi, the President of XFLU, I suspected Stephen would be interested.

President Sun was visiting St. Lawrence University (SLU, in Canton NY) to formalize arrangements for a faculty exchange between the two schools. The notice concerned a meeting to discuss the exchange program with faculty, especially those who might be interested in participating in the program. I had a class at the meeting time so I gave the notice to Stephen (who teaches at the state college across town). He looked at the notice, then looked at me, then looked at the notice, and said that if he went to the meeting, we would very likely be on our way to China for a year. After pausing, he added “Do you want to go to China for a year?”

I said, “Why not?” He went to the meeting and he was right. By the end of the meeting, the process that would see us in China for a year had begun. As it turned out, a member of President Sun’s faculty

was already scheduled to teach at SLU for the next academic year. But no one from SLU's faculty was as yet scheduled to teach at XFLU. In fact, no SLU faculty member was ready to go to China for the next academic year to be a part of the exchange. No one, that is, except us. And our willingness was based substantially on Stephen's prior China experience. That experience provided us with the background that made it possible for us to be ready for such a trip in just a few short months. By the way, neither of us spoke Chinese. (If we had, we might not have gotten the job; the university preferred native English speakers who could not fall back on Chinese so that the students—who were already supposed to be able to communicate in English—would have to speak English with these teachers.)

### May & June & July & Most of August

Since I did not keep an official journal until after departing for China, these months went by quickly, in a blur. We had a long list of tasks to complete, including (a) completing our teaching and other responsibilities for the spring semester that was ending, (b) arranging for Stephen to take a leave of absence, (c) encouraging Miles's enthusiasm for the trip (he chose to watch one of his already favorite Sesame Street videos, "Big Bird in China," many extra times), (d) getting passports, visas, and various travel inoculations (Miles was not thrilled with these), (e) arranging for someone to "house sit" for us, and (f) organizing someone to act as our local contact for such chores as collecting our mail and forwarding any important pieces to us.

Beginning our trek early in August, we stopped in California for over a week. Most of Stephen's family still reside in Sacramento where he grew up. His siblings, who had only seen our son in photos, finally got to meet Miles in person.

Finally the time came to leave for China. We were to depart from San Francisco where Stephen's brother Dan lives. So we went there and visited him first.

The real adventure—with pandas and the Monkey King—then began in earnest. ☺



We still had some feeling of being in China after we landed, as we listened to announcements in Chinese at the CAAC baggage claim. It seemed to take forever for our bags to appear (the last nightmare), but eventually we had them all and headed for customs. We had already spotted Stephen's brother Dan watching us from a glass-walled upper level. We almost made trouble for ourselves at customs by entering a "red" line, meant for people bringing things like plants or animals, instead of a "green" line for ordinary travellers. Seeing our bewilderment, an official redirected us. We walked through the last checkpoint without having to open one suitcase, and that was that. We were home.☺

§

## Conclusion

The passage of several years since our return from our year in China has probably made it easier to turn my journal into this book. We have no immediate plans to return to China in the future (although Stephen hopes to do so when he can get a proper sabbatical leave—during the trip reported here, he was on a leave without pay). Nonetheless we had deemed the overall experience so worthwhile that we had assisted Stephen's elder sister in securing a teaching position, for the 1991–92 school year, at Xi'an Jiaotong University, where Stephen had taught in 1979. Her letters during her stay refreshed our own memories of the "unique commonplaces" which filled our days in China (and she decided to stay and teach for a second year).

(A note about exchange rates: in late 1996 one US dollar exchanged for between 7 and 8 yuan. All the figures we have given throughout this book were at the 1990–91 exchange rate; at that time, one US dollar exchanged for about 5 yuan.)

We also deemed the overall experience so worthwhile that it might be of interest and value to others. That is why we decided to make the contents of my journal more widely available as a book. We took a long time to get the book into a usable form, longer than we thought we

would take. However, while China *is* changing, the fundamental nature of our cross-cultural experiences there convinced us that the book might still be very much able to assist anyone who was going to China to be more prepared for whatever they might encounter. In this way they could increase the benefit from, and enjoyment of, their trip. (Things might be better now in China than when we were there, and that would be just wonderful! Besides, if you get to go there, being a little over-prepared can only be an asset.) We also thought that those who prefer to do their traveling from within the comfort of their living room would probably at least find our story educational. Again, we even hope to take our own lessons to heart, and return to China for another extensive stay someday. We hope you, the readers of this book, get to do the same, and that this book will have made the trip more worthwhile for you.☺

