

四十二

On the map it appeared
to be one easy sail
from Yantai to Tianjin
there was no way to fail
no boats in the Bohai
so an overnight bus
where the seats turned to beds
was a hotel for us



Chapter 42 – Yantai is Chefoo

In 1997, our plan was to travel by train from Taishan to Yantai. Yantai (烟台市 Yāntái shì) is located on the southern shore of the Bohai Sea which turns into Korea Bay and then becomes the Yellow Sea and then the East China Sea and finally the Pacific Ocean. It is nearly due south of Dalian (about 45 kilometres due east of Lüshunku aka “Port Arthur”), and it looked to be a straight shot by boat to Tianjin. Twice I tried and twice my plan was foiled by the weather. But I’d still like to ride that boat.

Chefoo 芝罘 Zhīfú was the name most Westerners used when they referred to the city we now know as Yantai (烟台市 Yāntái shì.) Although it is a city of nearly 7 million people, my guess is that many people reading this have never heard of it. There was a Christian school that opened there in 1881 called the Protestant Collegiate School or Chefoo China Inland Mission School (芝罘学校 Zhīfú Xuéxiào,) and it served as a Christian boarding school for the China Inland Mission. I find the accounts of foreign missionaries living in China at that time fascinating. Most came to teach, not to learn. The ways they lived and dressed and considered their missions were multifold and multi-layered. Many missionaries provided the first solid connections between China and the West. Some men and women would dedicate their entire lives to the service of the church in China. I found one account of the life of missionary children at the Chefoo School by Larry Clinton Thompson, an interesting window into how the children of these missionaries lived their lives in a paper entitled: “Missionary Children in China: The Chefoo School and a Japanese Prison”

In 1941, the children and staff who had not managed to leave before the Japanese invaders arrived were first interned in the Temple Hill Internment Camp in Chefoo before being transferred to the larger Weih sien Internment Camp 潍县集中营 Wéi xiàn jízhōngyíng a Japanese operated the “Civilian Assembly Centre” about 260 km southwest of Chefoo. Among the residents of the camp was Eric Liddell, the famous Scottish gold medal runner turned missionary who was featured in the 1982 Oscar best picture film, “Chariots of Fire.” When he was finally taken prisoner by the Japanese, he was sent to Weih sien where he continued his ministry, setting up sports events, teaching science to children, and running a Sunday school every week. While there, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, but was a positive inspiration at the camp until his death in 1945. The title track from “Chariots of Fire” is often used in sporting events today and is still one of the most recognizable instrumental movie themes ever written.

A lighter story connecting Yantai to the West involved an American sailor by the name of Jimmy James. Most people don't know that Jimmy's actual last name was Skalicky. After dropping out of college in Minnesota in 1902, Jimmy joined the army and ended up in Tianjin (then known by Westerners as Tientsin) where he was discharged from the 15th Infantry in 1922. In that time, there were U.S. Navy ships that would dock at Yantai, and Jimmy had the bright idea of opening up a hamburger stand there to cater to the sailors. It was such a big hit, people begged him to do something similar in Shanghai, so Jimmy decided to give it a go. In 1924, he opened up a diner on Broadway Road (now 大名路 Dàmíng lù) in Shanghai, called The Broadway Lunch. In 1927, he changed the name to Jimmy's Kitchen, and the rest is history. And for those who don't know that history . . . the restaurant was an icon in Hong Kong from the Colonial era through its heyday in the 1970's and '80's until it closed in April of 2020. Until the end, you could still get the same Steak Diane and Baked Alaska that were favorites of John Wayne and Cary Grant on Wyndham Street in Central and at the Jinjiang Hotel in Shanghai.

