

四十三

Ending up in Tianjin
with my friend, “Harry Jeep”
an amazing old man
who sold art on the street
Eric Liddell, his teacher
M.D. from Bei Da
worked for US Marines
unforgivable flaw



Chapter 43 - Tianjin, Harry Jeep, and the International Community

I first went to Tianjin to see an old friend from Taiwan who was teaching in an international school there. Tianjin is about 80 miles to the southeast of Beijing. My friend, Jeff Fischmeier, wanted me to meet a gentleman he'd met, who sold paintings and porcelain on Ancient Culture Street. Enter, Harry Liu. Originally from Shanghai, Harry Liu studied at Tientsin Anglo-Chinese College in the early 1940s where his favorite teacher was the same Eric Liddell who set the world record in the 400 M. run in the 1924 Olympics - after refusing to run his favoured 200 M dash, since that event was scheduled to be run on a Sunday.

After graduating from high school, Harry went on to study and complete his medical degree in the Japanese and German program at Beijing University. But then, Harry accepted a part-time post-war job with the American Marines in Tianjin. His Scottish accented English quickly changed into an interesting combination of British and American English. In addition to speaking English, Harry also spoke Putonghua, Cantonese, Shanghainese, German, and Japanese, and a smattering of European languages. Harry loved America – or, at least the idea of it. Two things I used to take to Harry whenever we would travel to Tianjin were Whitman's Chocolate Samplers and current non-fiction books about China that were unavailable in China. Harry's work as a Jeep driver and general gofer for the American marines post-WW2 earned him both his nickname, "Harry Jeep," and a protracted period of re-education from the "real teachers" in China during the Cultural Revolution – the workers and the peasants. Largely because of his employment with the American marines, Harry never had the opportunity to establish a medical career.



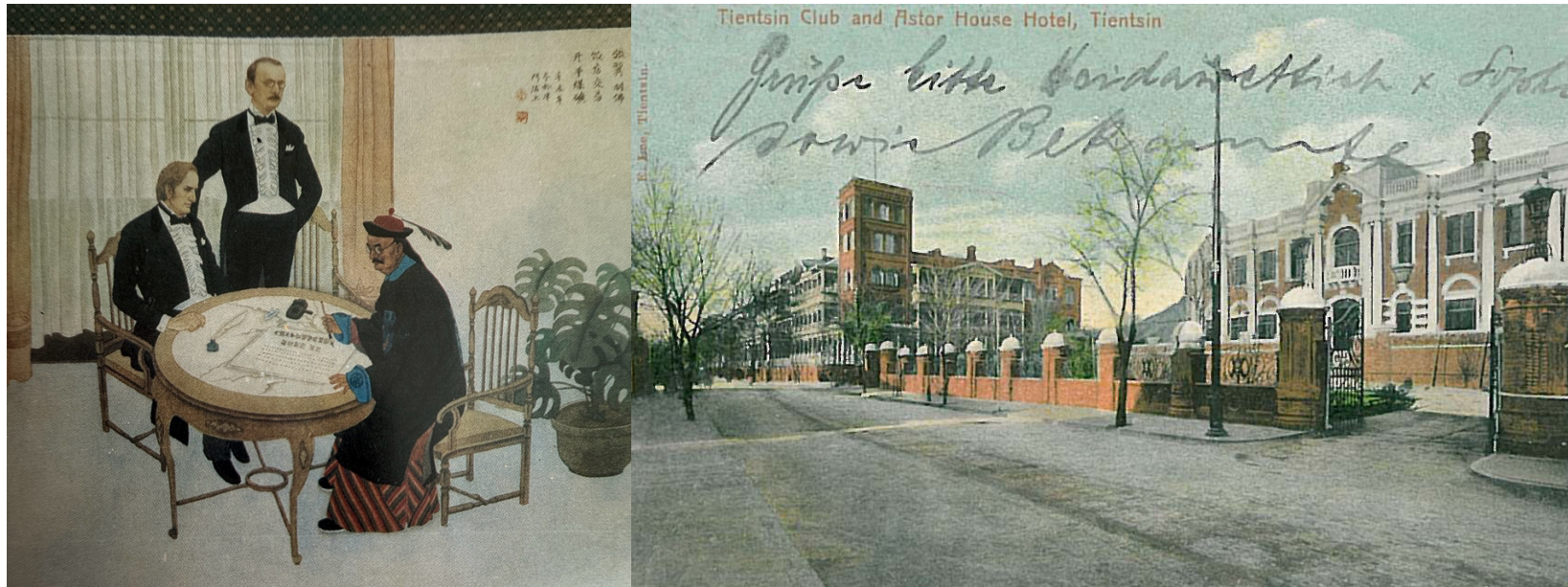
Harry introduced me to Kiessling's Café (起士林饭店 Qǐshìlín Fàndiàn) a German-Austrian bakery and restaurant renowned for its fine European cuisine. I remember taking Harry there in the late 1990s and treating him to a couple of his favorite dishes that he hadn't eaten since the 1930s. For years after that, whenever I would lead a group to Beijing, we would invariably detour to Tianjin where Harry would walk us through the European concessions and regale us with stories about his life in Tianjin. My friend, Harry Liu, passed away in 2010 at the age of 86, never having fulfilled his lifelong dream to visit America.

One place Harry introduced our kids to was called 狗不理包子(Gǒubulǐ Bāozi), a century plus old local favorite haunt whose name defies logical translation. It literally translates as "Dog doesn't pay attention steamed buns." The best explanation for the name that I've heard was that the original creator of these amazing steamed pork dumplings had arrived in Tianjin as a cooking apprentice at the age of 14 and was actually named 狗仔 Gǒuzǎi (young dog.) Because Gǒuzǎi focused on producing such great baozi, he would often neglect his customers. But since his baozi were so good, they didn't really mind!

The flower of the British Concession in Tianjin was the Astor Hotel (利顺德大饭店 Lìshùndé Dà Fàndiàn), located next door to British-built Victoria Park. It was the prime address for diplomats and social functions among the international upper crust in Tianjin in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ulysses S. Grant stayed there in the 1870s. The American consulate in Tianjin was located in the Astor until 1929, and Herbert Hoover stayed there numerous times before he became 31st President of the United States. Pu Yi, China's last emperor called the Astor his home for many years after abdicating in 1910 and before becoming the puppet ruler of Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. Starting as a single level hotel, by 1924 it had built up to three levels and later added an eight-story wing with one of China's first American Otis elevators. Today, the newer portion has been refurbished while portions of the old Astor retain their former Old World décor, memorabilia, and furnishings. The Astor remains one of Tianjin's finest luxury hotels.

Not only did Tianjin provide a home and community for people from several countries, it was also a safe haven for 5,000 European Jews during World War II. Jews fleeing the pogroms in Russia formed a community of approximately 13,000 in Harbin, and in the late 1930's and 40's Jews fleeing Poland, Germany and Austria were given sanctuary in Shanghai and in Tianjin. Notable among the Jewish community in Tianjin was Polish born author and journalist, Israel Epstein, who spent most of his life there. Arriving in Tianjin at age two, Epstein began establishing his journalistic credentials at age 15 working for an English language newspaper. The Tientsin Times. Later he would become friends and confidante of Soong Ching Ling and Edgar Snow before meeting and having long

life-changing conversations with Mao Ze Dong, Zhou En Lai, and Deng Xiaoping. Even though he was imprisoned for five years during the Cultural Revolution, Epstein remained both a Chinese citizen and a devoted member of the Chinese Communist Party until his death at age 90 in 2005.



I ran across this interesting description of Tianjin in Isabelle Maynard's book, *China Dreams: Growing up Jewish in Tientsin*: She wrote "Not until I was living in the safety of America did I realize that the land where I was born and raised would now be as inaccessible to me as Russia was to my father. It was then that the dreams began. Tientsin dreams of growing up; of joys and sorrows; of boyfriends and girlfriends; of blood red mimosas in Victoria Park, cerulean blue quilted rickshaw covers, yellow soft-as-powder sands of Pei-tai-ho Beach; of the silvery bridge joining the French and Italian concessions; of murky green water of the Hai-Ho Canal; of white signs that said, 'No dogs or Chinese allowed'; and of the blackness into which war had plunged us."

Now, less than an hour from cosmopolitan Beijing by fast train, Tianjin retained both the charm and feeling of 人情味 Rénqíngwèi (warmth and hospitality) that I had not encountered since leaving Taiwan.