

## A CHINESE/AMERICAN EXCHANGE

Guo Mingjing, one of two exchange students from Beijing Middle School in Beijing, China, studied for a semester at The Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. this past year. During the first year of this new program, two students from Washington, D.C. studied in China. While at Sidwell, Guo Mingjing took courses in biology, art history, beginning computer, and writing. He returned to China at the beginning of January in order to begin studies at Beijing Normal University. Before he departed, he shared his thoughts on what he had learned about the United States with Anthro.Notes editor JoAnne Lanouette who also teaches at The Sidwell Friends School.

Q: What knowledge did you have about the U.S. before you arrived?

A: Surprisingly little. My father is a professor of Classical Chinese literature, had studied in Moscow, and had been to Hungary. My mother taught Chinese at Stanford University during two summer sessions. I came to the U.S.A. to experience another country and to gain the friendship of Americans.

Q: What surprised you when you first arrived?

A: People are more friendly and informal in the U.S.A. It is impossible in China to say "Hi" to strangers. When I first went to the mailbox here, strangers said "Hi" to me. When I took a dog for a walk, I met another stranger walking a dog, and he started talking to me. That is much harder to do in China, and, of course, dogs are forbidden in the cities.

I was also surprised by escalators--just the fact that stairs were moving--and I was astonished by the number of cars just as visitors to



China are awed by the number of bicycles.

At first I could not believe that students would stay inside to study when they had grass and benches outside. In China grass is confined to parks; people do not have front or back lawns. But it is also more than that. Maybe I am influenced by my father, but I see nature as a source of intellectual stimulation--I think and write better when I am outside.

Q: In our conversations, you have mentioned that you have discovered differences in sports and cultural values between China and the U.S. What are those differences?

A: People do not exercise as much in the U.S.A., and that is obvious even in the fact that so many Chinese bicycle to work. I hope that maybe the Chinese

can learn from America's mistakes, and if we have a wise leader we will not decline to a nation of physically unconditioned people. In China sports encourage health, friendship, and nationalism, whereas in the U.S.A. sports seem to support commercial business success and enjoyment. Although we have no sports facilities as good as in America, everyone in China is active in exercising. Every morning, many people are running, which makes the school playground very crowded. You can see the old people doing Maiyiquam. The youths practice Wushu, and the kids are doing their gymnastics. Chinese people regard good health as the most important aim of sports. Once during a Chinese national match, there was a race and one player fell down. Another player stopped at once to help him. China is a country which has old customs of modesty, friendship, and kindheartedness. America is full of youthful spirit; it has more exciting business--movement, risk, and good dreams. But too often American sports seem more like fights than friendships.

Q: How did your experience in a U.S. high school differ academically from your experience in a Chinese high school?

A: In China the middle school (Junior 13-15 and Senior 16-18) generally offers Chinese, English, math, politics (including economics and philosophy), physics, chemistry, history, and sports. Each student has to take all the courses; no choice exists. We have class six periods a day, six days a week. You can imagine how hard Chinese students must work since we have homework in almost every class. Every day, much homework is heaped on the students, and they must do all of it by the next day. Students respect their teachers, and the classroom is a place for lectures, reading, and writing. The Vice Premier heads the Education Commission and decides on the curricula. All provinces have the same

textbooks and the same exams for applying to the universities.

In the U.S. I have found much more laboratory work and the importance of biology. I think biology is important for the future. Biology was a whole new world for me. In all my classes here there was much more discussion and more emphasis on thinking for yourself than in China. The teachers and students seemed more like friends. Students also have more choice in courses, and they seem more active and more independent than Chinese students.

Q: As you have gained fluency in English, what differences have you noticed between the English and Chinese languages?

A: I think Chinese characters are more difficult than English words. In English it is easy to read out the words just by looking at them. But you can't know most of the pronunciations of the Chinese characters only by looking at the shape of them, because Chinese characters have changed from the pictures thousands of years ago.

On the other hand, Chinese grammar is simpler than English grammar. English grammar has many different tenses; Chinese students often get very confused with them. Because in Chinese we have no tenses, we just use the same adverbs such as "yesterday," "now," "the next year." These adverbs are almost enough to express the different tenses.

Another important difference is that the verb is more important in Chinese than in English and the preposition is more important in English than in Chinese. In Chinese, to describe the motions of a finger, we can find scores of verbs. Each verb has its own lively meaning. Verbs are difficult for foreigners to master. The same thing happens to Chinese students with English prepositions. We

(continued from p.12)

often make mistakes with prepositions, such as when we say, "He will leave to New York" instead of "He will leave for New York."

Q: In your four and a half months here, have any Americans asked you puzzling questions?

A: Many people have asked me, "Do the Chinese have any freedom since the Communists?" Americans think that with a communist form of government a person can't have freedom. That is just not true.

I have noticed that many Americans take care of their private lives but do not take care of their public lives. I watch the news every day on television, and there is so little information on the rest of the world unless the country is involved with the U.S., like Libya. In China the TV news covers most all areas of the world. If Americans want a good future, they must know more about the rest of the world.

\* \* \* \* \*