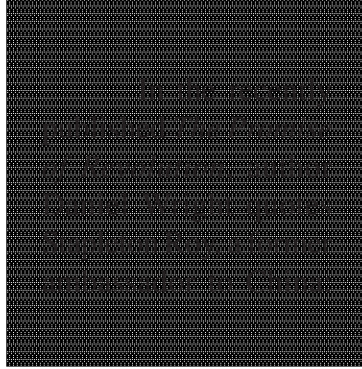


From the Executive Director



In the recently published *The Promise of Revolution*, author Daniel Wright quotes Stapleton Roy, a former ambassador to China: “Knowledge does not equal understanding.” He then goes on to state that “Knowledge combines information, theory, and fact. Understanding brings nuance, subtlety, the intangible. Knowledge is bones and flesh; understanding is soul and spirit.” (p. 3) While I am a Qing historian, often immersed in the analysis of books and research documents, I have come to realize that this knowledge needs to be supplemented by understanding, and that much of this understanding is best acquired by first hand observation.

In early October two Augustana College colleagues and I accepted an invitation extended to us by Central China Normal University (CCNU), (with which Augustana has had a fifteen-year exchange program), to journey to Wuhan, China to attend their One Hundredth Anniversary Celebration. It was quite an incredible experience, highlighted, for me, by a deepening of my understanding on three very different fronts.

My first discovery, more a rediscovery upon each visit, is that China is developing faster than is possibly imaginable. Reading essays about the modernization of China does not convey this realization to me as effectively as does a few days or weeks traversing the country. Wuhan, a city that I first visited in 1983 and have returned to frequently since, has developed a whole new skyline of impressive buildings, and has pushed new bridges across the Yangtze River. Its people have increasingly shifted from using bicycles to using motor vehicles to get to work. Equally impressive, the atmosphere on university campuses has also changed for the better. As David Vikner, of the Japan International Christian University Foundation and I sat sur-

rounded by thousands of CCNU students and faculty to watch the grand gala concert concluding the anniversary celebration, we kept poking each other and asking if this was really happening. There, in front of us, was a stage set up with a bank of lights and speakers, much as one might find them anywhere in the world for a rock concert. As the program progressed, we were intrigued by the students’ interaction with those on stage, not just the traditional opera singers and stand-up Chinese comedians, but especially the hosts who had been flown down from Beijing national television, and the two Chinese rock stars brought in for the occasion. This was a wonderful anniversary celebration in which CCNU’s new president, Ma Min, and emeritus president, Zhang Kaiyuan, proudly traced the roots of the University back to the founding of Wenhua Academy in 1903 which then became Huazhong University, the largest and most influential mission university in south-central China.

My second discovery is how much the life of college teachers is given meaning by the students that we teach. For fifteen years, Augustana has been sending recent graduates to CCNU to spend a year teaching English. In late August, six of our students left to accept this challenging task. When we arrived, we found them in good spirits, recently returned from excursions to every corner of China as part of their National Day celebrations. With a limited command of Chinese and only a few weeks in country, three of these students caught a sleeper bus and took a very long trip to Southwest China; two others journeyed by hard seat train to Xian, and from that point one took a bus to Huang Shan (Yellow Mountain) to climb this sacred peak. The remaining student, already well connected with a group of Chinese students, became their invited guest to make a trip to attend a concert in Beijing. All are teaching English in the classroom twelve

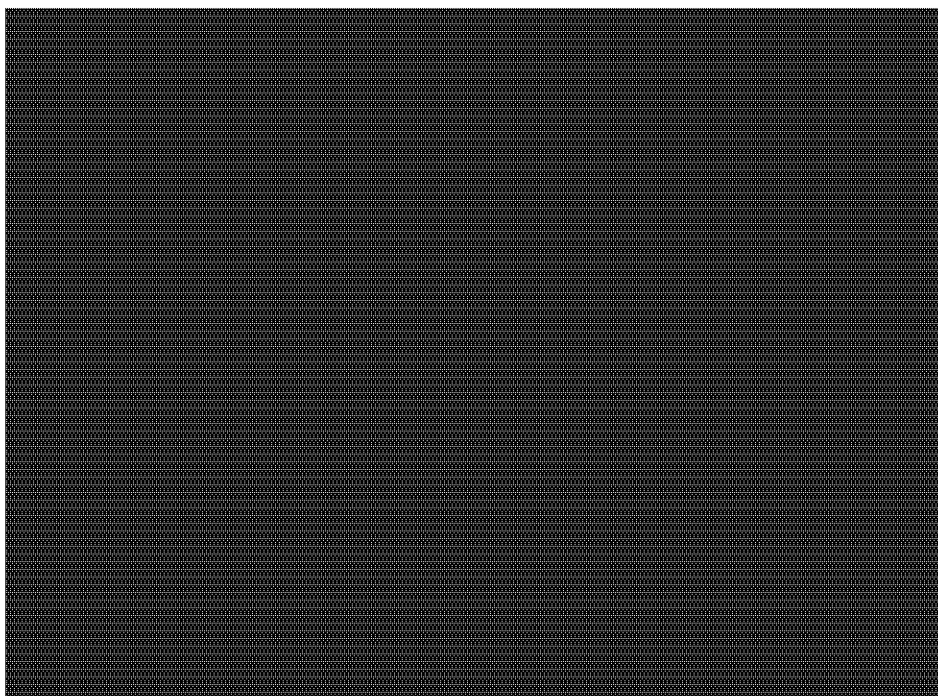
hours a week and taking Chinese language courses on the side. Their excitement about being in China and the discoveries that await them is contagious. At the same time, they have already come to realize what a wonderful opportunity is afforded them as they help young Chinese begin to master the incredibly complicated English language.

My third discovery came while in conversation with two people I deeply admire, Terry Lautz of the Luce Foundation, and Nancy Chapman of the Yale-in-China Program, both of whom were special guests at the anniversary celebration. Each in their own way has played significant roles in furthering the study of Asia in the United States and in providing resources to foster education, health care, and the economic development of China. Here are two people who have chosen to serve (and I believe serve is the operative verb here) in the foundation and the non-profit sector, rather than becoming university professors. In doing so, they have made, and

continue to make, significant contributions to humankind. I found it reassuring to discover that Yale-in-China has returned to the mainland and is again involved in educational and societal endeavors much as was the case in the first half of the century.

As is the case for all China scholars from my generation (I lived in Hong Kong from mid-1964 to the end of 1966 and entered graduate school in 1970), I am grateful that I can now travel freely throughout the country and thereby deepen my understanding of it and its people. This past visit as a guest of CCNU and the half-dozen Augustana students residing there was simply wonderful because I re-discovered the dynamism that is modern China, the enthusiasm of young people, and the steady service and compassion evidenced in Terry and Nancy. In doing so, my knowledge of China and of people was enhanced by deeper understanding.

Van Symons



Six current English teachers and two previous ones meet for dinner in Beijing