



How Was China?: Views and Vignettes from a Chinese Women's College

Dodie Johnston

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Feeling bored and counting her losses, Dodie is eager for a new kind of adventure as she enters her 60th decade. When she answers an ad inviting people to teach English in China, she finds the adventure she sought and much, much more. Dodie discovers that her destination, Hwa Nan College for Women, has been resurrected from the ashes of two revolutions by a handful of elderly Chinese matriarchs in hopes of preparing capable young women for vocations in the new China. The “Old Ladies” are feisty, determined and running the school on a shoestring. Her young adult students are idealistic and naive...full of dreams for their families and optimistic about their futures. Who are these girls and what are their stories? And how does Dodie, a retired school psychologist with no ESL training, muddle through a decade of teaching them English only to discover that she has been a student herself? *How Was China?* answers these questions with intelligence, humor and honesty. The book weaves together tales of travel, social commentary, personal stories of Chinese women and the author’s observations as she explores her home in this very foreign land. Dodie returns again and again through the first decade of the 21st century watching her students blossom into graduates, workers, wives and mothers...journeys that illustrate the amazing turns and twists of Chinese life. When not in class, Dodie wanders. Stroll through the streets and alleys of the old neighborhood with her, delight in the vibrant street life, laugh at market and clinic shenanigans, and grapple with the cultural differences inherent in every encounter. She watches in dismay as old buildings are torn down and replaced by new, but often dehumanizing, condos and shopping malls. She takes you on forays back into the lively history of the people fatefully connected to this rare private college, illuminating the events that led to China’s rise to power and affluence and sweeping Hwa Nan and its women along with it onto a new campus 100 years from its inception. After reading *How Was China?* you will never look at life in this mysterious country the same way again.

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