FIRST APPEAL TO THE HEART: A PRE-INTERNET MEMOIR

BY WEI LIU

One Saturday afternoon in the spring of my senior year in high school, I return home early. Soon I will take the entrance exam for college, a test with a pass rate of only 10 percent. Neither my dad nor my mom is at home. I drop my heavy bag onto my bed, then walk to my parent's bedroom, lit by spring sunbeams. I step inside and switch on the radio, slowly turning the dial so as not to miss any stations. I'm searching for a short-wave station outside of China. I'm tired of the Chinese radio stations, with their constant reports on China's excellent economy, its best of all political systems, its high standards of education. I'm not looking for any specific short-wave station, just any voice from outside China.

My hand keeps turning the radio dial. "Our government of China holds that all the countries of the world are responsible for maintaining world peace," barks a strident female voice before I can move on. I never feel at peace in China. The government keeps saying that we need to prepare for war against America, against Russia, and now they are fighting against the Vietnamese, somewhere across the border. Maybe every country is like this, claiming to maintain world peace regardless of their real activities.

Turning, turning. "Coming up next, we report on the unselfish deeds of a village Party secretary," booms a male voice. More propaganda. When I talk with villagers, all they talk about is how they are harmed by these communist officials.

Turning, turning. A warm breeze strokes my face through the open window, and a small green tree rustles in the flowerbed outside. "The conservative faction of the Chinese Communist Party… Hua Hua Hua…" A soothing male voice comes over the waves. I guess it is Voice of America before it's replaced by static that I know is produced by the government. If they're not afraid the foreign radio station is telling the truth, then what's the point of blocking it? I assume the foreign station is telling the truth, but the static is unremitting, and I move on.

Turning, turning. "Some people do not believe in the existence of heaven, for they cannot perceive it, but heaven does exist. The larva of a dragonfly lives in the water; it knows nothing of the boundless sky above the water. Only after being transformed into a dragonfly does it know what has been above it all the time. And at that time it is no longer able to fly back into the water to tell its former companions what it now knows. That's how it is when a human being leaves the present world and sees heaven for the first time." From the calm male voice, I can tell this is a Christian radio station from outside of China.

What a wonderful analogy. I believe there are things in the universe beyond mankind's perception. Although heaven is something people cannot perceive, that doesn't mean it does not exist. I know heaven is mentioned in the Bible. I haven't read a page of the Bible yet, but I know it is about God, who created the world, including human beings. Maybe the Bible is absolute truth and all the other knowledge mankind possesses about the world is only relative truth. I cannot find a Bible in the bookstores, and I have been unable to borrow one from someone else.

I have been seeking truth for a long time. I don't believe my overloaded schedule and the scoldings I receive at school are truth, nor do I believe in the chiding of my mom and dad, who always think the school is right. How about the textbooks? No, I don't feel good about them, and I completely disagree with parts of them, like the words on absolute truth and relative truth. How about the books I read outside of school? I enjoy them, but they don't seem to resolve the questions of life, and after I read them, I still have to face school and my dad and mom. How about myself? I've long been aware of my own shortcomings, in my homework, in my examinations, even in playing Chinese chess.

God, please save me! You are the only truth, I believe. I believe in you. I believe in the existence of heaven. I speak to God, whom I cannot see but I believe exists and can hear me. At that moment, I believe in God.

This is enough for me today. I turn the radio off. The next day when my dad is home, I say to him, "I want to be a Christian."

"How can you want to be a Christian?" he demands peevishly. "Every day you think this, think that, and now you want to be a Christian!"

I'm intimidated by his harsh tone, which is more than I expected. I don't want to talk to my Mom. If I do, I'll just get another scolding. I know that like most people in China, they believe what the government says about all religions being superstition. The matter is finished. I return to my stack of homework assignments, and before long I forget about becoming a Christian.

Postscript: Wei Liu eventually moved to the United States and was baptized a Christian in 2001.