



Shakyamuni

**You can be stopped and yet recover the initiative
You must use your days and months correctly**

**If you are defeated, you can recover
You must use the four seasons correctly**

**There are only a few notes in the scale
Yet you can always rearrange them
You can never hear every song of victory**

**There are only a few basic colors
Yet you can always mix them
You can never see all the shades of victory**

Sun Tzu, from "The Art of War" – 500 BC

It was my last evening in dear Shanghai for this go-round of a year and four months. Autumn was quickly descending into December cold as I walked past the old French buildings on Fuxing Road in clothes that weren't warm enough anymore. Dry leaves were blowing over the sidewalk and there was still quite a bit of traffic left over from the Friday night rush. I walked by a shop filled with traditional Chinese paintings of landscapes and flowers and the shop owner caught my eye, which made me catch my step, I went inside.

He was a wizened looking guy wearing plain cotton clothes, well worn shoes, and with a rough beard, smoking his pipe. Since he spoke almost no English and my Mandarin doesn't go very far we communicated with a lot of gesturing and eye contact as he showed me one painting after another. One wall-sized painting took my breath away. It was of a bustling Chinese town, streets and buildings and people active all through it, a scene from a past century. It was done in excellent



perspective, but not quite the Western perspective we are used to – that is, not strictly conforming to what the eye physically sees. Certain distant areas were magnified to show the relative importance the artist placed on them, and the trick worked beautifully. I said my name as I offered my card, which he took respectfully with both hands. He pronounced my family name back to me and said, “Poland, na?” I was able to communicate that I work in Shanghai as a pianist by playing an ‘air piano’ on a big wooden

table... he slowly pronounced a series of names; Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Paganini, Brahms... Then I drew an ‘air map’ on the table, pointing out I was born in New England and migrated to California, and now my wish was to remain in Asia. He was very amused by this and started laughing, saying “Bye by America, bye by!”

In walked his niece from school, a petite bubbly teenager with her Simpson’s book backpack, jet-black straight hair and tiny China eyes. She spoke English pretty well so the conversation picked up – she explained why a certain painting was her favorite as a small yellow cat poked his head out from between some scrolls resting against the wall. The scene was of vast farmland in rolling hills completely covered with very tall grass, a little farmhouse placed in the upper corner and the long winding pathway leading to it. From the regular and agitated strokes the artist made you could almost feel the wind rushing through the grass, as this young girl imagined herself on her way home to the

Chinese farmhouse in the late afternoon.

Unlike her uncle who is very traditional, but as many of the new generation she has an English name in addition to her Chinese name. Jenny explained she was from Shandong Province, a beautiful forested country area an overnight's train ride north, where there are many apple orchards. She was amazed when I told her how much Shanghai is like New York. We walked towards a back room where you could smell the paint and brushes, there was an artist at work there who looked up and smiled. I told them I was American and as usual, immediately went into my disclaimer stating, "But I no like George Bush!" Jenny gave a puzzled expression, not knowing who that person was. So I started explaining, "China has Hu Jintao, America has a George Bush..."

Her uncle understood my meaning and waved his hand in dismissal to show me he considered this a boring subject. Instead he motioned me over to the paintings on the other side of the room – an exquisite Buddha with a face composed of a few precious brush strokes – another with the Buddha sitting at the center of a mandala depicting the dynamic universe. He met my eyes and I knew he was thinking, "Now THIS is what I call interesting!" and quietly spoke the name, 'Shakyamuni.'

Bob Mocarsky Shanghai 11/04

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"The music and art of Donald McCrea and Bob Mocarsky"

bobmomusic@hotmail.com

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