

Letters from Overseas

Mary Fraser Writes from China

The Amity Foundation
Education Division
71 Hankou Road
Nanjing, Jiangsu 210008
CHINA

April 2009



Photo: Wolf Kutnahorsky

Burdens

The Chinese are very good at carrying burdens. A bicycle transports a fridge or a mattress to a new home. A small pedal-driven cart moves a huge pile of Styrofoam to a recycling shop. A bamboo pole carries baskets of vegetables and fruit to market.

Such sights make me wonder about the invisible burdens carried by Chinese people. Certainly many of my students, at first glance, seem burden-free. On closer examination and questioning, their inner burdens include finding a good job, repaying school loans, making a good marriage, and making a lot of money so they can have a comfortable life. In answer to the question, "Are your friends who have these things happy?" the response is, "No. They need more money and more things."

Chen Liu, a 30-year-old office worker at my university, agrees with this assessment but insists that she is happy much of the time. In answer to why that is so, she tells me of her dream to earn a doctorate degree at Tsinghua, China's top university. The Chinese university system does not make it easy to dream such dreams: the entrance exam is written once a year and it is university-specific; the doctoral exams for all the top universities are on the same day. Even if



The United Church of Canada, 3250 Bloor St. West, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781 or 416-231-7680 ext. 4017; pip@united-church.ca

Chen Liu wanted to set her sights a little lower, she must still wait a year! Her dream is her burden.

We, in the West, are so fortunate. Our systems seem set up to encourage dreaming and to make success attainable. As for burdens, we are much more private about physical burdens, using enclosed vehicles, recycling trucks, and wheeled suitcases and trolleys. For invisible burdens, as Christians, we do not need to be heavy-laden. Jesus tells us to come to him and he will ease our burdens (Matthew 11:28–30).

As we approach Easter, I am reminded that God doesn't want us to carry our burdens. God asks us to lay them down at the foot of the cross and surrender them to God (1 Peter 5:7).

Blessings,

Mary Fraser

Mary Fraser is a United Church of Canada global mission personnel serving with Amity in China. The work of this global partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

