

## The Red Blackboard: An American Teacher in China

Ruth Koenig



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As a traveler, I had always been frustrated at having to eat and run when visiting fascinating places. Being able to live, teach, and travel, and really get to know people was like a dream come true when my husband and I spent a year in China. Although fascinating, it was not an easy year. Coping with the lack of heat, of familiar foods, political monitors in the classroom, and few teaching materials sometimes made teaching a nightmare. It was the first time in my life I had ever written Spitting in the classroom will not be tolerated on my class syllabus. Traveling in a country with woefully inadequate facilities and resources was frustrating and maddening. Venturing out without knowing the language created some awkward, embarrassing, and sometimes humorous situations. In one instance, some enterprising and engaging salesmen inveigled my husband into posing for pictures, prominently holding up some sample commercial products. When the pictures and sample brochures arrived later, we discovered that he seemed to be enthusiastically endorsing a feminine hygiene product. Nevertheless, as we came to know our Chinese students, friends, and colleagues who shared their lives and experiences, we gained a new understanding of courage and an appreciation for the endurance of the human spirit, and the natural sweetness of the Chinese people.

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