

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Graham Peck

Description: In this interview segment, ER discusses Chinese history and culture with traveler and author Graham Peck.

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[ER:] China is so much in the news these days, but little is heard of the Chinese people themselves, their feelings and their reactions. Mr. Graham Peck is a young man who's lived among the Chinese people in their villages and cities. And in his recently published book, *Two Kinds of Time*, tells of his experiences. Today he's going to tell us about these people. I'm happy to introduce to you Mr. Graham Peck.

[Graham Peck:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. It's a great pleasure to be here.

[ER:] What does the title of your book, *Two Kinds of Time* mean, Mr. Peck?

[Graham Peck:] Well, when I went to China about ten years ago, uh I went as a traveler and uh was interested in the small amusing surface matters of life. But after I've been in China, only two or three years, I found that uh I was a witness to much more ponderous, even frightening events: uh the Pacific War, the outbreak of the Chinese Revolution. Uh and consequently, I felt that my experiences fell into two uh varieties, into two kinds of time, really. (1:22)

[ER:] Two kinds of time [ER laughs]?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] I see now what it means. How long did you live among the Chinese? Two or three years sounds like quite a long while.

[Graham Peck:] It was actually eight and a half. Uh on two trips to China, I went out there in uh nine--uh in 1936 and came back at the end of 1937. And then I returned to China in 1940 and stayed until the end of 1946.

[ER:] That's quite a long while [Graham Peck laughs]. That's uh - that's uh six years all in one stretch.

[Graham Peck:] Six and a half in one stretch.

[ER:] Six and a half in one stretch?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] Well, you might learn quite a good deal. How did- how did you happen to go? Just because as a traveler it interested you, or--(2:08)

[Graham Peck:] Well, originally, I went out immediately after graduating from college. Uh I um wanted to write a travel book and use some money I'd uh made in college doing portraits and so on to finance a

trip around the world. I expected to stay in China only two or three weeks when I got there. [Graham Peck laughs].

[ER:] And you stayed on all that time [ER and Graham Peck laugh] [Graham Peck: Yes.]. So you were there, of course, during the war.

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] That's very interesting.

[Graham Peck:] I was in the --

[ER:] That's very interesting, what were your impressions of Chinese people?

[Graham Peck:] During the war, you mean?

[ER:] During the war.

[Graham Peck:] Well, people of wonderful endurance but uh inhumanly put upon by all kinds of troubles

[ER: Um]. Some natural and some man made.

[ER:] You know, uh my husband's family, uh his mother's family had lived for great many years in China and um they all loved the Chinese people and China very much. And I'm interested in hearing you say people of great endurance because I've heard his mother very many times remark upon um the way they could endure. (3:27)

[Graham Peck:] Yes, I think that's the first impression of a great many uh.

[ER:] That's very interesting. Now your book on China is said to differ from some others because it describes your travels outside the large cities, and your experiences during several years of life among ordinary Chinese and provincial villages in towns. Tell us a little about where you travelled.

[Graham Peck:] Well, in uh my last trip out there, uh starting in 1940, and I first travelled overland from Hong Kong up to Chongqing and stayed there a few months, and then I went up to north China. I wanted to get as far away from Chongqing as I could and uh as close to the front as possible to find how-how war conditions were affecting these people in small provincial places. And uh I lived for about three or four months in a very small village in the northwestern mountains, a place called Shuangshipu, and then I went and spent half a year in a provincial capital called Luoyang, which was about ten miles from the front. (4:35)

[ER:] Well now, when you lived in a village like that, uh how did you manage it? Did you live with a family or did you live alone or what?

[Graham Peck:] Uh I was very fortunate in meeting a man named Rewi Alley, who was in the Chinese industrial co-ops, and he had some caves in Shuangshipu, uh residential caves and he loaned me the use of them.

[ER:] Well, that's very interesting. I remember those industrial co-ops very well, because um [Graham Peck: Yes] I think Madame Chiang brought me some things that they were making and also told me about

them when she first came to Washington. They were um an effort really to make production, if I remember rightly, of things like blankets and--(5:17)

[Graham Peck:] Yes, all kinds of articles of daily use.

[ER:] That were in daily use?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] Well, that's what I remembered. So you travelled to the north primarily, and then did you go on into the central part?

[Graham Peck:] Well, uh at the end of that year, Pearl Harbor occurred so I went back to Chongqing and joined the O.W.I. [Office of War Information] Whi--

[ER:] I see. Well now, what was it about Chinese life or about the Chinese people that made you content to stay there so long?

[Graham Peck:] Well, it was very fascinating living in a society so completely different from ours. It was in some ways medieval. It was also in the process of collapse, and everything that happened was -- uh so many things that happened were fantastically different from similar situations in America. And then uh the-the-the thing that I really liked the best was the character of the Chinese people: very tough, uh humorous, and calm. (6:20)

[ER:] Well, what-what's like-what's life like in a provincial town in China?

[Graham Peck:] Fairly monotonous from day to day. Everybody is working terribly hard, and uh I mean, you have to live in a small place for weeks and months uh to observe the, well, little crises of daily life

[ER: Do they get much news--] to collect enough of them. To get an impression of how people react to a situation.

[ER:] Well, do they get much news from the outside or are they just concerned with their daily lives? How they can live from day to day?

[Graham Peck:] The majority are only concerned with that. The newspaper readers are a very tiny minority. (7:11)

[ER:] So that really it's just a struggle of [Graham Peck: Yes.] day to day living? Well, that um that can be very absorbing! [Graham Peck laughs] That can be--a great deal about that is important. Um do you get any-any feel as you were there of what uh what the reaction of the Chinese people is to all the recent developments in their country?

[Graham Peck:] Uh all you can say definitely is that it's a very slow reaction, and I don't think the-their final attitude towards their new government will be evident for several years. The peasants are extremely conservative by nature, even if they're terribly poor. Even if they are the kind of people whom the communists could benefit and did benefit, they are very inclined to be suspicious about these changes just because they are changes. (8:01)

[ER:] Well, of course, my recollection was that the Chinese peasant loved to own land [Graham Peck: That's true, yes, yes]. That's the great desire.

[Graham Peck:] Even if they own a tiny patch, they regard themselves as land owners.

[ER:] Well now under a-a communist system, that is apt to be broken down, isn't it?

[Graham Peck:] Yes. But so far, the Chinese communists have redistributed the land rather than uh--I mean they've increased the amount of privately owned land by breaking up the large land holdings.

[ER:] Breaking up all the big [Graham Peck: Yes.] um land holdings?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] I know once, um I drove Madame Chiang around our countryside in Dutchess County and she looked down from the top of a hill and she said, "Your country is not so different in large contours but so different as you look at it, because a hill like this in China would be cultivated into hundreds of small plots of land. Not one inch would be left uncultivated and um each plot would be owned by a different person." (9:07)

[Graham Peck:] Yes. Bu-bu-but often--

[ER:] That takes one's breath away.

[Graham Peck:] Yes [Graham Peck laughs]. Often one person would own several little plots, all separated, instead of owning a-a complete farm.

[ER:] I see, but even then it meant an enormous amount too, didn't it?

[Graham Peck:] Oh yes.

[ER:] She once told me something that interested me, and that was that their sense of hospitality was so great that um even the poorest farmer would invite you to a meal and would put his whole wealth into that meal.

[Graham Peck:] Give you hot water if he couldn't afford to give you tea.

[ER:] Well, that's uh, it's-it's an--that's an extraordinary trait isn't it?

[Graham Peck:] Yes. (9:57)

[ER:] Most of us in this country, Mr. Peck, have a feeling that one of the great difficulties of the Chinese people is high taxation, and I wonder what method is used to tax the people there.

[Graham Peck:] Well, there are several methods and they vary a great deal from province to province and even from village to village, because in China there's -- in the past, there's been very little tradition of a uniform government uh by laws, by hard and fast laws. The government is by men and uh often they have enough power to do as they choose, and uh they simply collect taxes as they please. For example, villages close to a highway are likely to have heavier taxes than a village up in the hills simply because it's easier to get to, and uh the-the um village authorities, who are all appointive, uh can take taxes from the various groups of people under them in any way they please. They are supposed to uh-- this, of course, is all in the past--they were supposed to have done this in a way that would ensure that the richest paid the most and poorest the least, but naturally a system like that is very easy to become corrupted. [ER: Well--] And

the fact that it did become corrupted is one of the chief reasons why the Nationalist government is now restricted to the island of Formosa. (11:30)

[ER:] Well, that's um that's what I've always heard. Now you must have made some very good friends among the village people. Uh perhaps you will tell us a little about those you remember and that you really want to see again.

[Graham Peck:] Well, it-it's terribly hard to make friends among the peasants, because just as they are shy about changes, conservative about changes, they are very conservative about foreigners. And uh when I lived in a small mountain village in the northwest, I was there nearly three months, and it was only at the end of the third month that my next-door neighbor would uh trust me enough to speak fairly frankly about his problems. He was a very nice man, I thought. Uh one thing he told, amused me uh very much, is about um--he was very poor, he lived in a house that would be considered a ruin by American standards, dressed in rags, and the Communist armies had come through his village about six or seven years before and stayed about a week and went on. And uh I asked him if any local people had gone away with the communists and he was extremely contemptuous, very proud, and said, "Oh, only a few beggars." (12:40)

[ER:] Only a few beggars [ER and Graham Peck laugh]! Oh that's very amusing. Well, uh in your book, you speak of the years of un-resisted air attack by the Japanese, which gave the Chinese renewed schooling and endurance of passivity. You were speaking specifically of Chongqing, but did you find this to be true wherever you went? Had the long, hopeless war years actually change the personality of the people?

[Graham Peck:] I think, at least temporarily, it had. Uh they'd begun to get a very hopeless feeling about the problems of their life. That's another factor in the failure of the Nationalist government. Uh public morale just went down and down and down from about 1943 onto uh the collapse of the Nationalist government. This became increasingly evident.

[ER:] They just felt things were hopeless?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] Well um, did you run across any Chinese communists so that you could see what the appeal might be there? (13:47)

[Graham Peck:] I knew some of them uh at the uh office in Chongqing, the Chinese communist liaison office, and some in Peking after the war during General Marshal's truce--

[ER:] What kind of background did they come from?

[Graham Peck:] Most of these were educated, uh well--

[ER:] Educated in this country?

[Graham Peck:] Some of them were [Graham Peck laughs], yes. Um most of these liaison people of the communists were people with Western education. They were picked for that, you see.

[ER:] I know, uh for instance, that the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had part of his education in Moscow. I always realized that there were a tremendous number of Chinese students over here and some of them must be communists today. (14:35)

[Graham Peck:] Oh, quite a few, I think.

[ER:] Well uh, that uh that shows, I think, that it's economic conditions that create this more than it is uh ideological thought, probably.

[Graham Peck:] Well uh I think most of these, well, upper-class communists uh made their decision for intellectual reasons.

[ER:] For what?

[Graham Peck:] For intellectual reasons.

[ER:] For intellectual reasons?

[Graham Peck:] Rather than economic reasons.

[ER:] Rather than economic?

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] You really think that they uh felt that this was to the advantage of their um people?

[Graham Peck:] Yes. That seems to be the feeling among the ones I--

[ER:] From the political point of view?

[Graham Peck:] No, they felt revolution was necessary and that the communist program could bring revolution faster than any other. I'm not sure if whether they thought ahead and uh [ER: I see. Well now-] what things will be like in twenty or thirty years. (15:38)

[ER:] Yes. Well now you told me that they didn't get any um news through the newspapers. I don't suppose that they have radios.

[Graham Peck:] Oh, uh the people who could read would get quite a bit of news through the newspapers during the war years. Every provincial city, big one, had one or two papers.

[ER:] Yes, but that must uh mean an enormous number of people back in the country that don't get much information of the outside world.

[Graham Peck:] I would say uh about 80 percent of the total population has--

[ER:] Has what?

[Graham Peck:] Had practically no knowledge of the outside world.

[ER:] No knowledge of what's going on?

[Graham Peck:] Yes. This was under the Nationalist government. I don't know what it's like now. (16:19)

[ER:] Would you say that now they perhaps have started on education in a much more concrete fashion?

[Graham Peck:] Uh education in the form of propaganda, I believe.

[ER:] Well uh, I don't think we would quite [Graham Peck laughs] call that a sufficient education.

[Graham Peck:] No. [ER laughs]

[ER:] Well uh, I wonder in speaking of the provincial capital of Luoyang, you mentioned uh that there was little formal government to lead or protect the people, and that yet they ran an orderly community life. Now explain to me how that was possible.

[Graham Peck:] Well, there are so many customs of -- uh I suppose you could call it social behavior uh in China. The way people are supposed to act and arguments. There are rules for the conduct of arguments and conflicts. These aren't written down at all. They're simply habits [ER: Habits.] of mind, and uh a very strong family, uh a sense of family responsibility helps make an or-orderly community even though there's comparatively little government. (17:38)

[ER:] Yes, so that uh is really a tradition that keeps them um governing in-in a way that uh allows them to lead an orderly life.

[Graham Peck:] Yes, regulating their own neighborhoods, people lose face if they--

[ER:] It's regulated in that way.

[Graham Peck:] Yes.

[ER:] Uh what evidences uh were there uh of religion among the various echelons of the Chinese people?

[Graham Peck:] Well, of course, you see temples and shrines all over the country; many of them in ruins now. My impression was that the Chinese were not a particularly religious people.

[ER:] Were not a particularly religious people?

[Graham Peck:] No. They-they, well, they have a very strong sense of ethical behavior, I think, but uh [ER: Well that I've heard of, that I see.] formal religion is not terribly strong in China.

[ER:] I see that a good deal among the UN delegates; [Graham Peck: Uh-huh.] that sense of responsibility. [Graham Peck: Yes.] But um uh I should think that was quite possible about the religious uh feeling. Now um, I wonder if you haven't got a favorite story to tell us, because your book is completely filled with delightful anecdotes, and I thought possibly you might have saved one that wasn't in it. [Graham Peck laughs]

[Graham Peck:] Well, right off hand, I can't think of one that isn't in the book. My favorite of the ones in the book uh is about two Americans, rather than Chinese, I'm afraid, who tried to free two pet apes in the mountains outside Kunming. They bound them up and took them out to-out to the country in a Jeep, and then undid the ropes, and the apes had gotten very angry on the rough ride out to the mountains, and the two men got rather frightened so they climbed a tree, and it took the apes some time to untie the ropes and by the time they had, it has begun to rain so they decided they wouldn't get out of the Jeep. And for nearly an hour and a half, these two men clung in the tree tops in a drenching rain storm while the animals sat in their car [ER and Graham Peck laugh].

[ER:] That I think is wonderful. Um how stable do you think the Chinese communists are now in China? (19:57)

[Graham Peck:] I think this is probably, from what I've heard, a period of suspended judgement for most of the Chinese people, the non-political ones.

[ER:] I see. You just think they're waiting to see what happens to them?

[Graham Peck:] I think their--Yes.

[ER:] Uh what kind of party um still uh remains in favor of the Generalissimo Chiang on the mainland?

[Graham Peck:] I haven't heard any recent reports about that. There is a great deal of unrest in the southern provinces and there are guerilla groups, but what their connection is with the Formosa regime is very unclear.

[ER:] As you look at China today, do you think that the future is going to be a long period of unrest or do you think that uh they may uh before for long settle down?

[Graham Peck:] Well from what I've heard of Peking in north China, where they've been in power for several years, it's quite likely that they will succeed in setting up some amount of stability before very long.

[ER:] You really think they will?

[Graham Peck:] Yes, within a decade. Of course, everything in China takes long.

[ER:] Takes a long while. [Graham Peck laughs] I have discovered that the feeling of the Oriental for time is very different than our feeling [Graham Peck laughs] in this country. Well now, I want to thank you very much for being with me today and for telling our listeners so many interesting things on a very important question.

[Graham Peck:] Well, thank you very much for allowing me to be here.

(21:40)

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