

## Charles Greer

Charles and I first met in Austin, Texas, in the summer of 1972. I was in my first year of graduate school at the University of Texas (UT), and he was joining the geography department as a junior faculty member, coming direct from Taiwan. Charles and I had mutual disciplinary interests in international places, their overseas development, and societal and environmental transformations. It was soon apparent that Charles' teaching skills were well honed and that he was a very popular instructor. He would retain this mastery throughout his professional career, engaging and educating cohorts of students on China's societal achievements, the country's problematic human-environmental relationships, and the cultural richness of Maoist China, despite its authoritarian style of government. Our paths would cross again in the summer of 1978, when Charles came to Indiana University to join the faculty, and we have remained colleagues and family friends ever since, sharing exurbanite lifestyles, raising all kinds of animals on our respective "family homesteads," growing older and eventually wiser now that retirement is upon us.

Charles grew up in Fort Collins, Colorado, so he stems from a Western, farming background that he still adheres to in terms of recreation, riding horses, and rural living. From high school, and without ever visiting the East Coast, he accepted an academic scholarship from Dartmouth College in 1960. For the next four undergraduate years he played football and ran track in the off season. Attracted by courses in physical geology and geomorphology, Charles majored in geology at Dartmouth, and made the most of Dartmouth's "Ivy-League" environment. Dartmouth's Project Asian was the voluntary service overseas program that changed his life. After graduating in 1964, he and his wife, Sue, left for Hong Kong for a two-year service appointment teaching geology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). There he gained a working knowledge of Cantonese, acquired his fascination with China, and learned more about the mainland's transformations under Mao's Communist rule. Charles began teaching the Geography of North America at CUHK, thus gaining a "first foot" into geography that would redirect him again, if only slightly.

With the two-year contract expiring in the summer of 1966, Charles applied to graduate school at the University of Washington, to complete his M.A. there, and so they returned to North America to live the life of impecunious graduate students relying on TA/AI support for groceries. In 1969 he completed his master's thesis entitled "Quinghi Province: Transformation of a Cultural Frontier," and two years into his Ph.D. program he again left for the Far East to conduct fieldwork. This time, supported by a Fulbright Dissertation Abroad Fellowship, Charles, Sue, and their son, Jason, spent 18 months in Taiwan. Their daughter, Genevieve, would be born in Taiwan, and Sue would begin her career in English as a second language. Coming to the end of their 18 months in the early summer of 1972, Charles was surprised, but gratified, to receive a letter from the chair of the University of Texas (UT) geography department offering him a full-time instructorship. He accepted, they packed their things, and moved back to the United States, this time to Austin.

Charles completed his dissertation in 1975, and continued to conduct research on China's natural resources, water management systems, and wildlife resources. Then, while on a yearlong UT-Oxford School of Geography Exchange Program during 1977-1978, he received an invitation to interview for a joint post in East Asian languages and cultures and geography at IU. He flew over, met the College dean's representatives and both faculties, gave his formal presentation at 8 p.m. the second evening—which was 3 a.m. U.K. time—returned to Oxford a couple of days later, and was offered a full-time post shortly afterwards. An exceptional, not to mention exhausting, interview experience, to be sure! From then on, until 2000, Charles would hold down two faculty positions, teaching in both departments, doing the usual loads of service—but always in two departments—and continuing to engage and excite IU Bloomington undergraduates about China and its geographical wealth, its diversity, and its tremendous resources.

From the 1990s onwards Charles' longtime interest in writing poetry deepened, and he began taking a more active part in poetry circles in the community, attending and participating in poetry workshops at the John Waldron Arts Center, among other readings and small-group meetings in Bloomington. This has flourished in recent years to the point that he is publishing, with Jenny Kander, a collection of poems entitled *Say This of Horses: A Selection of Poems* (University of Iowa Press, 2007).

Beginning in the 2000–2001 academic year Charles moved to a full-time faculty position in geography, and this enabled him to spend more time developing his ideas and conceptual visions on human-environment relationships. This "change of scenery" was both invigorating and exciting to him intellectually, and it was rewarding as well to a cohort of graduate and senior undergraduate geography students, because both benefited from the scholarly exchanges and insightful/critical perspectives Charles fostered on today's pressing environmental issues. His research with Dan Knudsen also has paid dividends, and Charles returned to one of his old favorites, fieldwork, to pursue this new research agenda. Kazakhstan, Denmark, and Mexico were the new field sites, where Charles and his co-researchers shared perspectives, compiled environmental assessments, and built up their theoretical bases.

This latest burst of research energy gives no sign that it is likely to falter in the near future. Charles is doing more writing and research, and advising more students, than ever. Certainly he appears to have no intention of stopping, and the joint research he is conducting with students and colleagues is finding an appreciative academic audience among environmental geographers. If I can be excused this one, final comment on your retirement, Charles: "Looks like you're not going to ride into the sunset, but stay in the saddle."

*Dennis Conway*