

# She'll go from Hong Kong to Harvard



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Kristina Sepetya's travels have taken her to Taiwan, mainland China and now to Hong Kong. Harvard Law School looms in the future.

By Dennis Coffman  
staff writer

At 23, Kristina Sepetya has seen more of the world than most people twice her age. Although still attending college, the Farmington Hills resident has been to the USSR, to the Chinese mainland and to Taiwan. At the end of August, she will be leaving to teach school in Hong Kong. Nothing in her background, nothing in her plans, indicated she eventually would become a world traveler, she said.

Even now, she doesn't study foreign languages or culture. She has been accepted and will attend Harvard Law School when she returns from Hong Kong in fall 1986.

She is a graduate of Harrison High School and Smith College (a government and religion major). Although she is still a student, Sepetya spent the last year as an English teacher in Taiwan.

"They were expecting the quintessential professor," she said. She taught freshmen and sophomores at Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan. "But they were surprised when they found they were about the same age as I was."

EVEN MORE surprisingly, Sepetya had never studied the Chinese language. "I quickly learned 'survival Chinese,'" she said. "I was able to ask for things like food, tickets."

But she expects to have some communication problems beginning this fall in Hong Kong. Although she picked up Mandarin Chinese on Taiwan, Hong Kong residents speak Cantonese.

Another difference between Taiwan and Hong Kong, she said, is the way people mix.

"The British have made the colony more Westernized. Hong Kong is more segregated than Taiwan. In Taiwan, different peoples can mix around, but in Hong Kong, the British are together and the Chinese are together."

Even though Great Britain will turn Hong Kong over to the Chinese before the end of the century, Sepetya said she foresees few changes.

"If the Chinese are smart, they'll change the flag and that's all."

Of the three areas she has visited — Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan — she rates the food in Taiwan best.

"There was no problem with the food. The Taiwanese food was wonderful.

"It's so cheap. For \$1, you can get a good meal. For \$5, you can have a banquet. The food in Taiwan was the best in all of China."

"But I had to adjust my palate somewhat. Food in those countries takes on an almost religious value. You can't refuse, even if they are offering you chicken claws. You have to grin and bear it."

DESPITE THE difference in topography (mainland China is vast, Taiwan is compact, Hong Kong is tiny), all three have one characteristic in common: overcrowding.

"There is a housing crunch in Hong Kong. They live five or six to a room about this size (about 12 feet by 12 feet).

"I'll have three bedrooms. But with all that space, the Chinese still tell me, 'Women do not live alone.'"

Although living alone in a spacious apartment is uncharacteristic of the Chinese, Sepetya will try to mingle, in most other ways.

"It's easy to get caught up in the Western community in Hong Kong," she said.

In Hong Kong, she will teach 12-, 13- and 14-year-olds, rather than the college-age students she had in Taiwan. "I'm told this is a very mischievous age," she said.

She will teach at St. Paul's College, Hong Kong, China, for all its size, is as crowded as Taiwan and Hong Kong.

"It's not a vacation when you go to the Mainland, it's a trip. I can see why Marco Polo thought it was the whole world."

"I rode on hot, crowded trains with no comforts and slept in dormitory rooms. It was very hard. In Shanghai, people were sleeping in corridors.

"But every city has its own personality."

IN CONTRAST to the austerity of most of the Chinese accommodations, her boat trip was reasonably luxurious.

"I took a boat from Hong Kong to Shanghai. The cruise boat had sumptuous chairs and lace curtains. Her visit to Inner Mongolia (mainland China) was a study in contrasts.

"I had visitors of Genghis Khan," she said.

Sepetya's photos of Inner Mongolia showed a land of great beauty, with mountains and lakes, with barren steppes and with monasteries that served as military installations.

"Outer Mongolia is part of the USSR, so there's always danger of attack, even though both nations are communist."

The apparent attraction of Inner Mongolia for the Russians, she said, was the existence of great mineral deposits. Mining and agriculture provide the livelihood for most Inner Mongolians.

Part of the nomadic population lives in yurts, reinforced tent-like structures able to withstand the cold.

"There is a lot of military, because of the fear of

Russian attack from Outer Mongolia. There is a lot of underground tunneling (as in Vietnam)."

The Russians and Chinese may be at odds for, nationalistic reasons, but Sepetya related an incident that would indicate the Chinese are, nonetheless, communist.

"I went to see the performance of some dancers. During the performance, an apparently high-ranking party official walked in and everything stopped. The spotlight was shone on him. A performance can be preempted by a party official any time they enter."

UNIFORMS SET party officials apart. The more pockets, or a hat, signifies escalated rank.

"This man had four pockets and a pen in his left pocket, so he must have been important."

Each of China's provinces has its own character. Yunnan Province, for example, is home to many of the nation's minorities. "They're beautiful in their native garb."

China's burgeoning birth rate has led to the state-imposed limit of one child per family.

"But it's difficult, because children are so important to them. They're like precious jewels."

"Most families want to have sons, so they'll have someone to take care of them. Some families will have a second child, even if they have to pay the (state-mandated) penalty, so that they can have at least one son."

"The Han Chinese and the Taiwanese are pushing the one-child thing, but the minorities generally are allowed to have more."

Perceptions, she said, can often be misconceptions.

"We think of Taiwan as being highly industrialized, but it's also very agrarian. They grow all of their own rice. The south is industrialized."

EVEN WITH its industrialization, however, Taiwan's own people often are unable to obtain many material goods. "A lot of the goods never reach (their) own market."

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