



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Jaleh, Shireen and Karen Sasani, are back in town for the summer, visiting after moving to Tianjin, a city near Beijing in the Peoples Republic of China. The longtime Milton residents return to China at the end of August.

They're viewed as celebrities

• from AN ODYSSEY on page 1

It difficult for Ms Sasani to keep up her professional interest in journalism, however she has compensated by working on her photographic skills, a practise which has provided her with a wealth of images of China.

Language is the primary problem with life in China, though Ms Sasani says she is learning, however slowly, through lessons and immersion. She is capable of being understood well enough to manage most tasks but craves the ability to have a deeper, more intellectual conversation with local inhabitants.

The first Mandarin she learned were the words for "too expensive" taught to her by another Westerner. Now the whole family is taking language classes.

Cantonese even tougher

According Ms Sasani there are four tones in Mandarin. Words have different meanings depending upon which tone: rising, falling, high or wavering, is used. Of course, context and position in the sentence provides further shades of meaning. Ms Sasani considers herself lucky, the main language elsewhere, in the south of China, is Cantonese. It employs seven different tones.

Life in China is eye-opening. Everyone performs the same tasks as they do all over the world but they do them with differences in emphasis.

"I've noticed that in China life is in the streets. People meet there, shop there and eat there," she said, describing a chaotic, crowded scene. "The streets are

full of people selling food on little carts or at tables.

Westerners rarely drive in the city because streets are quite tangled and irregular, and there are masses of people and vehicles with which to contend. Mr Sasani is an exception to this rule, having learned the art of navigating the crowded streets. Fortunately a driver takes the girls to school and takes Ms Sasani around the city on her various errands. The main mode of travel between cities is by train, and Ms Sasani said she is keen for more experience of travelling that way.

Shopping is done by bargaining, a skill her husband has in abundance but one she has had to learn. Simply paying the initial price is unheard of. "There is a real game to it," she said. "In China you bargain to show you have good business sense."

Economy changing

In fact business consumes many Chinese as the country slowly begins to change from an agricultural economy to an industrial powerhouse. Attitudes are changing too. Businessmen are now considered good marriage material, where soldiers were in years past. Many Chinese customs are adapting or changing entirely, she said, to the new emphasis on business as the way to get ahead.

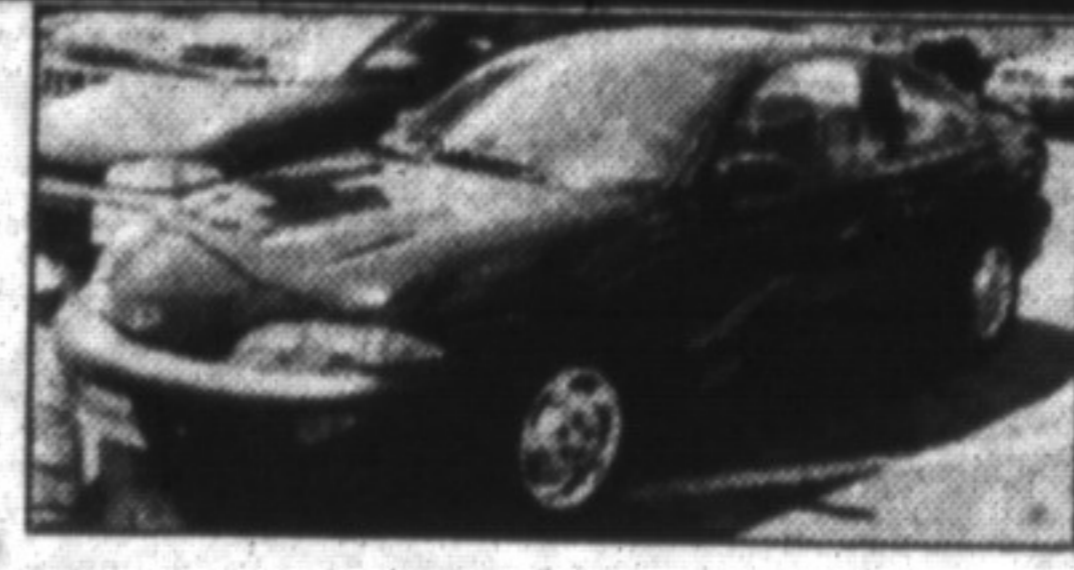
Salaries are low in China but many people are supplied with housing, medical care and even personal items through their employers. In some cases even meals and showers are supplied by companies for their employees.

• see FARMING on page 7

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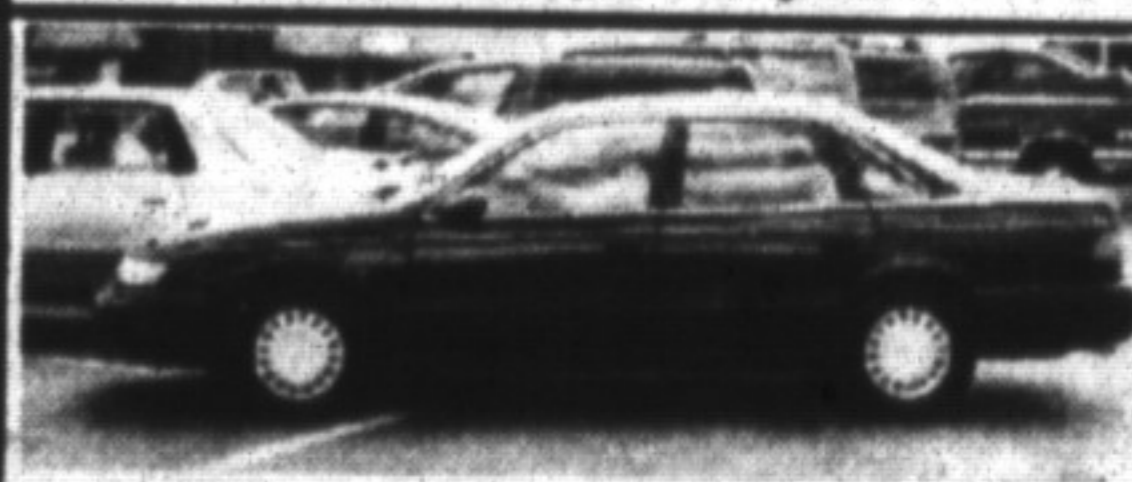
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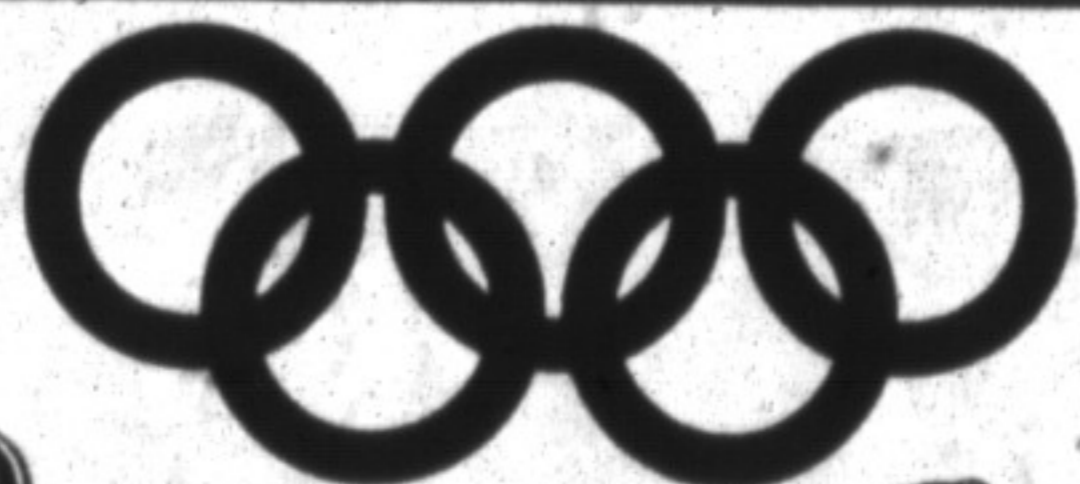
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