

China Journal: Dancing with the Sleeping Giant

by
John Sloan
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What follows is expanded version of a journal I kept while in the People's Republic of China for about a month during the summer of 1995. For two weeks, I was a scientific guest of LASG in Beijing, China, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Science's Institute for Atmospheric Physics. The remainder of my trip was spent touring in and around the cities of Beijing, Datong, Xi'an, and Guilin. During my time in Mainland China, I wrote 120 pages of journal entries, made copious notes, and took about 400 photographs. This journal is in my typical chatty, rambling style. Appended to the end is the trip report I wrote for my employer, the National Center for Atmospheric Research, in Boulder, Colorado. It contains details about the business portion of my stay, and hopefully exhibits a more economic writing style.

It is wisdom to know others. -- Lao Tzu

10 June 1995
00:00 Local
Beijing

I find myself, remarkably, in China. My flights were uneventful, especially considering I was in the air for eighteen hours or so all told. Having been awake for almost thirty hours straight, other than some fitful sleeping on two 747s, I will make this introduction brief. Suffice it to say for now that I made it to my hotel safely, and my luggage made the voyage intact.

I was encouraged by my friend Marla Meehl, an unusually experienced world traveler, to keep a journal. This is it. My strategy is this: I make notes throughout the day on 3x5 cards in my "pocket briefcase", and when I have some time to relax and reflect I refer to these notes while writing in my journal.

I am pleased to find myself in the midst of an adventure.

10 June 1995
10:30
Beijing

Last night Mr. Xingin Cheng (written reversed, Western style, as he himself wrote it) picked me up at the airport. Cheng is the assistant to Professor Wu, who is the head of the State Key Laboratory for Numerical Modelling (sic) of Atmospheric Sciences and Geophysical Fluid Dynamics. (Whew.) The western-style acronym is LASG. Cheng made it clear that I was encouraged to remain at the hotel until called upon this evening. So of course this morning I set off to walk around on my own.

I am at the moment near Peking University (all of the signs say Peking, not the more modern spelling Beijing). I have to keep reminding myself that I am in a communist country with a totalitarian government. When was the last time you were denied access to a college campus because you were a foreigner? Peking University is north-west of downtown Beijing, so much so it does not appear on many city maps, one of which was given to me by a friendly hotel employee who spoke no English; as near as I can tell, none of the employees of this tiny hotel near the campus speak English.

There are many common cultural referents. The clothing styles, including jeans and mini-skirts, would fit right in most western cities. I suppose the occasional Mao jacket wouldn't be out of place either.

I've walked by a Pizza Hut and a Kentucky Fried Chicken -- although as in Europe I find this incursion of American "culture" unfortunate. I see lots of automobiles on the busy streets that I cannot identify, but I also see a lot of Volkswagons and Audis, more so than in the United States. (I was later to learn that Volkswagen and Audi have plants in Mainland China.)

Amid the Chinese pictographs I recognize many western words, symbols, and acronyms. Since I am near a college campus, it should come as no surprise that the most recognizable are things like IBM, DEC, TEAC, SEAGATE, CD-ROM, TCP/IP, etc. in windows of what I take to be computer stores.

I see a lot of pagers and a few cellular phones. I have read that it is nearly impossible to get a "hardwired" phone installed, so an economical alternative is to carry a pager, which are cheap and require little physical infrastructure.

Did I mention walking by a Pierre Cardin clothing store?

Bicycles are everywhere, like motorcycles were in Paris, but more so: tucked in every corner. At night, garish neon illuminates everything.

10 June 1995
16:00
Beijing

Other than being turned away at Peking University (or University of Peking, depending on what you read), I can wander at will unmolested. Before leaving for Datong Province by train this evening, I have been put up in a small hotel near the University. While this location is a bit of a backwater, there is a definite lack of touristy stuff, which I appreciate. Walking perhaps six or seven kilometers this afternoon, I found a shopping district, street vendors, etc. For the most part I am politely ignored. In fact, I am hard pressed to say that my presence has any effect what-so-ever on those around me, although it is hard to be sure. Perhaps I am just seeing a Heisenberg effect.

Tidbit: I passed a McDonald's today, identifiable only by its golden arches.

The heat and humidity here is high. While it is a little uncomfortable, I find it very similar to Ohio this time of year, so there is a sense of nostalgia about it. It may seem strange to say that, given where I am, but I find more Western cues here than I did in San Francisco's China Town.

There are a few motorcycles here. Some 1970s vintage small Hondas (or close copies), but most of the bikes are Chinese copies of the Russian Ural, which itself is a copy of a World War II vintage German BMW.

I'm glad I'm in good physical condition. Not only does it make a difference in recovering from travel, but I hope I set a better example for Westerners. Very little body fat evident on those around me. Heart disease is in fact a problem for residents of Beijing, thanks to the availability of higher fat foods, but I suspect this may only be statistically relative to those who live elsewhere in China. Anyone here over forty lived through the 1958 famine.

12 June 1995

I have just a short break after having eaten lunch with my party here in Datong. I don't have a clear idea of what I had for lunch, but it was excellent. Fortunately, I'm not a picky eater. My impressions of Datong will have to wait. I want to write about the train ride.

We took the overnight train from Beijing to Datong, about a nine hour ride, leaving around 10 P.M. and arriving in Datong around 7 A.M. The walk through the train station in Beijing was something out of a movie. The floors were littered with people sleeping as best they could, seemingly with most of their belongings piled around them. I walked around and through, and sometimes climbed over, entire families. We showed our tickets to get through a portal and then suddenly we were in a largish room equipped with some couches typical of a train station, and virtually by ourselves. We stayed here for the few minutes before boarding the train, which departed soon after that. I never learned whether those people were waiting on trains or were squatting for the evening.

I don't have much of an impression of the train, although I believe it may have been steam driven rather than diesel-electric. It was dark and late when we left, and it was a mob scene when we arrived. I concentrated more on not losing sight of my party (although they were certainly more worried about me than I was about them, so I probably really didn't have much to be concerned about), so I didn't have the opportunity to look around. On the inside the train seemed rather nice, not elegant by European standards, but completely adequate and well constructed. The sleeping compartment I shared with three other of my fellow expats was basic but very comfortable, having two bunk beds solidly mounted laterally across the car and a small table next to the window. The door was windowless and locked, something we took advantage of after a young Chinese woman came into our compartment and made it clear that she would not be inconvenienced if we remained in the room as she spent the night there. We were debating what to do when just a few minutes later our host, Professor Wu, came by to check on us and shooed her off. Wu and his assistant Cheng shared another sleeping compartment with two women army officers, very attractive in their full uniforms of the People's Liberation Army. Wu said they were in the medical corps.

The bathroom at the end of the car was divided into a private water closet and a communal counter with several sinks. A iconic sign clearly meaning "not potable water" was evident; I used my portable filter to generate enough water to brush my teeth. One of the porters came into the bathroom, dumped a teapot of used green tea leaves into the sink, filled the tea pot with some water, drank about half of it, then filled it up the rest of the way and left. It

occurred to me that the water tanks were probably filled in Beijing, and might have been just fine, but that porter was still a braver man than I.

I managed to sleep some, despite the fact that I was on a train traveling across rural China in the middle of the night. The jet lag, a product of a fourteen hour time difference, may have had something to do with that. I woke several times up as the train stopped and started all through the night. It was pitch black. There were reading lamps above each bunk, but the main overhead lights, along with the Chinese musak, had gone out around 11:00 P.M. I would just lay there listening to the rhythms of the train. Were they letting passengers on and off? There were never any announcements over the public address system. Maybe they were taking on water. I woke up at dawn and just laid there, in the top bunk against the forward bulkhead, watching China go by the window.

14 June 1995
04:54
Beijing

As you can see, I arrived safely back in Beijing after two days in Datong. The trip roster included Prof. Wu, head of LASG, his assistant Mr. Cheng, several of the local meteorologists in Datong, and some other scientific visitors: Suki Manabe, who is a climate modeler at the NOAA Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory (GFDL) in Princeton, New Jersey, his wife Noko, and John Green (a.k.a. J. N. S. Green), a fluid dynamist formerly at Imperial College (sort of the British version of M.I.T.) and now semi-retired and teaching at the University of East Anglia. Suki and Noko are Japanese-Americans and John is about as English as you can get. The Manabes have since returned home, and John is here until the coming weekend. John and I have been hanging out together, and we have been the victims of one another's ramblings. He is quite the character. I am told that he is quite well known in the field. When I asked him if anyone at NCAR would know him or of him, he replied "Some might. They are likely to say 'J.N.S. Green... you mean he's still alive?'"

This two day trip to Datong, about 300 kilometers north-west of Beijing and within sight of the mountain ranges of Mongolian, was in many ways a visit into the past for Prof. Wu. During Mao's Cultural Revolution, Wu was "deported", as were so many intellectuals, to Datong and other rural areas to work as a peasant in the "reeducation" process. Although this could not have been a pleasant experience -- I imagine if I were plucked from NCAR and consigned to hard labor growing crops on the Western Slope of Colorado -- there is inevitably some aspect of "the good old days" for Prof. Wu.

Several times during our stay in Datong, Prof. Wu would ask our guide, a Mr. Wong, if some historical artifact was damaged

during the Cultural Revolution, since so many items of historical or intellectual interest were destroyed by the Red Guard (little more than gangs of young people encouraged by Mao to wreak havoc on the establishment) during that period because they were perceived to be of interest only to the bourgeois class and of no use to the proletariat. When Wu asked Wong about this, they were careful to speak in English and they spoke in hushed tones. I do not think they did so because it was a courtesy to me; Wu otherwise frequently spoke to Wong in Mandarin. I think they did it so that the other Chinese tourists could not understand them. I am once again reminded that I am in a communist country with a totalitarian government.

The Forbidden City in Beijing survived the Red Guard only because Zhou Enlai ordered the People's Liberation Army to defend it; otherwise there is little of historical interest in Beijing that survived the Cultural Revolution. For a city the size of Beijing, the capitol of the greatest nation in terms of population, there are precious few museums other than the Forbidden City. The world owes a debt to Zhou Enlai. Over and over again I am reminded of the tragic consequences of Mao's reign.

I am getting close to completing *Red Azalea*, an autobiographical book by Anchee Min. It is one of two books on China that I brought with me on this trip, the other being *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang. Both books were parting gifts from Marla Meehl. I recommend *Red Azalea*. It is a grim subjective portrait of Mao's China. John Green mentioned *Wild Swans*, saying that he had considered bringing it along, but was advised that it would not be a good idea if it were to be found in his luggage. I had wondered about this myself, but decided to bring both books anyway. I am careful to keep the two books locked up in my duffel bag when I am not alone in my room. I don't really need a visit from the police -- many of whom I am told are plain clothes. It does however add a certain element to the trip.

Prof. Wu (this is easier to write than his first name, Guoxiong - pronounced something like "Goo Shong" -- which is how I address him) and Noko Manabe had a grand time on several occasions discussing Chinese pictographs. Although the Chinese and the Japanese have different spoken languages, they share in part a written language: Japan adopted Chinese pictographs hundreds of years ago, and only recently (relatively speaking) adopted the far simpler phonetic Kanji alphabet. Chinese pictographs are Noko's hobby. So while the only common spoken language that she and Wu share is English (albeit heavily accented in both cases), she is none the less able to read much of the writing here.

Noko explained to me about "cheating" in writing Chinese. The order of the strokes is very important to the art of Chinese calligraphy. But writing with modern writing instruments like a ball point pen yields characters in which the order of the strokes cannot be determined. So you can cheat. It has been written that there is no

difference between Chinese art and Chinese calligraphy; all great Chinese artists are also great calligraphers, and vice versa. Authentic Chinese calligraphy is done using an ink brush, so that the order of the strokes is apparent.

Datong is known for its Buddhist caves and pagodas. I'm tempted to say that once you've seen one Buddhist temple you've seen them all, but I feel as if I have seen them all, and in fact they were all quite different. It seems that an emperor during the Northern Wei dynasty converted to Buddhism around the mid 400s A.D., and as emperors are wont, decided he needed to exploit the plentiful peasant labor. It is said that tens of thousands of sculptors labored to carve out the Yungang Shiku caves. These are a set of, well, really Buddhist shrines, carved out of the soft rock of a mountain side. You walk into one of these caves and are immediately confronted in the cool dry dark interior by a two story high statue of Buddha himself. Then it slowly dawns on you as you look around that entire walls, floor to ceiling, 360 degrees, are carved to commemorate Buddha. And there are a lot of these caves.

But caves aren't the only monument to Buddha. We climbed a mountain, pretty tame by Colorado standards but a local maxima around here, passing through a series of pagodas along the way, and ending up in a large pagoda in which a Buddhist priest, wearing huge round spectacles and looking to be about a thousand years old, led us in a little Tai Chi.

Most spectacular of all, though, was the hanging monastery of Mount Hengshan. This monastery is about forty buildings hanging impossibly on a nearly sheer cliffside, connected by tunnels through the soft rock, by wooden foot bridges, and by ladders, hundreds of feet in the air. It was at this point we discovered that John Green was afraid of heights. The government build a dam nearby -- necessary I would think in this hot, arid climate which reminds me very much of the Western Slope of Colorado. You can't see it from the monestary, but from the ground you can see both the (relatively) modern dam and the ancient (6th century) monestary. From high up in the monestary you can see the vendors down below, selling bottled water and photographic film. I passed on the water but did get some film.

I have been careful about taking photographs in Datong. Besides having many historical sites nearby, it is also a major coal producing site, and so since the Ming dynasty has been of strategic importance. Also, there is a large military base there. We passed part of the facility, and Jeep-like military vehicles and olive drab uniforms of the People's Liberation Army are ubiquitous. I have been told that the Chinese are a little sensitive about Westerners taking photographs of military installations, which they may define rather broadly to include things like railroad stations and bridges. However, most of the military people I have seen, other than the guards near the base, seem to be tourists like myself.

Whether or not they are sensitive about having military installations photographed, I've discovered that the Chinese love to

be in photographs, even when they surely know there's little or no chance they'll ever see them. In the dusty parking lot where we began our mountain climb, I asked Cheng to take my picture near where John Green and I watched some chaps trying to fix a piece of agricultural equipment that looked like it had been made from the cast off parts of a dozen tractors of Russian vintage. As soon as Cheng raised my camera, these three guys came over and asked (I am told anyway) if they could be in the photograph. These three looked about as disreputable as most of my motorcycle buddies (and I was wearing my Harley-Davidson baseball cap at the time, which has accompanied me to seven nations on three continents), so of course I said "Cool!" Cheng looked very dubious -- I think he's a city boy -- but I put my arms around them and he took the photograph. I'm confident that when it is developed it will show that we were all having a very good time.

15 June 1995
20:30
Beijing

First impressions of China:

Donkey carts sharing the road with Audi 5000 sedans. Three wheeled bicycle delivery carts, two stroke garden tractors used for transportation, and bicycles. Especially bicycles, everywhere. Modern office buildings emblazoned with the names of Japanese companies, next to crumbling brick hovels and abject poverty.

A Russian, an Englishman, a Vietnamese, and myself, greeting one another over breakfast while trying to find a common language (a smattering of English was the best we could all do). In a tiny farm village in rural Datong, near Mongolia, a basket ball court set among crumbling brick buildings, with a donkey tied to each hoop post.

No beggars or homeless (although it is a stretch to refer to some of the tiny brick hovels -- about the size of a walk in closet -- as homes). Instead, rampant capitalism in the form of street merchants, everywhere. I mean *everywhere*, covering the sidewalks, in the midst of the capital of the largest (now, perhaps only) communist nation on Earth.

Huge electronic billboards -- the kind you might find in a baseball stadium in America or in Times Square in New York City -- displaying complicated pictographs in animated advertisements. Beautiful Asian women pedaling their bicycles while wearing mini-skirts and talking on cellular phones. Adobe farm houses that would have seemed right at home in rural New Mexico.

A Chinese television program which was I eventually realized was *The Wizard of Oz*. Toddlers wearing nothing below the waist, squatting to do their business on a busy Beijing sidewalk. Tons of trash piled up -- no bags or cans or containers of any kind -- out in the open along the curb, to eventually be collected trucks and the streets

swept spotlessly clean by tiny old women wearing surgical gloves, hats, and masks.

Roman characters on a liter soda bottle written in the style of Chinese pictographs, but spelling 7-UP. Chinese pointing at a crumbling building, or at a stairwell in which the ceiling became lower and lower until you had to stoop as you reached the top of the stairs, shaking their heads, and muttering "Russians", as if that explained everything. A tiny brass statue of a dog that turned out to be a rather ingenious combination lock.

Teenagers wearing faded old People's Liberation Army shirts and blue jeans. Imagine as if the entire Western Slope of the Rockies were terraced so that crops could be planted on them. Done no doubt by hand, and probably by scientists and poets during the Cultural Revolution. Everything older than the turn of the century is measured in terms of the appropriate imperial dynasty.

In the middle downtown Datong, a rural province, a "California Beef Noodle King U.S.A." restaurant. Pool tables sitting outside in a dirt lot, people playing on them. Televisions, cable television, SGI workstations, CD ROMs, and bathrooms no Westerner would set foot in if they had any alternative. Construction starting at five thirty in the morning and continuing until past eight in the evening.

My hosts concerned that I am not eating enough -- because they checked the hotel records. Wonderful, lavish meals with no cold drinks to save your soul, but as much hot green tea as you can stand. Tea, hot tea, all the time, day or night, available anywhere, despite high temperatures and high humidity. Drinking hot tea while sweat drips off my brow.

You can't get a phone installed, but you can buy a complete Pentium system running UNIX with a TCP/IP Ethernet LAN. You can even buy office furniture from a guy on the street corner; he has glossy color catalogs.

China: high-tech third-world.

18 June 1995

16:25

Beijing

I have stayed in several places so far in my travels. My first night was spent at The Harmony Inn near Peking University. My next night was spent sharing a sleeping compartment on the overnight train from Beijing to Datong, a several hour trip covering perhaps 300 kilometers. I shared the compartment with John Green and the Manabes. One night in Datong was spent in the Yungang Hotel, easily the most luxurious place I've stayed at so far (and that's damning with faint praise). One more night on the train back to Beijing. Nothing like sharing sleeping quarters to encourage bonding. The Manabes left for the U.S. the day after we returned to Beijing. John Green returned to the U.K. just today. John and I have

been staying just across the hall from one another in the Foreign Guest House of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, taking our meals together and walking and chatting every evening. I am told by Prof. Wu that John is famous in the field and has several former students at NCAR, but I fear that to me he will always be that crazy Englishman and fellow expat I hung out with for a time in Beijing. Now that he has left, all I have for potential meal companions are some stoic Russian engineers who do not speak English and appear to have adapted less well to the Chinese standard of living (and the cuisine) than I have.

Yesterday John and I spent the day with his former Ph.D. student Xu Yung Fu, including having dinner with his wife and their child. During Mao's time, Chinese were encouraged to have children; Mao needed laborers. Now, men cannot marry until they are at least 25 (23 for women), and there is a one child policy in the cities (two children in the rural areas). I am told that if a Chinese couple has more than one child while living outside of China (for example, while students in the U.S.), they are allowed to bring all their children back into the country. This is a common strategy (and I'm wondering if the unspoken condition is "for couples that had a girl"). John wondered aloud what China will be like as a nation of almost all only-children. This has caused much contemplation on my part.

I have tried to concentrate on my perceptions of China, but just for a moment I think I will relate how I am getting along. I must admit I am lonely. Even with John Green around, and perhaps more so now that he is gone, I frequently long for someone to have a long conversation with in which I do not have to speak slowly, clearly, haltingly, choosing my words with great care (not just for clarity, but also to avoid committing some embarrassing or perhaps even dangerous faux pas). I miss Kathleen terribly, although I have called her twice so far, which has helped a lot. And writing this journal helps a lot as well. Still, there is little doubt I would sign up for an adventure like this again, perhaps for even longer than for a month. When my boss Bill Buzbee originally solicited volunteers for this exchange program, the Chinese were first were talking about a stay of three months. That would be difficult, but staying that long would have its advantages as well.

I have been eating a lot of different dishes, and fortunately I am neither a picky eater nor do I necessarily need to know what it is I'm eating before I try it. I have eaten in nice restaurants in Beijing, in the equivalent of the corner cafe in Datong, in what passes for fast food restaurants here, and everything in between. I have discovered that braised eggplant with chilies would please any Southwestern palette, and tempura-battered and fried bananas are to die for.

I have been buying a package of cookies at the corner market -- which is the size of a walk-in closet - and eating the them over the span of a couple of evenings. This is the size of package that would last at least a couple of weeks back home. I've been trying to keep my weight under control. I don't know how much weight I've lost, but if

I lose much more none of the pants or belts I brought with me will fit. It isn't because I haven't been eating. I'd guess it's a combination of low fat diet, no snacking, and lots of walking.

It's hard to find seafood served any fresher than in China. You typically see your live fish (or eel or snake) taken from a large aquarium tank. In just a bit it arrives at your table "personality intact" as it were. The main body of the fish has been sliced up for serving, but other than that it looks more or less like it did a few minutes before when it was happily swimming around.

Lunch is an interesting ritual here. I've been invited out to lunch a couple of times, but always to a restaurant. When they eat without me, I think the plan is quite different. Lunch time always sees them leaving the lab with their lunch bowls and chopsticks. I think they just get their bowls filled up by one of the street vendors. Most of the time I am happy for the break and wander around on my own in the neighborhood, taking pictures and making notes.

I have witnessed Chinese tracing pictographs on their open palms while conversing with one another. I read about this before coming here. Since all Chinese words are a single syllable (and hence, many pictographs have exactly the same pronunciation), Chinese frequently draw a pictograph on their palm whenever there may be some ambiguity in what they are saying.

I confess that I've done the palm trick myself. Even the Chinese with the best English skills sometimes confuse words like "thirty" and "thirteen", a pretty common problem in many languages. So I've held out my palm while speaking and traced "30" or "13" when answering questions like "how many kilometers is your house from where you work?" They don't take offense at this; in fact, I get the impression that they think it's downright polite.

I have also seen one better: folks will routinely take a ballpoint pen (which seems to be the only kind they have around here) and literally write on their palm to show someone else (including me). So far I have resisted adopting this custom, preferring instead to keep my pocket notepad handy, but paper does not seem to be so commonly available here. My more paranoid side wonders if there is a reluctance to commit something written to a more permanent form.

I have been making good use of my Zaurus, a personal digital assistant with both a keyboard and a pen, which has attracted some attention here, although not as much as you might think. Electronic gadgets are easily available here, although expensive compared to the typical wage. A professor at Peking University with whom I had dinner had a similar device. Still, my Zaurus has been my constant companion. Along with my passport, visa, and address of my hotel and LASG, as you might expect. Anyway, not only has the address book function of the Zaurus been useful, but the world time zone clock also reminds me that I have to call my wife at seven in the morning my time so that it is nine in the evening her time. Equally useful has been the fact that I programmed a bunch of internet addresses into it, which I've used while troubleshooting the

connection between NCAR and LASG. I've also used the little device to keep track of who I've sent postcards to and from where (unbreakable rule #1: always send Mom and Dad and Aunt Lucy postcards from any new city, anywhere in the world), and who I need to buy souvenirs for lest I now be allowed back home.

Speaking of Peking University, if you ever have the opportunity to visit (and you'll need an opportunity; you can't get in without an escort, your passport, and the correct paperwork, and even then there seems to be a lot of discussion involved), by all means take it. The campus, in the middle of this rather urban suburb of Beijing, is beautiful. Wonderful landscaping surrounding a beautiful lake, with buildings that are for the most part in traditional Chinese architecture. Only a few are big ugly concrete Bauhaus-style monstrosities. These were built by the Russians in the fifties, and are very poorly designed. The beautiful Chinese buildings were built by the Americans in the thirties. No kidding. The Chinese build nice little wooden houses around the property, one of which serves as the Severe Storms Laboratory, which I visited. The Lab is full of SGI workstations which would seem right at home at NCAR. The food in the university cafeteria is quite good; I had a very pleasant meal there with Professor Chen and Doctor Wong; the latter of the two is planning on visiting NCAR for several months. Around the cafeteria I saw a group of Caucasian students, mostly speaking English. It seems strange now to see Westerners.

20 June 1995
19:20
Beijing

This evening while strolling around I saw a young man pull over on his bicycle because his beeper went off. He returned the call on his cellular phone. It occurs to me that Boulder is one of the few other places here I am likely to see such a scene, but maybe that wouldn't be so uncommon in other major cities like London, Paris, or New York (but I've been in London and Paris and didn't see any such thing).

The comedian Jerry Seinfeld will be relieved to know that the signal for the waitperson to bring the check -- you know, writing with an "air pen" on your palm -- apparently translates quite well into Mandarin Chinese; I have used it several times.

The ads on Beijing television are just as inane as in the U.S., but I find never the less a certain exotic quality in them that attracts me, a quality that I am sure would be lost if I could read and speak the language. It is even stranger that the Chinese clearly find Westerners exotic -- I've never thought of myself as exotic, but the idea has a certain appeal.

Speaking of exotic, no one has mentioned my earring (I'm wearing my diamond stud in my left earlobe), although I have never seen a Chinese male wearing one. They are hardly shy about asking

personal questions. I have been warned that they routinely ask questions that back home we would find rude, like "how much money do you make?" As far as the earring goes, they probably see it as just another strange Western trait.

I have been thinking about how fortunate I am to have been working at LASG. It has given me an opportunity to experience a China that few tourists or even conference attendees could ever see. Every morning I walk to work, about twenty minutes, down mostly suburban side streets. I take part in the daily rush hour ritual along with millions of other citizens of Beijing, most of whom it would seem are bicycling along my route. I pass farmers who are temporarily living in tiny brick hovels the size of walk-in closets and who are squatting at the curb brushing their teeth and using a mason jar as their water glass. I have navigated through traffic jams consisting of one large truck carrying watermelons, an Audi 5000 sedan, and a hundred bicyclists. I pass what amounts to a fast food joint every morning, where an entrepreneur has set up a wok, a fire in a fifty gallon drum, and a folding table and chairs on a street corner, and does land office business. I have waved good morning to the metal workers bending iron bars to be set in concrete as I walk by. And I pass by a seven foot high concrete cinder block wall topped with broken glass set in concrete. I try hard not to wonder too much about what is on the other side of that.

I will be glad to return to hot showers in the morning. The Foreign Guest House only turns on the boilers for hot water during certain times of the day, which so far has not coincided with my schedule. I'm apparently an early riser compared to their usual tenants and perhaps the typical Chinese white collar worker as well. Perhaps it is just as well, as my bathroom -- which has the aspect of a prefabricated module manufactured as a single unit -- floods every time I use the tub. Apparently this is a feature, as I've watched the cleaning lady start her routine by spraying down the entire interior of the module using the shower head. The elevator only runs during "business hours" as well, and there are occasional electrical blackouts that bring everything to a standstill, except for the bicycles.

21 June 1995

19:00

Beijing

I have just returned from spending a few hours at the home of an LASG graduate student who was assigned to me as my keeper. My hosts have expressed concern that I have the habit of wandering off by myself. This is not without its risks: since I can't read any of the signs, or for that matter any of the labels on my city map, I am forced to navigate by dead reckoning using not much more than a compass (I never travel without one) and making notes like "north two blocks; west three blocks". I find it really difficult to recognize landmarks. But that's all part of having an adventure. Never the less,

the next time I take a trip like this one, I'll bring along a global positioning system satellite receiver.

Anyway, this graduate student, Hong Zhang, has an M.S. in meteorology. His wife, Cai Xiaohong, also works at LASG in the data center, and I believe she has a degree in something akin to computer science. I spent Sunday sight-seeing with them, a treat for them as well since LASG was footing the bill. The husband is a typical hacker type, more interested in playing with computers than doing anything useful with them. His wife Xiaohong is a project manager who supervises ten people and makes purchasing decisions. I sensed very quickly -- and I believe she did as well -- that despite her poor English and my non-existent Chinese, she and I had much more in common than her husband and I, much I think to his dismay. Although he tries hard, the fact is I found her to be the more interesting of the pair.

Unbeknownst to her spouse, Xiaohong and I have met twice before during this trip, as she attended a meeting at my hotel concerning a project with the World Bank. While I was strolling around Beijing with the pair Sunday she casually asked me what kind of hours I worked at NCAR and I told her that I typically worked fifty to fifty-five hours a week, more if need be, as did my spouse, and that this was hardly unusual for people in our professions. She made some remark in Chinese to which her husband replied, in English, "I'm not lazy! I work a lot at home!" Oops.

Xiaohong wrote my name phonetically in Chinese this evening. My last name is made up of two syllables (at least, in Chinese it is), unlike all Chinese last names, which are a single syllable and hence written with a single pictograph. The first pictograph means Hope, Forward Looking, Visionary, Dreaming. The second pictograph is the symbol for the Emperor, the Dragon. Xiaohong didn't seem to think my first name meant anything, nothing she would admit to anyway, but she did say it was the same as a famous Chinese leader. I've decided to interpret my last name as "Dreaming Dragon". "It's a good name!" Xiaohong exclaimed. (I had a "chop", a cut-stone stamp traditionally used as a legal signature, made with these pictographs. I've reproduced them below.)

The image shows two large, handwritten Chinese characters in black ink. The character on the left is '思' (Sī), which is composed of the top part of '心' (heart) and the right part of '田' (field). The character on the right is '拉' (Lā), which is composed of the top part of '扌' (hand) and the right part of '立' (stand). Together, they read '思拉' (Sī Lā), the phonetic transcription of the name 'Hong Zhang'.

Zhang and Xiaohong live in a one room apartment in a five story building. There is nothing wrong with their building that isn't also wrong with a tenement house in, say, the south side of Chicago. Which is to say, a little urban renewal is in order. There is a group of

young men, squatters, living in the hallway outside their front door. This is apparently not unusual. The couple's apartment is clean and neat as a pin. In one room they have a double bed, a wardrobe, some chests of drawers, a 486 PC, a small refrigerator, and a color T.V. That takes up 98% of the space. By Chinese standards it is luxurious, by ours it is tiny. They also have a telephone and an air conditioner, expensive extravagances.

They served me watermelon, which I ate against my better judgment, but to no ill effects. We looked at their photo album, turnabout being fair play since I bought some photos of NCAR, my home, Kathleen, etc. which I had shown them. Bringing these photos turned out to be a wise decision; I've shown them to several folks and it has turned out to be a good ice breaker. Of course, I also look at them myself from time to time.

I do not know if chocolate is rare in China because the Chinese have no taste for it or vice versa. However, the delectable cocoa-covered dried cherries, given to me by my friend Paul Hyder especially for this trip, got a thumbs down from both Zhang and Xiaohong. For me, they have been a welcome supplement to my diet and have done much to preserve my sanity.

Prof. Wu has mentioned Zhang might visit NCAR sometime in the future. I'm trying to figure out a tactful way to suggest that I think his spouse would be a better choice.

I had a long chat with the director of the IAP Data Center, Liang You Lin. I am surrounded at LASG by climate modelers who for the most part really don't have the foggiest notion what I'm talking about in my lectures on computing, mass storage, and networking. But Dr. Liang has attended all of my lectures and he asks good questions. He and I met today and chatted for a couple of hours, and other than Xiaohong (who works at the Data Center), he is the only person so far I have felt much of a connection with professionally.

Before I close for the evening, I'm going to write about bicycles. The typical bicycle in Beijing is a sort of 1950's vintage Schwinn-style standard, but with hand brakes instead of coaster brakes. A patina of rust gives it that classic look. However, although this is the average, the standard deviation is large. At the low end are rusting hulks whose chains are so stretched that they drag the ground (this is not an exaggeration). At the high end are a few mountain bikes that would look right at home in Boulder. Regardless of condition, nearly all of them are equipped with bike locks.

On my way to work every day I pass two bicycle repair shops. In Beijing this means a guy along the sidewalk with a tool chest. As near as I can tell, both of these entrepreneurs are doing land office business in the ride-through trade, and are capable of tackling anything from tightening a chain to a complete rebuild. All of this has made me seriously consider getting a mountain bike when I get back home.

From my room in the Foreign Guest House I can hear the folks in the hovels across the street partying again tonight. A couple of evenings a week they will break out a drum and a wind instrument and dance in the street. The wind instrument sounds a lot like a bagpipe (in fact, it was described as such in one of the books I brought with me). The party is fun to watch, although so far I have refrained from joining in.

This evening I walked up to the reception desk in my hotel, said hello, gave them my room number, retrieved my key, thanked them, and gave the young woman who operates the elevator my floor. All in Chinese. And they at least politely pretended to understand me.

22 June 1995
17:10
Beijing

Just a short note before leaving for the opera at Peking University. Unfortunately not Chinese opera, which I rather like from what I've seen on television, but rather Chinese performing European opera. Not sure what to expect. However, I'm anxious to go, even if it is just to see Peking University one more time, and to see the building that President Nixon gave a speech in during his historic visit here.

I misspoke earlier, there is another person I've connected with professionally. Mr. Jin is a Ph.D. student who I have been working with to get one of their climate models, written in FORTRAN of course just like ours, running across the network on one of our Crays. It's a "programmer thing" -- I don't think it would matter if he spoke no English at all, as long as we have a programming language in common. It turns out, apparently, that all programmers regardless of native language and culture, understand the same shorthand grunts and squeaks and curses when working together.

I spent the afternoon at the computer center of the Chinese Meteorological Bureau. This place is big, and services much the same function of the former National Meteorological Center (now the National Center for Environmental Prediction) in the United States. A real-time weather prediction for all of China is made here every day, and a television broadcast is done from a studio right in the same building. They have a two processor Cray C90, a Chinese "Galaxy" YH-2 (sort of an Cray X-MP clone), a Cray EL98/2, some CDC Cybers, some IBM mainframes, a load of DEC VAXen, lots of PCs, and probably more that I didn't see. I also met two Westerners, customer engineers for Cray Research, stationed here in Beijing.

I gave a talk here on mass storage, my first in which I had a translator. It went extremely well; I have a lot more in common with these folks since many of them are computer types. Lots of good questions. Working with a translator is an interesting experience. I'd say a few sentences, wait for the translation, say a few sentences, then

wait as a discussion in Chinese lasting several minutes would break out. Finally the translator would signal to me, and I would continue. I take it most of the discussion was not about what I was saying, really, but about the quality or accuracy of the translation.

My host at the Center was a Mr. Shi Peiliang, a software engineer who remembers my coworkers Basil Irwin and Paul Rotar quite well from their visit nearly ten years ago. Peiliang spoke exceptional English and had a very good grasp of idiom, and it was fun to help him catch up on the more recent doings of Basil and Paul. He was also obviously an extremely skilled computer type, so I didn't hesitate to ask questions. His reaction when I asked him if I could take pictures nearly convinced me that I am being paranoid when I worry about such things. Yeah, right, and as soon as I let my guard down, the secret police will knock down my hotel room door.

23 June 1995
19:35
Beijing

Today, my last day working at LASG, has been perhaps the most interesting of my stay so far. Since I couldn't start on any new projects, I hung around my desk and all kinds of folks came by to chat (and I suspect to practice their English). At lunch I walked down to the street market and ran into a Chinese Ph.D. student who wanted some advice on whether to go to U. of Maryland or U. of Chicago. We ended up having a marvelously long conversation about the importance of mentors, the value of good translators, and how Chinese writers vying for a Nobel prize in literature are at a disadvantage because of their reliance on translation. It was easily the best, most involving conversation I've had with anyone Chinese since I've been here.

Like many of the graduate students here, though, his main concern choosing a school in the States was picking one that would be safe. Cheng asked about Boulder, and after I spent a few minutes describing it, he remarked "I hear it is very safe", and heads nodded in agreement all around. I mentioned that I'd been in lots of big cities, lots of times, and had never been mugged, but I also said that I was careful about where I walked during what time of day. It's a shame that the Chinese feel they have to worry about such things in the United States, but my intuition tells me they may be right to do so. Not only might they be easy targets, but they probably lack the instincts to tell them what's a bad part of town and what's not. Walking around Beijing at any time of the day or evening, even exploring side streets and walking down back alleys by myself, I have never ever felt at risk from street crime. Lunatic drivers yes, crime no.

Prof. Wu and the IAP deputy director Dr. Wang, who by the way rates a personal assistant and a state-owned car with a driver, along with the "Foreign Secretary" of the Institute, and some of the

programmers and graduate students at LASG, took me out to dinner this evening to the nicest restaurant I've been in so far. Despite no electricity (everyone learns to deal with such things here) we had a sumptuous banquet by candle light.

They tried to play "gross out the American" I think: "here, have some squid. Here, have some cow's stomach. Here, have some -- we don't know what the English word for it is but it is a kind of snake". Thanks to the fact that I've never met a meal I didn't like, and am always up for trying new ethnic foods, I not only enjoyed all of it, but had seconds of several dishes, much to their delight. When I remarked that the cow's stomach reminded me of pig's intestines -- only we call them "chitlins" -- that got their attention. As usual, I looked around in vain for a bottle of Tabasco. Next time I'll bring some along with.

Once they figured out I wasn't a picky eater and was an okay guy cuisine-wise, everyone loosened up and we all started telling funny personal anecdotes. I trotted out the Napoleon quote ("China, there is a sleeping giant. Let it sleep. For when it wakes, it will shake the world!"), and everyone loved that. It was a fine conclusion to a fascinating work experience.

Tidbit: bird's nest soup really is made out of a bird's nest. There's a species of bird here that builds its nest out of its own hardened saliva. You can buy cans containing a tiny bird's nest in any corner market. You'd think you were eating some sort of translucent noodle. It tastes good, but maybe it's best not to think about it too closely, sort of like eggs.

It will be interesting to see what my new digs are like. The Foreign Guest house has been completely adequate, but I know people who would have refused to stay there if it had been a hotel in the West, maybe me included. I'm sorry that this part of my adventure is coming to an end. I would do it again in an instant.

24 June 1995
18:20
Beijing

I am firmly ensconced in my new hotel, the Japanese-owned Beijing Toronto, and have successfully made the transition from a scientific guest of the government of the People's Republic of China to a wealthy American capitalist. At the moment I prefer being the capitalist: I'm watching CNN and BBC on cable television in my room and drinking a cold Tsing Tao beer from the mini-bar. As beers go, Tsing Tao is hardly exotic. I've had it many times at Chinese restaurants back home. But it does have one big advantage: it's a heap better than the alternative, which is Beijing Beer, the other brew that seems to be ubiquitous here. Tiger Beer is also pretty common, but it's imported from Japan and (compared to Tsing Tao anyway) hideously expensive and not that much better. There is one big difference between domestic Tsing Tao and imported Tsing Tao: I've

only seen the local version in pop top aluminum cans, whereas the import comes in bottles. Makes me want to crush the can on my forehead using some cool martial arts move. I can't wait to get back home and have a Tsing Tao in a Chinese restaurant with some friends: "Hmmm, when was the last time I had a Tsing Tao... it was in Beijing, in '95 I think".

More on the hotel in a bit. For now I want to talk about traffic.

I routinely see people carrying carloads of goods on their bicycles. One of the grad students I worked with pointed to the wire contraption on his bike and said "Chinese baby seat". More impressive are the adults who ride side-saddle on the rear luggage rack of someone else's bike, while reading the paper or eating what passes for a sandwich around here, all with perfect balance and aplomb. I'd fall off within five seconds and be run over by dozens of bicycles behind us.

Traffic here seems to be barely controlled chaos, with only a general consensus to drive on the right, and then only when it's really convenient. Horns are part of the background noise since they are required whenever a car overtakes a bicycle, which of course means: constantly. Yet in the half-month I've been here so far, I have seen only one traffic accident, and then the only clue that there had been one was the driver standing by his truck with three police officers talking to him concurrently and at high bandwidth.

I had a Chinese breakfast this morning: a couple of things best described as cookies, some rice soup, and some meat bits and pickled cabbage akin to the Korean kim chee. The cabbage was so spicy that had I not had a palette conditioned by living in the southwestern United States, it would have made my hair stand on end. And like food in the southwest, I suspect the original reason for the seasoning was to hide the taste of spoiled meat; maybe here the original reason has not been lost. Before today I've stuck with a fried egg and bread every morning, something I had originally thought the Englishman John Green had taught them to make, but since then discovered that it is quite a typical Chinese breakfast as well (although perhaps they don't fold it up into a sandwich the way I've been doing). My daily fried egg was made in a wok. Just about everything is made in a wok, including the pastries I've seen them deep fry.

Speaking of bread, if you come to China, learn to eat steamed rolls. They look appalling, but once you get use to them, pasty white and having the look of not having been cooked at all, they're not too horrible. Anyway, today, my last day here, I decided to eat what most of the locals eat every morning. The verdict: interesting, but I'm glad I had the fried egg sandwich as an alternative (which for me was just as exotic for breakfast).

Tidbits: the Chinese have had their Saturdays off from work only since May of this year. They are still dealing with the concept of leisure time. I frequently see well dressed Chinese, mostly couples, playing badminton on the sidewalk with no net, just rackets. I'm told badminton is big all over Asia. I often see folks reading paperback

books (in Chinese of course). Book vendors are common on the street, and I see farmers reading while at their watermelon stands, elevator operators reading while waiting for customers, delivery cart drivers reading while taking a break from pedaling.

I've been watching some Beijing opera on television. Beijing opera has its own style, apart even from other Chinese opera. Although I could not understand a word, the costumes, the music, and the obviously very stylized gestures were fascinating. I've watched bits of historical dramas on television --- one in particular that took place during one of the imperial dynasties had beautiful sets and costumes. I've also seen sports, children's shows, and what surely passes for soap operas, some featuring Western actors speaking Chinese with subtitles. These tend to be rather self-serving, with the occidentals saying lines like "This is the finest frammistat I've ever seen, superior to anything found in the West".

I saw an interesting graph at LASG showing the age distribution of scientists working there over the years. There's this moving gap of "zero" that in 1995 represents the ages 41-50. One of the grad students suggested the Cultural Revolution, which is very plausible, circa 1966 being when most of the intellectuals were exported to rural areas for reeducation. A little mental calculation also suggests that this age group would have been children during the famine of 1958 in which, thanks to mismanagement by the Mao regime, about thirty million Chinese starved to death.

From famine to conspicuous consumption. It was a bit of a culture shock changing hotels. My hosts at the lab asked where I was staying for my vacation and when I told them, their eye's got big. "Four stars" one of them said. I was afraid to ask what my current hotel was rated. It was pretty shabby and could be only a little uncharitably described as a dump. The floors at the Foreign Guest House, and for that matter at the more posh hotel in Datong, bothered me a bit, the carpeting so dirty and embedded with spills of unidentifiable substances that I always made a point to use the slippers provided (flimsy paper in the Foreign Guest House, robust plastic in the Beijing Toronto) to walk on it. But truth be told, the Foreign Guest House was perfectly adequate in every way that really mattered (as long as you didn't expect too much). It might even have been above average for the Russians with whom I was sharing it. When I mentioned where I was going to be moving to, the deputy director of the IAP remarked over dinner "You're going to find out how cheap we really are".

Now I am surrounded by skyscrapers in downtown Beijing, just down the street from the China World Trade Center, at the Japanese owned and operated Beijing Toronto Hotel. This place is at about the same level as the best Hyatt Regency I've ever stayed at. For the first time since coming to China I feel underdressed in my L. L. Bean oxford shirt and slacks. I'm glad I saved the vacation for last; the reverse transition would have been downright painful. Still, I am struck by the relative decadence of the place, something that I don't

think would have occurred to me before this. That nagging feeling hasn't stopped be from popping open a cold Tsing Tao beer from the mini-bar, eating the peanuts, turning on the air conditioning, and watching CNN.

Speaking of CNN, I'd taken for granted what it means to be able to keep up with world events. Having been out of touch for a couple of weeks, it's a real pleasure to catch up on things. This reminds me of when I was walking through a train station in Paris and came across an English-language edition of *Newsweek* with a mug shot of O. J. Simpson on the cover. I felt reality sliding around beneath my feet. Next time I take a trip abroad to a non-English speaking country, I'm bringing a small shortwave radio along with.

I had an awkward moment my last day at the lab. A couple of the students and staff were asking me about my tour plans, and I gave them the details. They asked me how much it costs. I told them, not thinking anything much about it. They blanched. I did some mental calculations and realized that the figure that I quoted to them would have been like \$30,000 to me. I'm still trying to figure out exactly how to feel about that.

One of the Japanese channels on my room television frequently carries motorcycle racing. In many, perhaps most, respects, I realize that I have left China. I miss it, even though I know it is just outside (and maybe down the street).

25 June 1995
22:00

I saw a dog and some chocolate today, both firsts for my stay. The dog was leashed to a Westerner walking down the street. Dogs, and in fact most pets, are illegal or at least require a very expensive permit, for residents in Beijing. And of course, any stray mammals, regardless of species, are probably routinely harvested. I'm told they "wok" dogs here, and in fact I'm a little disappointed that nothing I've eaten has been identified as dog or cat. I saw a couple of Chinese watching the Westerner as he went by; they looked at the dog -- one of those little ratty dogs -- laughed and rolled their eyes. Not being a fan of little ratty dogs, I felt a certain sympathy with their point of view, and had a passing thought that maybe the dog would be interesting over rice.

Birds seem to be acceptable, though. A common sight is bicyclists taking their birds for a ride. The pets ride in little cages mounted on the front of the handlebars. The tiny feathered friends seem to take it all in stride.

Speaking of birds, as in birds and bees, I've seen condoms prominently displayed in several shops today. With the kind of population pressure a nation like China has, I figured birth control must not just be encouraged, but downright mandated. But this was the first time I'd seen it so obviously displayed.

I have walked the same stones in the Forbidden City as a score of emperors that ruled one of the largest empires known in history. There is a long tradition in science fiction -- mostly in the 1940's and 50's -- of writing about galactic empires. I appreciate the detail in those stories now. One of the members of our tour group compared security at the Forbidden City with the White House. It was a very interesting comparison. Example: the bricks of the courtyards of the City are fifteen layers deep, and set in an interlocking pattern. This is to prevent anyone from tunneling underneath. We are told that no one every did so successfully. Little details like that are important, if the predominant method of succession is via assassination.

You can tell the rank of the original occupant of an imperial building in the City and elsewhere by looking at the vertical edges of the sloping roofs. The more little figures depicted along those edges, the higher the rank of the bureaucrat for whom the building was built. I think the Emperor rates eleven little figures.

Also, the Chinese construct drainage systems similar to those of gothic cathedrals built in Europe in the middle-ages. My suspicion is that the latter may have been inspired by the former. Notre Dame in Paris has gargoyles that act as drain spouts. It's neat to see Notre Dame in the rain, water pouring from the gargoyles' mouths. Stone structures in the Forbidden City have dragons and other such creatures serving the same purpose.

I spent some time today wandering around Tiananmen Square with a Taiwanese-American couple and two businessmen, one from Australia, the other from Saudi Arabia. I mentioned the famine of 1958 in which thirty million Chinese starved to death. The Australian remarked "So what?" and went on to say that proportionately the same number of citizens probably starve to death in developed Western nations every year. I think he's a little pessimistic -- I don't think 3% of the American population dies for lack of food every year -- but his point was well taken.

27 June 1995

14:00

Beijing

I'm sitting in an Air China 767 at Beijing International Airport waiting to go to Xi'an. Getting through the airport on my own was a bit of an adventure, but I seem to have done everything right the first time. There was one brief moment of concern when an announcement in Chinese caused half the departure lounge to get up and leave, but so far so good. Of course, easy for me to say, I'm not even off the ground in Beijing yet, much less in Xi'an. Plenty of time for another adventure or two along the way.

I'm not sure which was more surreal: listening to the heavily accented English announcements while watching a Michael Jackson video at the Hard Rock Cafe Beijing, or hearing American rap music when I got on the plane just a few minutes ago.

I had a burger and fries at the Hard Rock Cafe Beijing. Heck, I don't even eat burgers and fries anymore at home. At least I think it was a burger. It may not have been made of cow. Hard to say. If it was legitimate, it was one of the more marginal burgers I've ever had. Naturally, I loved it. I've been eating native dishes three meals a day for over two weeks, so I figure I've paid my dues.

The weather during my stay in Beijing has been warm and humid but quite acceptable. Only a couple of days of rain. John Green tells me I am a little early for the monsoons, a seasonal phenomena. I brought my North Face Gore-Tex shell and matching fleece jacket along on this trip. Expensive but worth every penny. I feel I'm prepared for just about anything, including blizzards. Kathleen and I learned a long time ago that if you're going to have an adventure, take along adventure gear. It doesn't matter whether your adventure is in rural China, on top of a mountain in the French Alps, or in Disney World. My expedition quality North Face outerwear certainly qualifies.

I'm about half-way through *Wild Swans* but have taken up reading in parallel a book I bought at the China World Trade Center since presumably I can read that one more openly (although I admit I'm probably being paranoid here). The book by Fred Schreier, an American businessman living in Asia, is on doing business in China. It's full of interesting anecdotes, rules of thumbs, and helpful hints. *Wild Swans*, by the way, is great, an engrossing multi-generational view of China. It is a little reminiscent in terms of scope of the Chinese movie *Farewell My Concubine* in some respects. The book spans the post-imperial times of the warlords, through the Mao era, to the modern day.

I have to thank Basil Irwin. Well before I left on this trip he recommended several Chinese movies available on video. I rented four such movies: *Farewell My Concubine*, *Ju Dou*, *The Story of Qiu Ju*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*. All of these were filmed and produced in China with Chinese actors, and English subtitles. I realize these are the best of the best. The terrible Chinese movies never make it to American shores. But these movies were a revelation. They're not Hong Kong martial arts films, they are truly great movies, among the best movies I've ever seen. I can recommend any of them without qualification.

In particular, *Farewell My Concubine* gives you a perspective of the history of China over a span of perhaps sixty years inclusive of the Cultural Revolution. It has a fascinating story revolving around the Beijing Opera, and features one of the most stunning endings in any movie I've seen. The movie itself was so controversial that it was initially banned inside China itself.

The Story of Qiu Ju gives you a real feeling for living in China, and is interesting because it is not until maybe two thirds through the film that you have any idea at all when the movie takes place. It transitions from rural China to an urban area, and only then to you see any technology much above the level of the bronze age. This is

consistent with my travels through rural China and a farm near Datong.

Ju Dou has a story behind it that is worth telling. Films made in America no longer use the Technicolor film process; it's considered old and obsolete. Some years ago the last Technicolor film processing plant was packed up and sold to China. A characteristic of the Technicolor process is that it yields reds and yellows with deep, brilliant, saturation. *Ju Dou*, which takes place inside a factory which dyes silk, uses this to great effect. The red and yellow silks that are almost constantly in the background are so vivid and rich that you can almost feel the colors flowing over your eyeballs. See a good print of it, it really is that remarkable.

Of course, I've seen Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, which is a fine film, but it is China seen through European eyes. My recommendation is to cut out the middleman. However, *The Last Emperor* is worth seeing because it was filmed on location inside the Forbidden City. There is a scene where the boy emperor rides his bicycle down an alley in the City; I have walked down that same path.

I'm not kidding myself here. I do not understand the Chinese, nor could I hope do, even if I made many visits to China and spent my life studying the country and its history and culture. And while I think I've seen more of the real China than the typical tourist, I also know I've not even seen the tip of the iceberg; maybe only a snowflake that has settled on the tip.

Consider this: before Christ, when my ancestors in Scotland were wearing animal skins and painting themselves blue, China not only had an empire, a culture, a written language, and a set of laws, it had begun building an artifact that today can be seen from the moon: the Great Wall.

I've been thinking of James Bond lately. Weird, yeah, I know. But just as the Forbidden City has given me a better appreciation of galactic empires in science fiction, my experience in China has allowed me to appreciate some of the details in Ian Fleming's novels. How does James Bond get by with day to day life while carrying out his 007 missions in foreign lands? Well, first thing is he speaks fluent Italian and French, and does passably in several other languages. But more than that, he always has a local person working with him, a faithful (or sometimes not) sidekick (who of course always gets killed). So he has local help -- just like me. Also, he stays in expensive hotels under his cover as an executive with the British firm Universal Import/Export. So he has this vast infrastructure going for him -- just like me. Finally, he has the resources of the MI.6 intelligence service behind him -- yeah, just like me, except my service is called Visa and my gold card is my license to spend.

Now I don't want you to think that I'm comparing myself to James Bond -- not that such a comparison couldn't be made, on looks alone if nothing else. "Sloan. John Sloan". Anyway, several times during this trip I've asked myself "What would Bond do in this

situation?" and frequently this has led to the right decision. So far I haven't been in a situation in which a Walther PPK semiautomatic pistol would have been necessary. I own one of course, a PPK, but it didn't make this trip. This line of thought got real weird (not an uncommon occurrence under these circumstances) when I realized at the time that the theme from Goldfinger was playing in the background on some loudspeaker. Coincidence, or Musak-like mind control? You decide.

Tidbit: on some bus out in rural China I saw a giant billboard advertising a shooting range, featuring a picture of China's version of the Russian AK-47 assault rifle, and proclaiming in English "Foreign visitors welcome." Have no idea what to make of that, but if I had a firearm in China, I certainly wouldn't admit to it.

Stylized statues of lions are on either side of nearly every outside door all over China. They're considered good luck, keeping out the evil spirits, or so I'm told. One lion is always male, representing the emperor, the other female, representing the empress. How do you tell them apart? The male is the one with balls. Well, okay, ball. His paw is always on a globe, representing the Earth. Hey, wonder how long that's been around, think the Chinese knew the Earth was round back in the bronze age? The female always has her paw on a lion cub, who is laying on his back with his toothful mouth open. Now that I've told you this, you'll start seeing lions at every Chinese restaurant you pass.

The lions are just one example of Feng Shui, literally "wind and water". Feng Shui is a kind of superstition that has been practiced with more or less formality for a couple of thousand years around here. It's a form of geomancy, magic that comes from buildings, their location, orientation, and architecture. While it is officially outlawed by the State, that's like saying outlawing gambling in the U.S. prevents office football pools. The Chinese can be very serious about which way a building faces, how many doors or windows it has, or even where mirrors are placed.

I was a busy tourist in Beijing. Besides the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, I've also seen the Summer Palace, climbed along the Great Wall, visited the Ming Tombs, and walked along the Sacred Path.

The Ming Tombs is the graveyard of several emperors of the Ming dynasty. As emperors with lots of cheap labor are wont to do, they spared no expense building large, deeply buried tombs.

The Sacred Path is, well, a path. Actually three paths, at the Temple of Heaven. The emperor and empress would walk along the left and right paths (or maybe it was the right and left) to this temple and pray for a good harvest. Important imperial tip: if you want tens of thousands of peasant laborers to build you impressive tombs, you need a lot of grain with which to feed them. I don't recall what exactly was supposed to use the center path, but I'm pretty sure if a mere mortal stepped on it, it was bad, really bad, like crossing the beams. An interesting architectural feature of this large complex is

the acoustics. Much of this was built in the sixteenth century, before there was much science in the way of acoustics (well, this is China, you never really know, they invented just about everything while Europeans were hitting each other with clubs). But because the architect was really into numerology, the way the place is designed you stand in one spot outdoors in the center of this massive stone Round Alter, speak, and it sounds as if your own voice is whispering in both your ears.

But the best place of all was the Summer Palace. The summer palace lies about fifteen clicks north of Beijing, and was a sort of imperial Camp David. It was originally built around the twelfth century. These emperors, they pretty much knew what they were doing when it came to recreation. Besides having concubines, they also knew a good vacation spot when they saw one. The only thing the parcel of land marked out for the Summer Palace lacked was a lake, so they had the peasants build them one. A big one. Not kidding, this lake is big enough to go sailing on, easily. It's big, it looks completely natural, and it's all a man-made artifact. In the early part of the twentieth century, Cixi, the Empress Dowager, decided that while she liked the look of the lake, she got seasick easily. So she had built for her a giant concrete barge, firmly resting on the lake bottom, so that she could pretend to be sailing around while being firmly attached to dry land. Problem is, see, the money she used to build this "boat" was intended to modernize the Imperial Navy. This fact came back to bite her when the Japanese invaded by sea at the start of World War II. This little bit of fiscal irresponsibility not only ended the Empress Dowager's reign, it ended the imperial period permanently. It took the Nationalist Chinese and the Communists working together to chase out the Japanese, and then the Communist chased out the Nationalist Chinese, who settled in Taiwan. This would be sort of like the Democrats chasing out the Republicans, who settled in Hawaii, although the Chinese certainly don't see it that simply.

Tidbit: a traditional bed here, found in both rural farms and in the Forbidden City, is a broad, raised, flat adobe or brick artifice that is hollow inside with a door in the front. You toss in some firewood into the bed, light it up, toss a woven straw mat on top, and sack out.

27 June 1995
20:00
Xi'an

I believe I am in Texas, or maybe Oklahoma. Oh yeah, the signs say Xi'an (I guess), but the climate and landscape suggests something more familiar, just as Datong looked like the western slope of Colorado. Xi'an is a hot, dry, dusty city in central China.

Travel tip: carbonation at high altitude will cause intestinal distress, alcohol will dehydrate you even more than the dry recirculated airliner cabin air, and caffeine will dehydrate you and

upset your ability to handle jet lag. I've been much happier flying since I've starting sticking to juice or water. Too bad the Chinese gentleman sitting next to me on the 767 didn't know about this, or he might not have drank all the beer and coffee. We hit a long stretch of brutal turbulence, and since it was too bumpy to read or write, I decided to catch a cat nap. A particularly good lurch woke me up and I opened my eyes to see my seat mate staring contemplatively at his air sickness bag. He made it, though.

Tidbit: the other night on television I'm pretty sure I saw *Real Stories of the Chinese Highway Patrol*. No, I'm not kidding. I couldn't tell if the three-wheeled pedal cart was their high speed pursuit vehicle, but it did manage to overtake the perpetrator on his bicycle. Really. Once again the righteous justice of the socialist state is served upon a miscreant with a defective ideology and lead feet.

The local currency, the Yuan, is getting to me. The other evening I negotiated some slob of a cab driver from ¥40 to ¥20 for a cab ride, and I still got ripped off even then. Later it occurred to me that I had argued him down from maybe \$5.00 to \$2.50. This is a country in which the average income is ¥400 per year -- maybe \$50.00. That includes the majority of Chinese who are farmers in rural areas and very poor compared to the typical Beijing city dweller. Makes me glad, and a little guilty, to be a "wealthy" American. The income differential between the big cities and the rural areas is why Beijing has millions of squatters or illegal residents living in hallways or hovels. Most of them are farmers looking for better work. Eight million bicycles in Beijing, by the way.

Some Westerners who were also staying at the Beijing Toronto came back to their rooms to find a neat card explaining that in their absence their room had been searched and a contraband travel iron had been found. Unlike these tourists, I think this was strictly the hotels doing; the rules spell out that heating devices like travel irons are strictly forbidden. There's plenty of stuff here to make you paranoid without having to make anything up. I suspect there's not much in the way of a fire department, especially for a city the size of Beijing. At predominantly wooden artifices like the Forbidden City, and just about anything older than a few decades here is made of wood, there are always fire extinguishers evident, sometimes twenty or more, lined up against a wall outside a building.

Have I mentioned that 80% of the motor vehicles here are owned by the state? I suspect that the remaining 20% are mostly taxis (which are everywhere), busses, delivery vehicles, and the like. So virtually everyone who drives does so full time, as a professional driver, and no one else drives. I would never drive in this city. That's right, I'll break 100 MPH on a motorcycle, but I would not drive in China. I find the best attitude is to treat each car or bus ride (and I've had a lot of them) like a commercial air flight: sit back, relax, because no matter what happens, there is nothing you can do. It also helps to close your eyes once in a while.

I find the Chinese to be very laid back, very different from the Japanese. They usually don't wear business suits, and not just among the academics I've worked with either, as I'm told by the Western businessmen I've met here. The Chinese delight in having huge yet casual banquets. They mostly go with the flow. Lose your grip with your chopsticks and drop something on the tablecloth? No sweat, just use your fingers, or go for seconds.

This is good since while I was pretty proficient with chop sticks before coming here, I'm no where near being in the league of the typical Chinese citizen. I can pass the test of picking up a single kernel of rice, but the dexterity of folks at the dinner table is downright intimidating. They can pick up a pair of chopsticks with one hand and the implements will immediately be correctly positioned and aligned. Still, I feel I did well holding my own.

The Chinese are also most un-Japanese like when it comes to touching. They are even more touchy-feely than your typical Westerner (including me). They will shake your hand and then not let go for many seconds. It is not uncommon to see adult men walking holding hands, or even sitting on one another's laps. There is no connotation, they are simply more casual about expressing themselves this way. I don't see the same sort of touching though between the sexes. The woman that guided my group through the Forbidden City implied that things are pretty Victorian in contemporary China when we began discussing the palace eunuchs (who carried their testicles around little boxes... I guess I would have some sentimental attachment to them too, if that was the only kind of attachment I could have).

Somethings do get their dander up and then there's no stopping them. For example, back before the birth of Christ they were so concerned about those pesky barbarian tribes to the north that over the span of 2500 years and several imperial dynasties they built a wall seven thousand kilometers long. No small wall either, I climbed a tiny portion of it. It's wide enough to drive a car on and several stories high. Standing in one spot, you can see it bob and weave over the mountains for miles and miles. Just when you think it's out of sight, your eyes pick it up again in the distance. Of course, fat lot of good it did them. The Mongols just went around the wall and conquered China, and Ghengis Kahn founded a new capital in a little town off the beaten path that in the fullness of time came to be called Beijing.

29 June 1995
07:15
Xi'an

This morning I'm on a China Northwest Airlines flight waiting to take off for tropical Guilin. I've flown enough that I've gotten to know the typical jetliners. As I walked across the tarmac to this one, I couldn't identify this one. I was beginning to get worried until I got

into the cabin and noticed all of the instructions were in both Chinese and Russian. Yep, a Soviet-made Tupolev. That's reassuring. The plane itself looks like a crude copy of a 727. I hope the laborers who made this didn't have too much vodka the day they put it together.

Xi'an airport reminds me a little of D.I.A.: it's fairly new, built in 1990, and its the way the heck out of town, connected to civilization or what passes for it here by a new highway. However, for whatever reason, buildings here in China have a remarkable way of looking dingy quickly. I was in a rather run-down built-up area yesterday that looked like it had been that way forever, but I happen to know it had been a farmers field as recently as 1977.

Passing some new construction in Beijing the other day, an Australian businessman I was sharing a cab with pointed at some construction and wondered aloud "I wonder if they're building that up or tearing it down?" Yesterday, I was walking around on top of the city wall, the old fortress in the heart of Xi'an, I dunno, maybe a couple of thousand years old or so, and it looked in better shape (including the pagoda on top) than most of the modern buildings I see here. Of course, a lot of the crumbling artifacts from the 1950s can be blamed on the Russians (and the Chinese do not hesitate to do so).

10:45
Guilin

The Tupolev TU154M delivered me safe and sound to Guilin, where I'm writing this from my room at the Holiday Inn, if you can believe it. I'm about to go out exploring. Guilin reminds me very much of photos and films I've seen of Viet Nam in terms of climate and geography. Not surprising, since I'm on the southern tropical part of China. Mountains tower over the city, but not mountains like you might have seen in Colorado. Rugged, nearly vertical sides and rounded tops, spotted all over with vegetation, unworldly. Guilin has been called one of the most beautiful places in the world. I can believe it.

On the way to the hotel we passed farmers in indigo pajamas and shallow conical straw hats working in rice paddies. We had to stop once to let some water buffalo cross the road, and once again because some girls were having some problems with a load of green bamboo on their bicycles. The roads are clogged with what appear to be roto-tillers -- uncovered engines over a front axle with long handles reaching back to the operator -- converted into small tractors.

On the flight over we were treated to chicken drumlets and canned strawberry juice for breakfast. Instead of pretzels or peanuts, we got some dried squid bits, which I saved and am enjoying as I write this. Squid jerkey, as I've come to think of it, is good if a little salty. The Chinese are also crazy about soy milk and coconut juice, neither of which I've been able to develop a taste for.

I have learned to be careful about my pronunciation of Chinese, but perhaps not in the way one might expect. I had begun

by accurately mimicking the exact nasal tone and inflection for "nee how" (hello), but several times I apparently did it so well that the other person would launch into Chinese at the speed of thought. I am now more careful to keep a "western accent" and deliberately mangle the words a bit. As you might expect, I have had no problems adopting to this practice.

Did you know that the Peking Man, one of the oldest humanoid fossils, was lost? It was taken by the Japanese during World War II, and now probably sits in a warehouse or at the bottom of some trash heap. Shades of Indiana Jones. (It was co-discovered by the French anthropologist and nearly-excommunicated Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, coiner of the term "Omega Point" and a favorite among the Singularity crowd.) In general, it's a wonder that any cultural artifacts survived the change in imperial dynasties, the Mongol hordes, the warlords, the Japanese invasion of WW-II, the civil war between the communists and the Kuomintang or Nationalist Chinese, and Mao's Cultural Revolution.

One of the unexpected benefits of taking these small group tours is that I've met a lot of interesting people. Many of them are, like me, in China on business. I've talked to folks from England, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, German, Jakarta (Indonesia), and even such far away lands as Texas and California. This morning I chatted with a women from Columbus, Ohio, just an hour or so from where I was born and raised. Air travel has made the world tiny.

Xi'an is most famous for the archeological dig containing the terra cotta army. They are truly worth seeing. The army is a vast battle formation containing thousands of fired clay soldiers. It is a dig in progress, scientists working on it while the tourists gawk. The largest of several hallways -- really sort of huge aircraft hanger-like structures -- shows the main battle formation -- life size -- with infantry, cavalry, and charioteers. I counted nine columns, a flanking column on both the left and right, plus a forward line for cannon fodder and a rear guard. It occurred to me that this find, discovered by some farmers drilling for water, is important for several reasons: besides being a major archeological find, the figures show period battledress, weapons, and tactics from about 200 B.C. You have to realize that this buried army represents a big leap forward in human rights in China. The army accompanies an imperial tomb, and prior to this the emperor would have been buried with the real soldiers. Puts a new spin on early retirement, and surely makes recruiting for the forces of an elderly emperor challenging.

When you visit the terra cotta army, don't try to take a photograph. I'm told that they will confiscate your camera and expose your film. I suppose they might use the excuse of not wanting to expose the artifacts to bright light, but the real reason is apparently they want to preserve the postcard and souvenir value of their own photographs and prevent any competition. The army attracts thousands of tourists each year.

At the dig I watched a "circlevision" (360 degree) film which included an historical reenactment of the building of the army and the tomb of the emperor. The soldiers were constructed in a modular fashion such that the bodies were mass-produced while the heads (and facial expressions) were made in a wide variety. Impressive for the bronze age, and it makes you wonder if maybe the Chinese, as with so many other things, beat Henry Ford to the punch, and in the bronze age too.

I saw a similar circlevision film at the Great Wall. The Chinese seem very good at this. Unfortunately for us collectors, they have not discovered the idea of selling soundtracks. Too bad too. Not that the Chinese don't understand compact disks; near Peking University there is a street corner that daily is mobbed by vendors selling bootlegged music CDs and pirated software on CD-ROM.

While in Xi'an I also saw the archeological dig at Banpo. This dig unearthed a 6000 year old village. The village, what little is left of it or can be inferred, was rather large, maybe 50 buildings housing 500 people.

I saw something strange while riding along a back road in Xi'an yesterday: another dog. That makes two non-human non-farm mammals total that I've seen so far while in China. Not dogs, not pets, but mammals of any kind. Humans and birds are the only life I've seen, other than the two dogs plus farm animals like pigs. Unlike the first dog that was some European's ratty little pet, this dog was a working dog, a big bay-colored hound. Some locals were playing with it at the time, but I'm confident that it earns its keep. A slacker would have more value as this week's entree. I'm sure that wild mammals exist, but there must be a lot of evolutionary pressure to be cautious around people.

Tidbit: it is disconcerting to be shown a film in which a cartoon character gleefully bails out of an airplane. Especially while one is fastening one's seatbelt.

Tidbit: spitting, although technically illegal in Beijing, has been called the national sport of China. This apparently extends to air travel and the air sickness bag.

Tidbit: I am delighted to report that in Xi'an there is a tollbooth on the highway to the new airport which is done in beautifully traditional Chinese architecture.

While in Beijing, I visited a sort of ethnic theme park. The park has native peoples imported from the broad range of ethnic groups that have been subsumed by China and the Han. They demonstrate native skills, anything from cooking to basket weaving to dancing, in structures built to resemble their native habitats, ranging from a straw hut from Polynesia to a stone fortress from Mongolia. The tourists were mostly Chinese, including natives from those same ethnic groups, delighted to find a little piece of home. I didn't mention to my hosts that I wondered if this was built to ease the conscience of the State, something like the U.S. building museums for Native American cultures. The admission fee to the park was

expensive enough (although a pittance by Disneyland standards) that I only found one Chinese that I worked with that had ever been there, and he had gone there as a host to a visiting Westerner.

It was at this park that I witnessed a Chinese version of a wet t-shirt contest. It was part of a re-enactment of an ritual from one of the tropical regions which involved dousing both participants and spectators with water. While I am sure that the women tossing the water around were wearing authentic costumes, I somehow suspect that it was no coincidence that their clothes were form-fitting and that they ended up soaked to the skin. They attracted a big, enthusiastic, and predominantly male audience.

This goes along with the strange mixture of modesty and sensuality I see here daily. For example, the women routinely wear long dresses that cover nearly all of their bodies, yet the clothing is virtually transparent in bright sunlight. Mini-skirts, short dresses, and Lycra are popular, right along side the Mao jackets and People's Liberation Army surplus clothing. Yet there seems to be little in the way of sexual tension that my Western sensibilities can detect. Heck, for all I know, I've been hit on while I've been here, and have been too culturally ignorant to recognize it. However, I have read that the Beijing police in particular are concerned about Western men and Chinese women together, so much so they've been known to barge into a hotel room and surprise a Caucasian husband and his Hong Kong or Taiwanese wife, intent on putting the barbarian on the next flight out.

Alphabets and keyboards: Chinese words are made up of a set of several thousand "pictographs". Chinese dictionaries, of which I have a couple, are "alphabetized", first by the number of strokes it takes to draw a pictograph, then by the basic elements in it. Each pictograph has a one syllable name. Since the human mouth is only capable of making a small number of unique sounds or phonemes, dozens or even hundreds of pictographs have the same sound for their name. Ambiguity is dealt with by giving different inflections or intonations to each name or by the context in which it is used. Even so, there is frequently a possibility of ambiguity, so as I mentioned earlier I routinely see two Chinese in a conversation trace pictographs with a finger on an open palm.

The Japanese adopted the Chinese alphabet -- perhaps better described as a written vocabulary -- centuries ago, but eventually dropped nearly all of the Chinese characters in favor of the much simplified (in both content and syntax) Kanji alphabet. Kanji is more like Western alphabets in that several symbols are used to make a word. I've always considered this a strength of Japanese writing until recently. The Japanese have to contend with a larger character set than the West, which although much smaller than Chinese, still requires them to use vastly more complicated computer keyboards.

The Chinese on the other hand have adopted a standard phonetic spelling for each of their pictographs. This official adoption of this phonetic spelling is one of the reasons we write Beijing now

instead of Peking. It also normalized the Western spelling of Chinese words. The Chinese use standard QWERTY keyboards. As they type, the software automatically inserts the correct pictograph into the text. For pictographs which have the same pronunciation and hence phonetic spelling, a menu pops up to select the correct character, although there are some heuristics in the software I have seen that automatically picks the most likely character subject to the operator's correction. So no hardware changes for the Chinese when they buy computers; they order the same keyboards and displays we would. This puts them miles ahead of the Japanese, in my opinion. Who'd'a thought? At LASG in Beijing, the administrative assistant for the laboratory won an all-China typing contest. At the lab she routinely used software like I have just described running on a Macintosh. John Green referred to her as having the fastest hands in the East.

The downside for the Westerner is that although it is entirely possible to speak a little Chinese and be understood, I find it impossible to read any of it, or even to do crude pattern matching to recognize signs and the like. Looking up something simple in a Chinese-English dictionary requires much patience, and a willingness to admit defeat.

30 June 1995
19:00
Guilin

I have to be on my way to the airport by 06:30 tomorrow morning, so I'm forgoing the Guilin night life. I've done dinners with my multinational tour groups before, and last night I went to a musical show at one of the area hotels. But on this trip I'm traveling solo. It is a little strange having a personal driver and a personal tour guide at my beck and call. I think I prefer the dynamics of a group, even if the group and I don't speak the same language.

Most of the groups anyway. In Xi'an, part of the group was this American extended family, all adults or close to it, who spent most of their time in the tour bus (really, a sort of large van) arguing amongst themselves, while China rolled by outside. I've found many times the most interesting scenery by far isn't what I see on the official tour, but what passes by the windows of the tour bus, little snapshots of day to day life that I've deliberately concentrated on in this journal. You can read about the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Imperial Tombs, in any coffee table book on China. I've been there, done that, but the impressions I find more indelible are the ones from day to day life.

I did have an interesting dinner with this family from California, a couple from Australia, and a couple from the Netherlands, at a "dumpling restaurant", or in Cantonese, "dim sum". Other than some appetizers, soup, and the requisite watermelon, all thirteen courses were different dumplings, served one at a time to

each of us. The platters came out from the kitchen so quickly that it gave new meaning to the term "fast food". I remarked that it was the first time I had been served a meal one bite at a time. It was delicious, though, and a real treat in its variety. Chatting with such a diverse group was also great fun.

I did learn a language lesson of sorts. The waitress at the restaurant did a remarkable job introducing us to our different courses of dumplings. She identified each course in English, and when she brought out the soup, she not only described the soup but identified the classic Chinese brass container as a "hot pot". I asked if the hot pot had been made in Datong, as I had visited a factory there. Without missing a beat, she nodded and replied "Yes, soup". "Good enough", I said.

I've already mentioned how beautiful Guilin is. It may be the most beautiful place I have ever been. Its ethereal. I spent the day cruising on a riverboat down the Lijiang river from Guilin to Yangshuo. I had the strangest impression of a collapsed colonial empire. I saw farm houses being overtaken by the dense, lush tropical foliage. It must be a constant battle between man and plant. It was in stark contrast to Datong and Xi'an. Fisherman in long narrow boats poling along the river. Waterfalls coming down the mountainsides. Every bend in the river would reveal some kind of man made structure, usually partially collapsed and covered in vegetation. Not a place to get lost in. Yet frequently I'd see children splashing about near a path that ended at the water, with no civilization in sight.

I was on a tour of one today on the riverboat, but I did hook up with a British couple, Bill and Daphne. They're both in their early fifties. They've each taken three month sabbaticals from their jobs in England, hoisted backpacks, and are taking a "once in a lifetime" (their words) trip across India and China. The two of them are just making it up as they go along, taking riverboats, buses and trains as the need arises. I didn't mention that it sounded to me like they were revisiting a faded British Empire. When I got off the boat and we parted company, I returned to my keepers, and the Brits hiked towards the middle of Yangshou to inquire about buses. Neither of them spoke Chinese. That's some adventurous spirit.

Tidbit: "KTV" or Karoke Television is all over the damn place here. I've seen it in every city I've been in. No, haven't made the leap.

Tidbit: Chinese walk like they drive.

Tidbit: On the remote control of the color television in my hotel room at the Holiday Inn in Guilin, the button for what I believe is the color balance has a Yin-Yang symbol as its icon. Gotta love it.

While in Xi'an, I was pleased to stumble across one young Chinese woman who played piano, and a trio of young Chinese women playing traditional instruments. They were all being largely ignored by the other diners in the restaurant. I was enchanted my their musical skill and their selection of pieces, both classical and

traditional Chinese. I clapped enthusiastically for both of them, and in return I got big smiles and nods. Maybe they were just being polite, but then so was I. They didn't speak any English, but my impression is that they were probably students.

While wandering around Guilin yesterday, I passed a video arcade. It was full. Another unfortunately export (but as much from Japan as from the West). But I also walked down a street with the most densely packed, chaotic collection of street vendors I've yet witnessed here, and that's saying something. I saw several complete tailor shops, with pants and dresses and a sewing machine, in an area about the size of a closet.

Yesterday, I ran into a young Chinese man who spoke very good English. He offered to take me to a place to meet his English teacher, who he said was educated in San Diego. I could barely believe that this was happening; I had been warned that a common scam in Guilin was to lead a tourist to some far off spot then extort money from them to lead them back to their hotel. Scam or not, I declined, and continued to walk around the beautiful lakes and lush jungle vegetation that are in the center of the city, completely confident that I could get lost all by myself. I did. I was very late getting back to my hotel, but saw a lot of the city while sweating in a near panic.

Tidbit: never leave your hotel without something with its address written in Chinese. Most of the tourist hotels give you a business card with the address and directions for how to get there. Don't leave home without it. Trust me on this one.

Today I passed a peasant woman laboring near the roadway. On top of her traditional conical straw hat was a international orange baseball cap. They are nothing if not a practical people.

I also passed a young man and woman riding a motor scooter along some rice paddies. She was clutching a cellular phone in her hand. Lesson: don't make too many assumptions. About anything.

I've mentioned already that you have to be a lunatic to drive here. No really, I think it must be a requirement for getting a permit. However, if you do choose to drive in China, something that is almost certain to reduce your life expectancy or at least automatically void your life and auto insurance -- rest assured that the road signs are all iconographic and hence easily interpreted. Here are some that I have seen:

"No passing."

"Dancing up ahead."

"Trees may be planted by houses here" (or perhaps "houses may be built by trees here").

"No..." well, I'm not sure about this one. It was the international red circle with a line through it covering two Chinese characters. I'm pretty sure it was nothing I would ever do in a moving vehicle anyway.

I had a long chat with a Taiwanese on the riverboat today. He was educated in the U.S., getting his B.S. in computer information

systems in California and his M.S. in economics in Michigan. He said that the Chinese students that he studied alongside in the States would tell him that they thought Taiwan should be back under control of Mainland China (the Nationalist Chinese fled the mainland to Taiwan after a civil war with the Communists just after World War II). He asked them if they themselves planned on returning to the People's Republic after they completed their education in the West. Their answer was basically "No, of course not, not if we have a choice." At his point he'd lose it; they wanted to impose their government on his homeland, but wanted to escape it themselves.

One last item before closing for the evening. You may recall my remark that the Forbidden City gave me a new appreciation for galactic empires in science fiction. This trip has also caused me to reflect on the works of Scottish science fiction writer Ian Banks. He has written several novels that take place in the Culture, a galactic civilization of "humaniform" beings. The stories feature all the usual trappings of space opera, like faster than light travel, artificial intelligence, neat weapons. The twist? The Culture is not the classic SF empire, but rather a communist society. Banks makes it work by having virtually all the labor, at least all of it that no human chooses to do, done by machines. Energy is nearly limitless and free, and everything is coordinated by vastly intelligent machine minds.

The Culture isn't portrayed as Earth's future. In fact, it's fairly contemporary, as we find out in a story in which one of Banks' recurring characters, Dzeit Sma, visits Earth in 1977. She is an agent of Special Circumstances, the special operations branch of Contact, that portion of the Culture that deals with non-Culture civilizations. "Dealing" here is a rather broad concept. Contact is a combination of diplomats, secret agents, scientists, and mercenaries.

At one point Sma remarks that Western governments on Earth would probably be surprised -- and dismayed -- to find out that the future as represented by the Culture was "bright, bright red".

01 July 1995
Guilin
07:50

I'm on a Boeing 737 waiting for China Southern Airlines to fly me back to Beijing. I want to talk about walls.

If you've spent anytime in China, you might be tempted to think I'm referring to Walls, the British ice cream vendor. I am told that prior to the Asian Games in Beijing -- the site of which I wandered around one afternoon -- Walls was virtually giving away things like patio umbrellas, awnings, and vending carts. It should have been a successful campaign. The result is that the Walls logo is visible on virtually every street corner in every city I've been in, regardless of size.

But what I really want to write about are real walls: brick walls, stone walls, wood walls, compressed mud walls, etc. The wall

has a long tradition in China, such as can be found in the typical layout of the rural farmstead. It consists of three buildings set around a courtyard with the fourth side closed off by a wall. The outer walls of the three buildings are usually windowless, so the compound is walled off from prying eyes and traveling bandits. A traditional Chinese home is constructed similarly, and this design is even reflected in the modern homes in Beijing in which the upper class lives. We may reflect for a moment the meaning of "class" in a "classless" communist society. As in the West, the gap between the poor and the affluent is widening in China. One wonders if this is an inevitable result of their "two system" economy, a combination of communism and capitalism. I also wonder if that opinion is just a little crass, coming from a "wealthy" American.

Walls are a recurring theme, which can be found frequently in the way they build their hotels, businesses, and factories. The Forbidden City is a few grand buildings inside a concentric series of walls and moats. Entire towns, such as Xi'an and Guilin, still have large portions of their ancient city walls intact, walls which were built during the Tang and Ming dynasties. In the case of Xi'an, the city wall is of massive dimensions, turning the old central portion of the city into a fortress. Walls around former imperial residences are ornately decorated, and today are preserved as works of art. A prime example, and one of the largest surviving section of imperial walls, is in Datong. I marveled at the ornately carved dragons on its face, the dragon being a symbol of the emperor.

And then there's the Great Wall, an attempt to build a barrier between China and the Mongolian tribes to the north, which resulted in a structure so large it can be seen from the moon.

Walls are important here, and I believe its reflected in their culture and how they deal with foreigners. The polite smiles and agreement is often just an emotional wall behind which hides their true feelings and real opinions. I've learned the Chinese habit of saying "perhaps" to mean "probably not".

The Westerner in China would do well, I think, to remember the value of walls to the Chinese.

10:00

I know all of perhaps a half dozen Chinese words, but this proved adequate for me to order hot tea from the beverage cart on the plane. I helped the young Chinese woman seated next to me to get her armrest tray table deployed. She thanked me in Chinese, then asked with virtually no trace of an accent "Do you speak English?" I will likely never learn more than a few words of Mandarin -- the exact pronunciation of Chinese for "good bye" still eludes me -- but at least what I do know is being understood.

Still, confusion crops up in the oddest way. I had a conversation the other day in which I mentioned that I had been to Datong. "Datong... we don't know that." I knew I was probably

mispronouncing it, so I tried several different inflections. The Chinese language depends so much on exact inflection that I really have no idea what I finally said that worked. It must have sounded quite comical to a bystander. "Datong?" "No..." "Datong?" "No..." "Datong?" "Oh, Datong! Why didn't you say so! Yes, we know Datong!"

I've just finished *Getting Along with the Chinese for Fun and Profit* by Fred Schneider. Schneider is a vice president of an American firm. He's lived in Asia ever since he fought in the Korean War. An interesting book, and a good counterpoint to the two Chinese-written books *Red Azalea* and *Wild Swans*. One of the anecdotes that Schneider relates is driving in rural China with bicycles on a rack on top of the car. He got pulled over by the local smokies. Seems that although you could drive your car on that road, and you could ride your bicycle on that road, there was just something not right about driving with bicycles on top of your car. The constabulary clearly thought that if wasn't illegal, it should be.

19:20
Beijing

I have just eaten a rather good Japanese meal in one of the restaurants in the Beijing Toronto hotel. Traveling alone does not inspire me to an active night life, although there is plenty of it in Beijing, including discos. There was an interesting sushi bar in the hotel, but a look at the menu revealed that prices for a meal started at \$70 (in hindsight I should have tried it).

I've done a little shopping here and there. But precious little buying, much to the dismay of eager shop clerks. Apart from the tourist traps that the tour guides lead you through (an essential part of every tour), I have done some perusing at a number of places on my own.

These tourist traps are typical of the package tours you can take through one of the state-managed tourism agencies. You tour a factory, and the tour always ends up (in a way perfected by Disney in the U.S.) in a store in which merchandise made at that factory can be purchased. Many of the Westerners like this, but I and some of the businessmen find it a tad boring. It did inspire an interesting discussion though on what we were not being shown, for example the buildings containing the child or convict laborers, which many of us suspect are just around the corner.

John Green, his graduate student, and I spent an afternoon just before John returned to England shopping for souvenirs. We wandered around downtown Beijing, including the largest, newest department store. This adventure included a ride on the Beijing subway and an articulated city bus. The bus was so packed with people that when it hit a pothole that in our neck of the woods would be called a crater, everyone left and returned to the floor as a unit.

In the department store there was a counter that sold calculators. Thousands of calculators filled up the display case and the shelves behind the young saleswoman. She would total your bill on an abacus. I find a deep resonance between this and my other experiences here.

Just this afternoon, I spent a couple of hours wandering around Lufthansa Center, which is a short cab ride from my hotel, and just a block from the Hard Rock Cafe. The center includes a five star hotel, several restaurants, many small shops, and a full department store.

I have also been to a farm in rural Datong and seen the rice paddies in Guilin. I find a sharp contrast between the stores and the farms. It is difficult for me to reconcile the poverty of the farmers -- so poor they can't even afford dirt -- with the relative prosperity evident in the stores. Yet, I know this wealth gap must exist in the United States as well, probably in Denver proper.

The stores are impressive: full of consumer goods made in Asia and the West, and full too with middle class Chinese anxious to improve their standard of living and adopt the conveniences of the Western life style.

I'm not kidding, these stores are jammed floor to ceiling with stuff, and Yuan is changing hands everywhere you look. I find this remarkable in a communist society. As an outsider, many times the only clue I get as to the level of influence the government has on the lives of its citizens are the articles in the ubiquitous English language edition of the *China Daily* newspaper. For the most part it smacks of stereotypical communist propaganda: "Li said that sports have played an important role in promoting the country's socialist progress in material, cultural and ideological development. The existing status of fitness still falls short of the needs of socialist modernization, said [state councilor] Li." It will be interesting to watch China cope with the perpetual juggling of socialism and capitalism.

Tidbit: on the way to the Guilin airport we had to stop to let a family of pigs cross the road.

You can buy a motorcycle at the You Yi Shopping City in Lufthansa Center. They range in size from 80cc to 250cc -- small by American standards, although not unusual in Japan and Europe -- with a typical displacement being 125cc. Besides the recognizable brands like Suzuki and Kawasaki, there were makes unknown in the West such as Lucheng, Jailing, Tianhong, and Changqi. One wonders what these words might mean. "Swift Socialist Wind"? "Internal Combustion Running Dog"?

Oh, need a helmet to go with that new bike? No problem, got 'em right here. Leather jacket? Yep, fifth floor. Heck, there's probably a gas pump in there somewhere, I just didn't look hard enough. There was an entire section in the store devoted to automotive accessories, in a country in which private ownership of non-commercial automobiles is rare. Word has it the Chinese

government is encouraging more automobiles to be bought and used. How they will fit eight million motor vehicles -- replacing all those small, efficient bicycles -- in a city of more than twelve million that is already beset by terrible pollution and traffic congestion, is beyond my comprehension.

Never the less, the Chinese seem to be very interested in motor sports, if their television is any indication. I've already mentioned the frequently international motorcycle races covered by their local television. Today, I watched part of a special on the famous Paris-Dakar motorcycle and automobile race which, despite the fact that I could not understand a word of it, was still better than any such coverage I've ever seen in the United States. Alas, the only motorcyclist I've encountered here, even having seen many motorcycles parked on the streets, was Steve, a native Californian businessman with whom I climbed a tiny portion of the Great Wall. He noticed my Harley baseball cap which has been my constant companion on many of my travels, including France, Italy, Switzerland, England, Scotland, and all over the United States. Steve rides a Kawasaki Concours, a nice sport-touring bike.

I'm convinced though that there must be motorcycle clubs in China. While walking near the China World Trade Center in Beijing, I came across a line of Chinese bikes, all clones of the Russian Ural (itself a clone of a WW-II vintage BMW), all with side cars, and all in the same color and trim. They were not olive drab, nor were they sporting the usual cop-bike paraphernalia. I insist on believing that in some bar somewhere nearby there was a bunch of motoheads having a good time, and if only I could have found them I would have too, regardless of any language difficulties. I'm sure my Harley-Davidson baseball cap would have gotten me admission to the festivities.

The Chinese, at least in Beijing, are also into basketball, and the NBA in particular. The games are carried on television here. The students at LASG were astounded that I didn't follow professional sports in America. Basketball hoops are everywhere. Tennis, and as I've mentioned before, badminton, are also popular.

02 July 1995
09:40
Beijing

I'm on a United 747 waiting to take off for Tokyo. I have already left China by virtue of the fact that I've changed the currency in my money clip from Yuan to Yen. My nearly month long adventure is almost over.

A brief mention of airport taxes is in order for anyone who ever visits China. At each of the three airports I've used in China, I've had to pay a tax. This happens in the U.S. too, but the tax is collected by placing a surcharge directly on tickets (as anyone who has compared ticket prices between D.I.A. and Colorado Springs knows).

So in the U.S. it's a hidden cost to the consumer. In China, you walk up to a window and pay your money. Keep the ticket you receive handy; it, along with your passport, airline ticket, boarding pass, and baggage claim check, will be checked several times by security. The tax fee varies from ten Yuan to fifty Yuan. If you aren't actually flying anywhere, you can turn in this ticket as you leave and get a refund. But expect to have to pay this tax before progressing very far into the airport. Also, as with nearly everything else in China, you'll pay more tax because you are a foreigner. I heard some Westerners grouching about this -- sometimes the tax is as much as five times higher -- but my rationale is that the communist government is subsidizing its citizens. So it's not that foreigners are paying more, but citizens are paying less.

Another travel tip involves currency exchange. Not that long before my trip, China had two currencies, one for foreigners and one for the citizens. Many of the out of the way places didn't want to take the foreign-flavored currency, even though the law required them to do so. Also, you couldn't take Chinese money of any flavor out of the country. Now, all is much improved. There is one currency, and now I suppose they think if you take it out of the country, leaving your hard currency at the exchange booth, so much the better. However, I found it impossible to get Chinese currency prior to entering the country. Neither the usually reliable foreign currency desk at my bank, American Express, nor AAA could help me.

Currency can be exchanged only at official currency exchange booths. These are easy to find in the big tourist hotels both in Beijing and elsewhere. Sometimes the larger department stores have them. The Hard Rock Cafe in Beijing even has one, and it is right where you can buy HRC goodies like t-shirts and pins (imagine that). But in many of the more out of the way places I stayed, for example near Peking University, exchanging currency was hard to impossible. If you visit China, get some currency changed at the airport. Insist on this, even if your hosts tell you it isn't necessary. My suspicious nature tells me they prefer you broke because you're less likely to wander off.

By the way, Chinese paper money is quite beautiful, much like European currency. Different denominations depict different ethnic groups that were conquered and subjugated by the ethnic Chinese Han (well, okay, they might leave that part out). You'll also notice that the paper money comes in two sizes, big and small (they have coins too). The big bills are in units of Yuan, the small are in units of hundredth of Yuan. This means the smallest denominations of the small bills are worth fractions of a cent. I use mine as bookmarks. If I smoked I would probably light my cigar with them (being of course a wealthy American capitalist, this would seem right in character).

One more travel tip: don't leave home without your Sprint Fon ("phone") card. From my hotel in Beijing I could pick up the phone, dial a seemingly patternless series of numbers, and a Sprint operator who spoke perfect English would answer. You cannot imagine what

this is like after several weeks in China. The cost of the card (which I got from my employer) is actually quite reasonable when you consider that at some point you will pay any price just to hear someone whose speech you can understand. Had it not been for the fact that I was calling my wife, I would have tried to form a relationship with the Sprint operator. Any Sprint operator. There have been only a few glitches calling home, and most of the time the connections are flawless. I'm impressed. There might be something to this telecommunications stuff after all.

My health has been fine on this trip. I've gone native to the extent that like nearly everyone else in China I've picked up a respiratory bug, but that's about it. Not surprising, given the high pollution and poor sanitary conditions you see in Beijing. I have been very careful about the water. Many of the hotels I've stayed in -- and we're talking Sheratons and Holiday Inns, never mind the night train to Datong -- do not have potable tap water. There is usually a iconographic symbol over the tap in the bathroom to warn you not to drink the water. Even in Beijing, I developed the routine of pouring some of the water from the ubiquitous vacuum flask in my hotel room that is refilled daily into cups to cool, to be used later in my various bathroom rituals. If I was caught without boiled water, I used my small high-tech portable water filter that I brought with.

I did drink water in restaurants a couple of times, but with no ill effects. I also ate watermelon many times -- very popular and currently in season here. That was pretty foolish, but I had no problems. I had been warned not to eat fruit bought from street vendors, who are virtually on every corner. They frequently boost the weight of items like watermelon by injecting them with tap water -- or worse, water from their farm.

The problem with water borne infections and dysentery is not limited to foreign visitors. During my visit, Prof. Wu's wife became so ill from eating a meal while visiting a family in a rural area that she had to be hospitalized and rehydrated intravenously. Before I made this trip, I contacted the Kaiser-Permanente "travel clinic". They gave me a polio booster, a gamma globulin injection to boost my immune system, a diphtheria-tetanus booster, live typhoid fever vaccine, and various other potions and elixirs. Thanks to them, I have felt pharmaceutically well armed.

I have read that postal fraud is a big problem in China. Hotels have been known to take your letters and postcards and your stamp money, and your mail is never seen again. Having the hotel apply the stamps is a real courtesy, as the stamps here, and for that matter the envelopes too, are not pre-glued. You have to apply glue from the bottle by hand. I limited my use of this courtesy to post cards. For other correspondence, I have applied the stamps myself or relied on the secretary at LASG. A telephone call to Kathleen revealed that mail takes about twelve days to travel around the world. I find this a little remarkable.

Tidbit: it is not unusual to see a fairly mature forest and notice that all of the trees lined up in near rows. Planted by hand, for the most part during the Cultural Revolution, perhaps by college professors and scientists exiled to the countryside.

We're taking off. I am leaving China behind.

02 June 1995
16:00
Tokyo

My United Boeing 747 is about to leave Tokyo Narita airport. I've been trying to figure out how to sum up a month in the People's Republic of China. It's probably hopeless. It's futile to suggest that I've even seen China. It would be like a one of the Chinese I worked with for two weeks coming to the U.S. for a month, visiting Washington D.C., New Orleans, Phoenix, and Dallas, and claiming to have seen America. It's too big, too diverse, containing so many ethnic groups that even among the Han, the ethnic Chinese, there are two distinct dialects, Mandarin and Cantonese, such that someone (as I was to find out) from Beijing and someone from Hong Kong must speak English with one another to be understood. Movies from Hong Kong on Chinese television in which the actors speak Cantonese are subtitled in Chinese pictographs.

I have visited a communist country, lived and worked there, vacationed, and am returning home. What I will remember most is the rampant capitalism. I can count on one hand -- actually, on three fingers -- how many Chinese asked me for a handout. But I was approached by hundreds of Chinese who wanted to sell me something. China is often perceived in the West as a nation of one billion potential consumers. But the more perceptive in the West realize that this huge population represents an equal number of producers. We best not forget that the Chinese had a merchant class when most people in Europe were wearing animal skins.

I have come to believe that the West is lucky that China has a conservative government, that pretends to be socialist and which believes change should happen slowly. Sometimes, people become impatient, and Tiananmen Square is the result. Hong Kong is a British Crown colony and an almost perfect fusion of Western business acumen and Chinese tradition. It lies on the southern coast of China, a tiny patch carved out of the Chinese mainland by a combination of tradition and treaty. By that same treaty, Hong Kong reverts back to the control of the People's Republic in 1997. In case you forget just when this will occur, there is a three story illuminated digital display counting off the days, facing one side of Tiananmen Square, near Mao's Tomb. It is a constant reminder to the many Hong Kong tourists -- and perhaps more subtly to the Taiwanese as well -- that a day of reckoning is coming. And the PRC has its own experiments with capitalism in the south of China, apart from Hong Kong.

If -- that should be when -- the PRC unleashes these people in anything resembling a free market economy, and if they have the kind of mercantile attitude that I saw everywhere I went, I believe these people will eat our lunch. Napoleon was right: China is a sleeping giant, and it is starting to wake right before our eyes. But China has not joined the first world yet, and there are many barriers in her way, not the least of which is feeding her population of one billion souls. I'm not sure which to be more concerned about: a China that succeeds, or one which fails.

It will take time for me to mull all of this over, try to make sense of it. I know that writing this journal has been an integral part of that process. Thinking about what to write has given me time and motivation to think about what I have seen and done, and I much appreciate the suggestion of Marla Meehl that I do it.

I have missed my wife terribly, and the only thing that has made this month long separation bearable has been the occasional phone calls, the photographs from home that I brought along for a completely different purpose, and the distracting alienness of the place I have just visited.

The plane is moving and I am going home.

The human nature of people is similar. -- Confucius

I cleared customs in San Francisco. As I walked to my gate to get on the plane to Denver, I wandered into a gift shop, like any of a million gift shops in airports all over America. I felt my eyes tear up at the simple pleasure of being able to read all the writing on the merchandise. It is a difficult feeling to describe. The sales clerk was Asian. It seemed appropriate. I finally identified the tune running through my head: "Back in the U.S.S.R." by the Beatles. As someone once said, "The East is Red, Baby, the East is Red". My duffel bag, which along with a shoulder bag was my only luggage for this trip, survived a month in China, five trips through Chinese airports, and a Soviet airliner, only to be damaged by the infamous Denver International Airport baggage system. Seconds after I got off the plane in Denver, I saw my wife, Kathleen. I had lost eleven pounds, looked gaunt, grown a beard, and hadn't slept for thirty hours. I said "Nee how". She apparently recognized me.

*John Sloan
15 August 1996*

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Appendix

TRIP REPORT
J. Sloan
LASG/IAP, Beijing China
12 June 1995 - 23 June 1995

[This trip report concentrates on the work aspects of my month in China. A personal trip report, based on 400 photographs and 120 pages of journal entries, is forthcoming. My work was centered around Beijing, although during my travels I also spent several days in the cities of Datong, Xi'an, and Guilin.]

I spent two weeks working at the Laboratory for Numerical Modeling for Atmospheric Sciences and Geophysical Fluid Dynamics (LASG) in Beijing, People's Republic of China. My sponsor was Professor Wu Guoxiong (I will write proper names Chinese style, with family name first followed by given name). Professor Wu is the director of LASG.

LASG is part of the Institute for Atmospheric Physics (IAP), which in turn is part of the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS). LASG receives funding from a variety of sources, including the CAS and the Chinese National Science Foundation. LASG is located in the Academia Sinica district near Beijing University. This district is in the suburbs northeast of central Beijing, far enough from the city center that it does not appear on many Beijing street maps. Central Beijing is reachable by cab or a combination of city bus and subway. The address of LASG is

LASG
Institute for Atmospheric Physics
Academia Sinica
P. O. Box 2718
Beijing China
100080
FAX: 86-1-2562347

The purpose of LASG is to develop climate models. Most of the climate modeling and analysis at LASG revolves around weather related catastrophes. China is a huge country with a large, hungry population.

China is so large geographically that there are two main dialects of Chinese, Mandarin and Cantonese, which are not mutually understandable. Although the principle ethnic group in China is the Han, there are a dozen or so other ethnic groups within China's borders. Climates in China range from desert in the east, mountains in the north, and tropical jungle in the south. Every year the equivalent of billions of dollars of damage to crops, property, and human life is caused by weather related natural disasters. So climate modeling is motivated by the need to predict seasonal events over mesoscale areas so that precautions can be taken to protect important national assets. For example, a successful climate model at LASG predicts rainfall quantity and patterns for the spring monsoons.

Computing power for LASG comes mainly from two middle-end SGI workstations (lasgsgi4.iap.ac.cn and lasgsgi8.iap.ac.cn). Some additional computer power was supplied by a Convex timeshared minisupercomputer maintained by the IAP, although in general this machine is old and does not supply either the functionality or the horsepower of the SGIs. While at LASG, several new DEC Alpha workstations were installed. The local area network consisted of thinwire Ethernet. Wide area networking was a maze of connections; to reach NCAR's meeker.ucar.edu from LASG's lasgsgi4.iap.ac.cn I had to go through a total of 16 systems (for those who are interested, I have appended the route generated by the "traceroute" command below). Based on the latencies reported by "traceroute" and "ping", I believe that part of this path went through a geosynchronous satellite via Sprint Link. Although you could TELNET into NCAR, and I did routinely, you had to get used to using the keyboard in "damn the typos, full speed ahead" mode, as the multi-second latency of waiting to see characters echoed was deadly otherwise (folks involved in CO-OP 3D will appreciate the analogy).

(I should mention that if you have the cash, buying computer power in Beijing is not a problem. You could buy a complete Pentium system, or even a UNIX workstation complete with LAN, from the any number

of stores or even from the right street vendor. I'm not kidding. He'll sell you office furniture too, right from the catalog. Pagers and cellular phones were ubiquitous as well. Just don't try to get hot water or expect the regular phones to work. Infrastructure: no. High-tech: no problem.)

My work in Beijing included

- o giving a series of lectures;
- o implementing and demonstrating an IRJE connection to NCAR so that LASG modelers have the option of making use of NCAR's facilities;
- o working with one of their modelers to port one of their atmospheric models to the NCAR community YMP8 supercomputer, Shavano;
- o acquiring and installing network monitoring tools on some of the SGI workstations at LASG to troubleshoot both local area and wide area network difficulties;
- o discussing data storage and management issues with the director of the IAP Data Center;
- o visiting the National Laboratory for Severe Storm Research at Beijing University;
- o some minor assistance in reviewing scientific papers for English usage;
- o generally creating a relationship with the scientists and programmers at LASG.

I gave a series of four lectures at the IAP. Each lecture ran about 90 minutes, including questions. These were given without translation, although I take it from the questions that were asked that the lectures were largely understood. However, while in China, I quickly adopted a completely different speech pattern which I found made

communications a little easier, choosing my words carefully, speaking slowly and distinctly and in what is considered to be accentless English (in America this means the Midwestern dialect as spoken by most newscasters, and which I grew up speaking), staying away from idiomatic phrases and for the most part humor. I received comments several times on how easily I was understood, but I suspect some of this was just the typical Chinese politeness. Many of those who attended my talks, particularly the older members of the audience, had been educated in the West (America or England).

The lectures I gave were (in order):

"The Supercomputing Environment at NCAR", which described the overall computing environment and introduced some of the associated infrastructure;

"The Networking Environment at NCAR", which described NCAR's local area, metro area, and wide area networking, including some discussion on the vBNS and the community Internet (special thanks to Marla Meehl for supplying me with a wealth of slides; without her help this talk would not have been possible; credit was given during the lecture);

"The Mass Storage Environment at NCAR", which described in detail our mass storage system;

"Mass Storage Workload Analysis", which discussed my own research in characterizing MSS workload.

Since most of the attendees were climate modelers and graduate students at IAP and LASG, most of the questions were of a more general nature rather than on specific technical topics. I was not able to gauge how accessible or even applicable the content of the lectures were to the audience.

I also gave a lecture at the National Meteorological Center (NMC) of the Chinese Meteorological Administration (CMA) in downtown

Beijing. A tour of the NMC preceded the lecture. The CMA is responsible for the short range weather predictions for all of China. Beijing television stations pick up a feed from the NMC building where the nightly television weather forecast is actually produced. The NMC houses a two-processor CRAY C90, a two-processor CRAY EL98, a Galaxy VH-1 (a Chinese supercomputer similar to a CRAY XMP), dozens of VMS-based DEC VAXen and commercial VAXen clones (used to run their real-time data network), as well as the usual high-end PCs and workstations littered everywhere. The difference between the rather stark facilities at LASG and IAP and the relative technological opulence at the NMC reflects the levels of prioritization and funding for the two organizations.

My two hour lecture at the NMC was on "Supercomputing and Mass Storage Futures" in which I discussed trends in microprocessors, chip fabrication, memory, supercomputing, and storage systems, and how I thought they might affect NCAR. This lecture was very well attended, and was done with a real-time translator (which took some getting used to). There were a lot of extremely pointed questions on very specific topics, such as StorageTek's Redwood and IBM's NTP technologies, and SCD's experiences with MPPs. These folks were clearly dealing with issues very similar to SCD and were right on top of what I was getting at in my talk. It was an extremely gratifying afternoon. My host was Shi Peiliang, who is the assistant director and senior engineer at NMC. He remembered the visit by Paul Rotar and Basil Irwin around 1983 quite clearly, and we enjoyed getting caught up on what they were up to now. My lecture was also attended by Professor Yao Qiwen, deputy director of the NMC, and it was he who asked some of the most interesting questions.

The address of the NMC is

National Meteorological Centre
46 Baishiqiao Road
Beijing China
100081
FAX: 86-1-8347386 or 8311191

I worked with one of the LASG programmers, Mr. Jin Xiangze, at LASG to port one of their atmospheric models, "IAP9", to NCAR's community YMP8 Shavano. The model was written in FORTRAN 77 (I think; I've written thousands of lines of FORTRAN professionally, but not since perhaps 1980 and FORTRAN IV). This entailed using IRJE extensively to move the model source code and all of the initialization data over to the MSS, writing NQS scripts, iteratively compiling the model and altering its data management routines to use the NCAR MSS for reading its initialization data and storing history files, etc. By the end of my visit we were able to get through a model day, which was our goal. All of this was done using my account on Shavano, although it would be easy to do from their own account should they choose to become paying customers. I am pleased to report that although Mr. Jin spoke only limited English, and I speak no Chinese, all programmers apparently understand the same shorthand dialect of pointing, grunts and expletives when it comes to writing and debugging code. We had no problems working together (in fact, it was a little weird).

I spent an interesting afternoon discussing data issues with Professor Liang Youlin, who is the director of the Data Center at the IAP. He combines the functions of both Roy Jenne and Gene Harano, and is the keeper of the climate data at IAP. The Data Center currently stores data on a relatively small number of 6250 round tapes, although they also make use of 4mm and QIC tapes (but as near as I could determine, not 8mm). The Data Center currently has an RFP out for a new UNIX computer system including database and other software. This is part of the Chinese Ecological Research Network (CERNET) project which is funded in part by the World Bank. This project will collect real-time weather data from ground stations over a wide area network and manage it in a relational database. Professor Liang and I spent some time discussing the pros and cons of SGIs versus RS6000s in this role (I won't reveal what I suggested, but suffice it to say that he and I were in complete agreement).

I spent an afternoon with Professors Chen Shou-Jun and Wang Hongquin at the National Laboratory for Severe Storm Research (LSSR) on the campus of Beijing University. Professor Wang is using software running on SGI workstations to visualize satellite data of cloud imagery. This was a bit of a job interview, since Wang has asked to visit NCAR and work in either the NCAR Graphics Group or the Scientific Visualization Group. I brought back his vita and a code sample, which have been turned over to the Graphics/Viz folks. (If you get the opportunity to visit Beijing University, do so. It is not as easy as it sounds, as ever since the student protests several years ago, foreigners are not allowed on campus unless they have paperwork documenting their business. The campus is full of beautiful landscaping, with lovely buildings done in the old Chinese style and built by Americans in the 1920s, and ugly buildings done in the concrete slab style built by the Russians in the 1950s.) The address of LSSR is

LSSR
Department of Geophysics
Beijing University
Beijing China
100871
FAX: 86-10-2564095

While at LASG I also got to know some other visiting scientists as only you can when you have shared with them a sleeping compartment on the night train to Datong. These were Syukuro (Suki) Manabe of the NOAA Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory (GFDL) at Princeton, his wife Nobuko (Noko) Manabe, and John Green formerly of Imperial College and now at University of East Anglia in the U.K. Many folks at NCAR know the modeling work of Suki Manabe, and John Green has several former students who are now scientists at NCAR.

I must acknowledge the efforts of the following folks, without whose contributions my trip could not have been a success:

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 Mr. Xu Yung Fu (LASG and John Green's Ph.D.
 student);
 Mr. Yao Qiwen (deputy director, NMC);

and many others whose names I was not quick enough to write down. In particular, the hospitality of Professor Wu and Mr. Cheng during my entire stay, of Mr. Hong and Ms. Cai who invited me into their home and generally looked after me, of Mr. Xu who spent an entire day escorting me and my fellow expatriate John Green around Beijing, and Professor Wang who hosted a wonderful dinner for me on my final day at LASG, are very much appreciated. I also want to acknowledge a graduate student whose name I've lost, with whom I spent a fascinating hour or two talking about the importance of choosing the right thesis advisor, cultural idioms, Chinese history, life in the U.S., and the nature of translation and why a Chinese author will never win the Nobel prize for literature. It was interesting meeting a spiritual sibling so far away from home.

The experience of working in China versus playing tourist was completely different. I would do it again without hesitation (but next time I'm taking my hand held GPS unit with me). My personal trip report will discuss this in more detail.

As promised, for those interested parties, here is the traceroute output on how to get from LASG to NCAR.

```

traceroute to meeker.ucar.edu (128.117.64.25), 30
  hops max, 40 byte packets
 1  159.226.62.62 (159.226.62.62)  24 ms (ttl=100!)
   1 ms (ttl=100!)  1 ms (ttl=100!)
 2  159.226.250.62 (159.226.250.62)  3 ms  3 ms  3
   ms
 3  159.226.1.60 (159.226.1.60)  4 ms  3 ms  3 ms
  
```

4 * sl-stk-3-S11-56k.sprintlink.net
 (144.228.206.161) 2480 ms 2522 ms
5 sl-stk-5-F0/0.sprintlink.net (144.228.40.5)
 2697 ms 2227 ms 3187 ms
6 * icm-fix-w-H2/0-T3.icp.net (144.228.10.22)
 2684 ms *
7 * * fix-west-cpe.SanFrancisco.mci.net
 (192.203.230.18) 2930 ms (ttl=241!)
8 * border3-hssi2-0.SanFrancisco.mci.net
 (204.70.34.9) 3933 ms (ttl=242!) *
9 * core-fddi-0.SanFrancisco.mci.net
 (204.70.2.161) 2837 ms (ttl=243!) 1466 ms
 (ttl=243!)
10 core-hssi-2.Denver.mci.net (204.70.1.37) 1478
 ms (ttl=244!) 953 ms (ttl=244!) 1339 ms
 (ttl=244!)
11 * border2-fddi0-0.Denver.mci.net (204.70.3.114)
 1129 ms (ttl=243!) *
12 * * ncar.Denver.mci.net (204.70.29.6) 1371 ms
 (ttl=242!)
13 * ucar-gw.ucar.edu (192.52.106.2) 2820 ms
 (ttl=241!) *
14 * * *
15 * * *
16 meeker.ucar.edu (128.117.64.25) 2107 ms * *

END OF REPORT