Chapter 21
China 2006





Saturday, May 12, 2006, Beijing

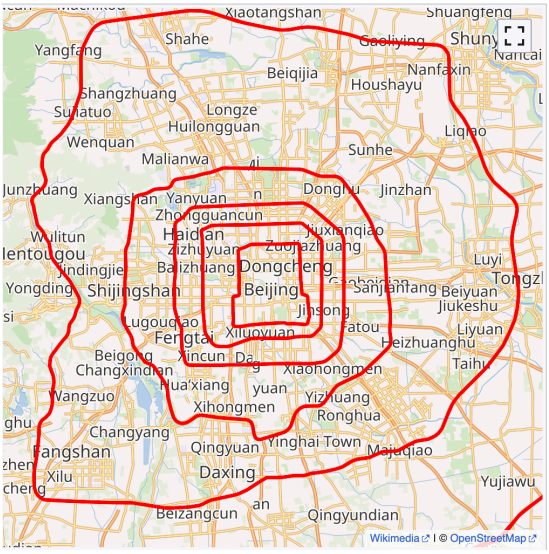
I'm here for two weeks, during which I will give two lectures at Renmin University here in Beijing, then travel to another city, Zhengzhou, where I will repeat the lectures at another university. During the rest of my time, I'll apparently either be free or be taken to tourist attractions.

I arrived last night at about 9:30 PM. I had wondered a bit about whether I'd be given any trouble at the border, since although I had gotten a visa, I didn't have any real proof of who had invited me or even a very precise name for where I would be staying. But

they passed me through without comment. I had checked my bag and found it already on the conveyor when I got there. Looking for where to get local currency, I immediately found a Citibank ATM that easily gave me what I needed. Finally, exiting the arrivals hall, the waiting crowd included the young woman who has been making my arrangements, Yanwen Yu, holding a sign with my name. So, all the things that sometimes cause problems on arrival went very smoothly.

Yanwen took me to the university by taxi. I sat in the back and she in the front, next to the driver. That seemed awkward at first, as she had to turn to talk to me, giving me information I would need. But that didn't take long, and for the rest of the 45-minute ride she chatted with the driver. She did much of the talking, and she must have been a good conversationalist, as he laughed a good deal.

Beijing is a very large, sprawling city. I've seen mention before of its "ring" roads, five expressways that have been built so far, one after the other as the city grew, enclosing the city in concentric circles. The airport is northeast of the city along another expressway extending radially outward and quite a way further out than the third ring, which the university is near, northwest of the city. Our ride took us along these expressways, including across the northern side of the city.



Beijing ring roads from Wikipedia 2023

This was nighttime, so there was not a lot to see except what was lit up. This included almost constant billboards the whole way. These were not oriented the way they would be in the U.S., built almost perpendicular to the road so that a driver could read them easily alongside the road ahead. Instead, they were parallel to the road, and hard to read even for a passenger, since they were clearest when we were next to them, which was only very briefly. One advantage of having them parallel, though, was that there was no limit to their width. A single billboard could extend along the road for 50 yards or more, providing quite a panoramic, if only brief, view of whatever the advertiser wanted to display. Another advantage was that these signs often fit naturally onto the roofs of buildings that paralleled the road. In fact, it seemed in places that just about every building had such signs on their roofs, so that the natural top level of any building was such a sign. Almost all these signs were illuminated by numerous lamps shining up at them from their bases. Most were not lit internally, like neon signs. This meant that they could, and did, include quite attractive pictures of people and landscapes as part of their messages.

As Yanwen had explained, I would be staying in a hotel-like residence within the university. She gave me a map of the university, which occupies a rectangle of space bordered by walls with just two gates, on the east and on the west. (I learned later that

there actually are two more, north and south, but they are used much less.) She showed me on the map where my hotel would be and identified near it a convenience store and a restaurant inside the campus. Across the campus, she showed me on the map where the offices of the School of Public Administration (my hosts) were, and a post office, supermarket, and bank. She explained that outside the east gate I would find a large shopping center. All these things she marked on the map, which itself contained only markings in Chinese.

When we arrived at the campus, the driver seemed to have to pay something to get into the gate. He then drove through narrow lanes, zigzagging his way through the buildings to the hotel. This was Friday night, and students were out and about everywhere. Being in the city, I had supposed that students might live off campus or with their families, but when I asked, Yanwen said that most lived on campus in dormitories, undergraduates four to a room and graduate students two to a room. (I later learned that six to a room is more common for undergrads.) So it was not surprising that on Friday night they were out milling about on campus.

The hotel-like residence has two parts. The entrance is through a large (9-story) residence for international students, several of whom were partying in the lounge as we arrived (one had to be picked up off the floor by his friends, having apparently fallen down drunk). Attached to this is a smaller building, called the Experts Building, which is the residence for people like me. Yanwen checked me in at the desk in the larger building, then took me to my room on the second floor. The desk clerk took some pains to explain something to her that he wrote down on a slip of paper, and that she then explained to me: there is hot water only during the times 6:00-8:30 AM, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM, and 5:00 PM – 1:00 AM. This is indeed important, and I took pains to get up early enough this morning to get a hot shower.

The room is not luxurious, of course, but it is certainly satisfactory. It has two twin beds, with mattresses as firm as I have ever experienced, and rather lumpy. There's a TV with some 60 channels, only one of which is in English, and there is a small refrigerator. A standard amenity here, which I need to learn to appreciate, is a thermos of hot water and cups for making tea. Each room gets a fresh thermos outside its door each day, or perhaps more than once a day. Yanwen went out of her way to find the phone number I should call to reach the "servant" who would replenish my water if I needed it. Clearly, I need to learn to drink tea.

I travel with a set of electrical adaptors that are supposed to let me plug my devices into whatever arrangement a country has. These are mostly not needed here, because two of the outlets in the room have power strips plugged into them that accommodate multiple plug types. Very nice! Unfortunately, this morning I plugged in my hair dryer without remembering to switch it to 220V, and with a flash of light one of the power strips seems to have died. For the moment, therefore, since they were both plugged into it, I have neither a TV nor a refrigerator. So, the room is very well equipped, but it can't overcome the inadequacies of its guests. (Actually, it turns out that China routinely accommodates at least two kinds of plugs, including the American. But it does not, ever, accommodate

the modern plug, one tine of which is flared at the end. I've ended up using my adapters anyway, just for this.)

This morning, after taking my hot shower and blowing the fuse, I went down to the restaurant for breakfast. I remembered to bring my Chinese phrasebook, thinking it would be useful. It wasn't anywhere close to being adequate to the task. The restaurant is labeled "Student Dining," and it is clearly intended for regulars, not transients like me who don't speak Chinese. To the right as you enter is a desk where two clerks take orders for food, handle the payments, and give receipts. To the left is a counter where much of the food is served. Signs everywhere tell, in Chinese, the choices and the prices. None of the attendants speak any English at all. I tried pointing at something I wanted at the second counter, but that did no good since I hadn't paid. At the first counter, I didn't know how to ask for what I wanted, except coffee. In the end, I just got coffee and a bottle of juice (orange soda, not what I'd hoped), both of which I could get at the first counter by pointing.

As I sat at a table drinking my breakfast, I looked around at the other tables occupied by students eating. Most were either using spoons to eat some sort of soup or cereal from bowls, or they had rather longish brown pastries that they held with chopsticks and either ate as-is or first soaked in their bowls. At the table next to me, two young men sat down with no food at all, but with receipts that they placed on the table with them. A bit later, a server arrived with their food, each with a large bowl of what looked like wonton soup and, on a separate plate, some sort of bun. This all looked good enough that I finally summoned the courage to approach them and ask if they spoke English, hoping to learn how to place an order for what they were eating.

One of them did speak English, and he was eager to help. He wrote down the names of the two items (the wonton soup really is, it seems, wonton soup), and then, when I expressed some confusion about how to proceed, he went to the desk with me and ordered for me. In thanks, I gave him my card, and he then asked if he could join me to talk while I ate. It turned out that he was a Masters student in journalism, having done an undergraduate degree at Peking University majoring in economics including international trade. He was very eager to talk and to give me suggestions of what I should see, what I should read, and so forth. He wanted details of my lecture, which he said he hoped to attend.

After this breakfast, mid-morning, I set off to explore the neighborhood. The university campus looked more like a campus than many I've seen in Asia, since it is set apart from the surrounding city. But its buildings are typical 20th century Asian cement structures for the most part, and they are placed closer together than would be comfortable on an American campus. Or maybe there just aren't as many trees as I would like, though many of the streets and sidewalks are lined with trees. To my surprise, since the map that Yanwen had given me didn't seem to show it, there is a nice grassy area in the center of campus, what one might call a Quad. The building housing the policy school offices (closed today) sits on the edge of that. Behind it, as Yanwen had indicated, is a café



Renmin University campus from trip



Quadrangle in front of Number 2 Teaching Building, Renmin University, from Wikipedia 2023

called Water Stone. Contrary to what she said, however, it does not apparently have internet access, which I so far had not found anywhere. I didn't stop there for coffee, as a result, since I'd seen a Starbucks outside the gate that I figured I'd prefer.

To reach that, I used a pedestrian bridge over the busy main drag that runs in front of the campus gate. Starbucks is in a large modern building (called "Modern Plaza") that is a large shopping center. After having a coffee in Starbucks, I worked my way through all six floors of this mall. I had a couple of things to look for, based on suggestions from Pat and Minda, so that gave me some purpose. But mainly I was just sightseeing. The mall was not divided, at least by walls, into separate stores, but there did seem to be sections devoted to names that were often brand names or names of designers. I assumed that these sections operated largely independently and in competition with each other. However, none of them handled payments themselves. They instead used a common service provided, it seemed, by a bank, which had stalls throughout where one paid for purchases in any of the stores. As a result, the clerks handling the merchandise were never involved in accepting payment or processing credit cards.

I learned this, not by observation, but by making a purchase. Not that I found anything that I was looking for. Rather, as I passed one of the shops on the floor that was mostly devoted to men's clothing, I noticed a tweed sport coat that for some reason got my interest. That doesn't normally happen, and I don't know why it did here, although it is true I'd been thinking for several months that I should go shopping for a jacket that, in my mind's eye, looked very much like this one.

I went over and looked at it more closely, immediately getting the attention of the young woman who was (wo)manning the shop, and who spoke decent English. I knew immediately that I liked the jacket, but it was the only one remotely like it on the rack and I thought it very unlikely that it would fit me. Silly me. I'm used to stores where all the inventory is on display, but that is not the case here. When I asked if they would have one to fit me, she opened a drawer, pulled out some keys, and left me alone in the shop (though under the watchful eye, I'm sure, of the shopkeeper across the aisle) while she disappeared to her storeroom. She returned with two jackets of the exact same appearance, the first of which seemed to fit me almost well. While she was gone, I checked the price tag and saw that it said ¥1630, which I figured to be about $180 and I was willing to pay.

The fit of the jacket, as I say, was OK, but not perfect. While the shoulders and arms seemed just right, the length was about an inch more than I'd have preferred. I asked if the other one she'd brought was smaller, but she said no, it was bigger. Did I want a smaller one? Well no, I said, I wouldn't want the shoulders any smaller, or the sleeves, just the length of the coat itself. She said she would look, and she disappeared again with her keys. She returned with yet another of the jackets, and sure enough, this one seemed to fit the same in the shoulders and arms, but was the inch shorter that I wanted. I bought it.

It was only at this point that she mentioned the price, which she said was ¥1160, quite a bit less than I had thought. Had I been in America, more confident of both my perceptions and my ability to communicate them, I'd probably have blurted out that the tag said ¥1630, perhaps costing me some money. But here I just maintained my normal air of confusion and completed the purchase. She took me over to the bank desk, which

charged my Visa card. Then, back at my shop, the shopkeeper used a scissors to remove the basting stitches that closed the pockets, and then disappeared one more time into what I thought was a changing room and returned with a bag for the jacket. This "bag" is a full-fledged garment bag, complete with two zippers and an outside pouch for carrying other things. It surely must be worth a bit of money itself.

Since returning to my room, I've been reading the guidebook to Beijing that I brought along, and I came across the following sentence: "if a shop accepts foreign credit cards, you might consider looking elsewhere." This refers explicitly to souvenir shops, where it says that the acceptance of cards means you are "paying well over the odds." I'm hoping that clothing stores are different, although I guess it doesn't really matter if I like the jacket. In any case, I got more (the garment bag) for less than I had already decided was worth the price.

Working my way up by escalator through the shopping center's levels, it seemed to end at level five, where I could look out on the roof over a central atrium that the complex was built around, so I thought I was about done. I also noticed that I was hungry and that it was about 1:30. But then I noticed that I could smell food, even though this floor seemed to be filled with household items, not food. Around the other side of the atrium, however, I found another set of escalators, including one going up, and sure enough it led to a whole floor of restaurants.

Much of this was a food court, with perhaps a dozen different vendors of food surrounding a central area with tables. Unlike our food courts, however, these were all selling Chinese food, or something close to it. (One was Japanese.) In spite of their all being Chinese, however, they all seemed to be different. Of course, I didn't know what I was seeing, in almost all cases, but I could tell that I wasn't seeing the same thing repeated. I walked around this place several times hoping to find something on display that appealed to me as much as the dishes that I could see people eating at the tables. I now think that the problem was in the displays. They display the dishes in a way that highlights their distinctive ingredients and that downplays the rice or noodles that provide their base. But it was the rice or noodles that I mostly saw on people's plates and that attracted me. Eventually I settled on a plate of greens and beef that I wanted to order.

Once again, however, I didn't know how to do that. I pointed at the dish on display, so that part was easy. But the woman behind the counter kept pointing off to her left. I'd noticed another one of the bank counters for making payment off to my left, not hers, so I pointed in that direction and formed my face into a question mark. She shook her head and pointed again to her left. I walked in that direction to the other end of her shop, where there was another woman. And to her I pointed back at the dish that I wanted to buy. She just looked confused. Back at my first lady, she apparently caught on, found a slip of paper, and wrote the number 12 on it. I looked at the sign labeling the food I wanted and saw that, in addition to some Chinese characters, it listed its price as ¥12. Ah. Again I moved back to her left, where the other woman now directed me to continue in the same direction. And there, around a corner and out of sight from where I'd been standing, I found a second one of the bank counters. I paid my ¥12, got a receipt for it,

and took it back to my first woman who took it and directed me to sit at a table to wait. The food arrived shortly, and it was just what I expected – very good. I suppose that I was just what the Chinese folk expected of an American, at least in the era of George Bush: not too bright.

Sunday, May 13

OK, so I still didn't have it right. Today I went back to the same food court for lunch, picked out what I wanted (some noodles, priced at ¥6), and went to the cashier with ¥6. No, she indicated, she couldn't give me a receipt unless I first gave her a slip of paper, one of which she showed me, and it was just like the one the woman had given me before. I guess that wasn't her way of telling me the price, but a standard part of the procedure. Back I went, pointed to what I wanted, got the necessary slip, paid for my receipt, turned it in, and shortly after got my food. Simple, once you get the hang of it.

I was given the bowl of noodles in broth with some bits of meat, on a tray with a set of chopsticks wrapped in a paper napkin. I sat down at a table and then realized there was no spoon. I thought that maybe you were supposed to drink the broth directly from the bowl, picking it up. But as I looked around, nobody seemed to be doing that. As I ate the noodles and meat with my chopsticks, I watched my fellow diners to see how they would handle it. Nobody seemed to have a spoon, yet nobody ever picked up a bowl. Instead, they just seemed to leave whatever broth remained after they finished their noodles. I, eventually, did the same, even though it seemed wasteful. (I'm still confused about this episode, which wasn't repeated. Since then, I've always been given a spoon, and used it.)

I've jumped ahead, of course. I stopped writing yesterday after telling about lunch, but there was nothing else to tell for the rest of the day. It was a late lunch and I stayed in my room from then and went to sleep early.

This morning I woke up early, intending to go over to the Starbucks after breakfast, and then eventually go to one of the tourist attractions that my guidebook had recommended, the Temple of Heaven. At breakfast, I again met a fellow who spoke English, and we chatted for a bit, but without the long conversation of the guy yesterday.

After breakfast, my priority was to find a way to get back here if I ever left, since I intended to take a taxi and I didn't know how to communicate where I was in order to get a taxi back. The guidebook said to get a card from one's hotel, with its name in Chinese characters, to show any driver. I asked at the desk, fortunately finding a clerk who spoke a bit of English, but he had no idea what I was talking about. It took some time before I got him to find a slip of paper and write the Chinese characters for Renmin University, but eventually he did it. Back in my room, I then picked up the card that Yanwen had given me, thinking I should also have her phone number with me, and of course I found these same characters printed quite nicely on that as well. (I checked them carefully to make sure they were the same.) So I just took the card.

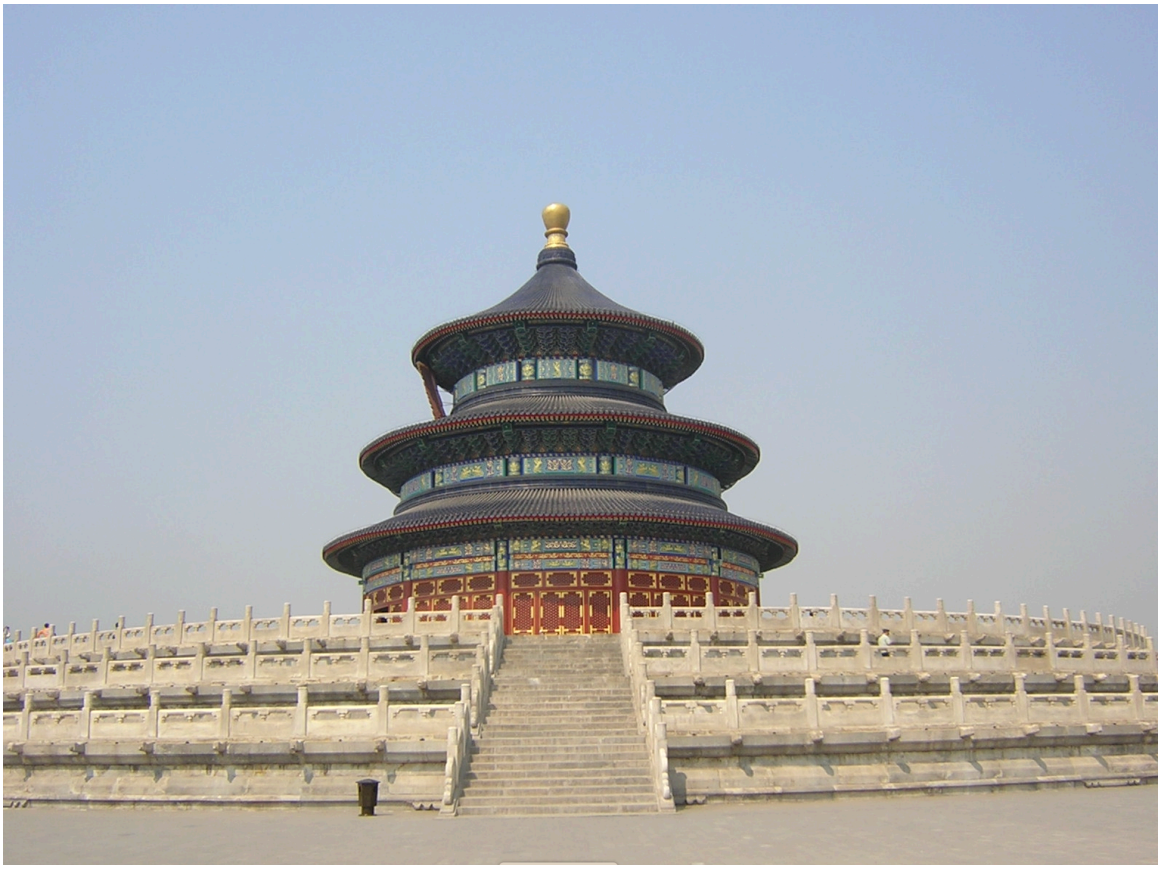
I set out to cross the street to Starbucks, but I could see that its lights were out so apparently it wasn't open yet. Right in front of me was a line of waiting taxis, so I took one. The driver nodded affirmatively when I showed him the page in the guidebook with the temple, and we set off on what proved to be quite a long cab ride. I worried a bit that we might be taking a roundabout route, but from what little I knew of the city, that didn't seem to be the case. When we got to the temple, the charge was only ¥34, which is only about four dollars. The ride had permitted me to see a lot of Beijing, which is a sprawling city with an awful lot of high-rise apartment and other buildings. It seems to be laid out in an orderly grid, with broad boulevards and expressways cutting wide swathes through it. Not particularly attractive, but not at all ugly either, I'd say.



Typical boulevard in Beijing, from trip

As I paid the taxi driver, my cell phone rang, and it was Pat. I had her hold while I got my change and exited the cab, then walked to a shaded spot near the Temple ticket office to talk to her. A nicely dressed young man standing there in the open eyed me speculatively, and I suspected he wanted to offer his services as a guide (which I'd have refused), but by the time I got off the phone he was gone.

The Temple of Heaven is actually quite a large park, with several structures along its central axis that the Chinese emperors used for praying and making sacrifices. My visit was mostly full of looking at the structures, one of which was particularly beautiful and



Temple of Heaven, from trip

impressive. In addition, I walked away from the central axis into the wooded park, where I found lots of people enjoying the park in various ways, such as playing forms of catch and forms of musical instrument. The former included what should have been hacky sacks tossed with their feet but were instead something decorated with feathers. There were also groups using what looked like large ping pong paddles to play catch with another feathered object, sort of like a shuttlecock, and still others using similar paddles to catch and throw, but never actually hit, balls. Another interesting sight was an old man



Playing in Temple of Heaven park, from trip

drawing Chinese characters on the sidewalk pavement with a long stick that had a sponge on the end, wet with water. This apparently is a common practice, an art form that includes both the beauty of the characters and the message of what is written, both of which disappear after a few minutes due to evaporation.



Writing with water, from trip
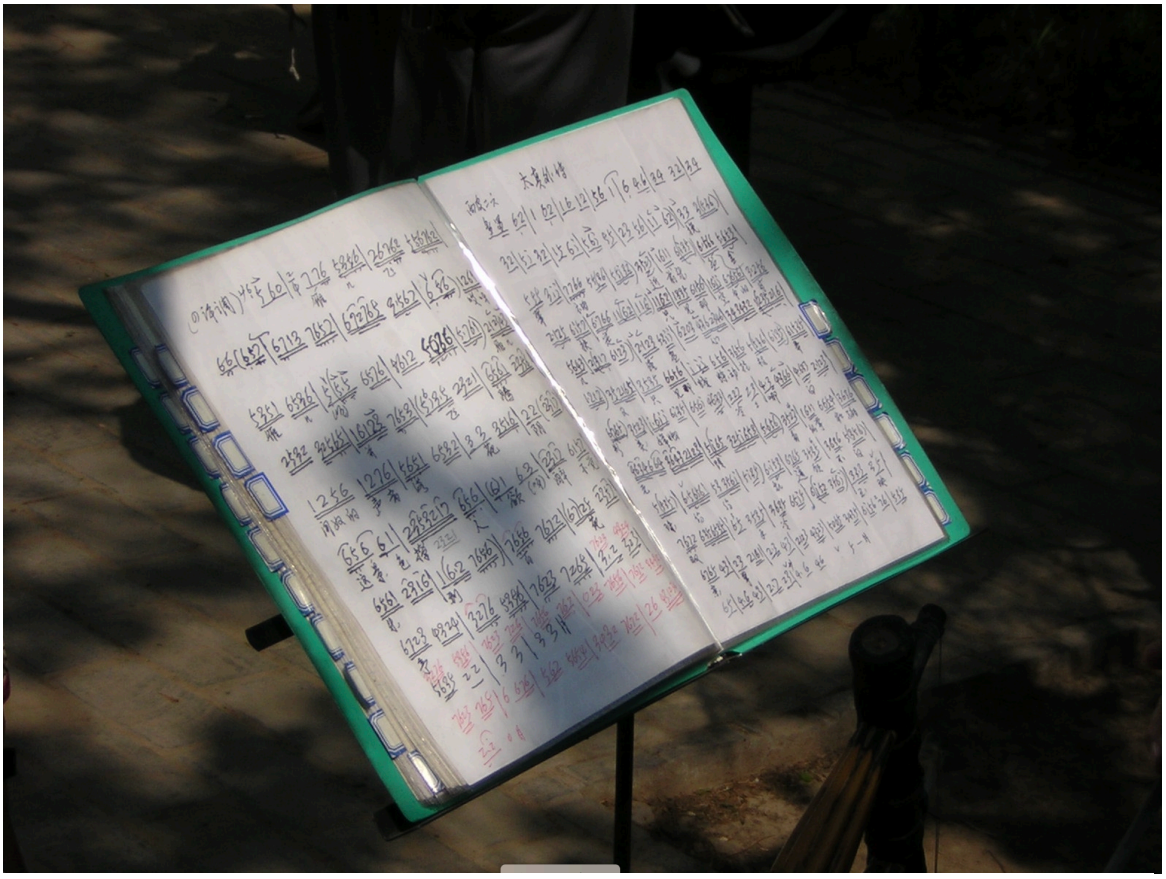
The musicians got most of my attention. In one clearing in the woods, with benches around its edge, each bench had one or two middle-aged men playing instruments, mostly a two-stringed one with a small cylindrical sound box. They played with a bow. Most oddly, the strings of the hairs of the bow itself passed between the two strings of the instrument, making it especially suited to playing both strings as once. As they played, looking at sheets of music propped in front of them, most had a woman standing facing them and singing. There must have been eight or ten benches in this one clearing, with people at each of them playing and singing independently. From a distance, it all ran together, but up close, as I walked around the circle of benches, the sounds of one group would fade and be replaced by another. The music lacked anything that I would call a melody, but I'm sure it was recognizable to most of the audience. It certainly wasn't random, as was clear from the sheet music they were working from. This, however, was nothing like our western sheet music, and seemed to consist mostly of groups of numbers with perhaps an occasional horizontal line; no staff or notes as we would understand them.



Musicians from trip



Musician from trip



Sheet music from trip

The park was being enjoyed mostly by Chinese people, many of whom were probably tourists from other parts of China, and many I'm sure were from Beijing itself, enjoying a Sunday morning in the park. There were occasional tour groups led by guides with flags, but these were mostly at the major temple landmarks, not out in the woods.

When I later told Yanwen that I had gone, alone, to this temple, she seemed dismayed, since it meant that I could not know the meaning of any of the buildings and inscriptions that I saw. True, but after learning much of that at other temples, I'm not sorry I did this one alone.

My return trip by taxi was uneventful, and I was glad to recognize the neighborhood of the university when I saw it. I hopped out, grabbed a coffee at Starbucks, and then had the aforementioned lunch.

I had arranged to meet an incoming student of the Ford School, Xing Xing (pronounced, I'm afraid, rather like the prison), at the coffee shop on campus at 2:00. She was there when I arrived and waved to me from her table. We chatted there until after 5:30, then went to dinner at a restaurant just outside the campus. She graduated from this university in economics a year ago, so she knows the area. She was eager to talk about lots of things, including what she does in her current job with KPMG, one of the Big Four accounting firms.

I found it more interesting, though, learning about her family. She is, of course, an only child (having more than one child in China is illegal). Her parents are both professors of traditional Chinese medicine, which one or both also practice in a clinic. At one point, when I showed her how to tell people where you live in Michigan using your hand, she speculated on whether the location of Ann Arbor might be a significant point for massage pressure or insertion of an acupuncture needle.

She took me to dinner (though I paid) at a restaurant she knew well across from the university. She ordered for us, checking that I'd be happy with each dish, and we shared a half of a Peking duck plus a soup, a bean curd dish with seafood and vegetables, and a dish of stir-fried celery and lilies. (Yes, she said they were lilies.) This turned out to be far more than we could eat, but the whole thing cost less than we'd spent on three coffee drinks during the afternoon. The total for the dinner was only ¥74, which is about nine dollars. The restaurant wasn't fancy, and it clearly sought to attract students, but it was clean and nice, and the food was good, so this was surprising.

At the start of dinner Xing Xing gave me a gift of a book of Chinese paper cuttings. These are amazing figures cut out of paper, representing the animals of what in our western Chinese restaurants we call the Chinese Zodiac. It's beautiful. I had brought to China some gifts of Michigan memorabilia that I'd intended to give in circumstances like this, but of course I'd forgotten to bring one along. So when she walked me back to my residence, I had her wait while I went to my room for a Michigan T-shirt. Perhaps that will get her started early on her career as a Michigan student. I hope she can come. Like other Chinese students, she still must be approved for her U.S. visa.

Tuesday, May 16

On Monday morning I got, and needed, no help in ordering breakfast, since I'd kept what I'd learned the past two days. I'm not, of course, getting my usual orange juice and bran cereal, but I'm getting a more than ample breakfast each day of wonton soup, steamed bun, and the larger sesame bun that I had the first day. I get coffee that is at least acceptable. Interestingly, all this costs me ¥7, of which ¥3 is the coffee. As they say, if you want to eat cheap, eat local (although even the coffee is less than fifty cents).

I spent the morning at the same coffee shop, Water Stone, where I'd spent time with Xing Xing. I'd seen lots of people using laptops while we talked, and I thought I'd learned from Xing Xing that they were indeed connected to the internet. I headed over there first thing Monday morning, ordered a coffee, and fired up my Dell. My first few attempts to reach the internet did not work, but eventually I succeeded. Even then, however, I was not able to reach the University of Michigan web sites, including my own homepage and my link to U of M webmail. But my regular e-mail program worked fine and connected me directly to my inbox. Naturally, I had lots of e-mail to attend to, and I spent half the morning doing that. I spent the rest of the morning finishing the PowerPoint slides for my lectures and going over the one I would give that afternoon. It was a good morning, if not a very Chinese one.

I had planned to return to my residence for lunch, but at some point, I realized I could eat at the coffee shop, so I did. I ordered a beef and rice dish from the menu, one that looked Chinese, but I was surprised when it came with a fork and a bowl of tomato soup. I guess it makes sense that a coffee house would cater to Western tastes.

As arranged, Yanwen picked me up at 1:40 and walked me over to the building that houses the policy school, where I met briefly with the dean, Dr. Dong. Then he and another faculty member took me by car to the other end of the campus where the lecture was to be held in a large new building that just opened a few months ago. It was well equipped with computer and projector, and without too much trouble we got my presentation working from my thumb drive.

The audience was two or three dozen students. Dr. Dong introduced me, in Chinese, and then I started my lecture by inviting the students to interrupt with questions if they had any. They didn't. But in spite of that I felt pretty good that my lecture was connecting with them, and I hope I was right. At the end, with time for questions, one student stood up and asked a question that he had clearly carefully prepared. It had little to do with what I'd talked about, but it was a good question and I responded. Others then asked questions as well, and when at one point there were no further questions, the faculty member who was present (Dr, Dong had left for a meeting) spoke to them in Chinese and fired them up again. After several more questions we gave it a rest. I then had several students come to the front to ask for my email address and permission to write to me if they had questions. I gave them each my card and encouraged them to write. I wonder if any will.

The present faculty member – Dr. Zhong, I think – walked me back to my residence. It was he, too, who later picked me up there to go to dinner with Dr. Dong. Along the way he explained something about several students wanting to join me on my trip to the Great Wall today. That seemed implausible, and perhaps I totally misunderstood, since none showed up.

My dinner with Dr. Dong was in a surprisingly fancy private restaurant inside the grounds of the campus. There were four of us, including both Prof. Zhong and a friend of Dr. Dong's who is an official at the Chinese Development Bank. We had a private room with a round table that would have easily seated eight or more. I told Pat later that the dinner was nothing to write home about, but here I am writing about it. I may have put a damper on things myself by refusing any drink but water. In any case, we had several courses of perfectly acceptable food, but nothing that I can now, a day later, recall. I rather expected that these dishes were leading up to something special like Peking Duck, but all they led up to was a course of watermelon, apples, and grape tomatoes (!) that served as dessert. There wasn't even any rice or noodles, and when the fruit arrived Dr. Dong asked me if I had had enough or would prefer some rice or noodles. Naturally (and truthfully) I said I was fine, and that was the end of our dinner. We broke up shortly after that, and I was pleased to get back to my room early.

There was, of course, lots of conversation. What I remember best was discussing the Chinese language and how it is pronounced. This came up when Dr. Dong mentioned the name of another faculty member whom I would be meeting Wednesday, Dr. Xu (pronounced "Shu"). But he didn't just say Shu as you have probably said it to yourself reading this. The word he said was drawn out much longer than you'd expect, and it dipped way down to the lower register of Dr. Dong's voice, before rising back up at the end. Indeed, I'd swear that Dr. Dong's head also moved down and up along with his voice. That prompted me to ask whether I would dare just say Dr. Shoe, as would come more naturally to me, or would I then be saying a completely different word. I didn't really get an answer to that, in that I was assured that when listening to non-Chinese speakers attempt the language, the Chinese make allowances and figure out what is being said from the context. (Context is critical in other situations too, I've since learned. In songs they can't use the tones. And in writing, most words use two characters, but there is no written indication of which pairs go together.) On the other hand, it really is true that the same sounds can have very different meanings depending on how the tones vary while they are being said. Dr. Dong illustrated this with the sound, "ma". He spoke it four different ways, each of which he said was a different word. (One of them, incidentally, was mother.) I already knew this from reading my guides to China and Chinese, but it was interesting to hear it demonstrated. And although I could describe, the way the books have, the changes in intonation that characterized each of his four versions, and I could probably speak the word in ways that I would think fit those descriptions, I'm pretty sure I couldn't do it in a way that Dr. Dong or any other Chinese would recognize as even remotely right.

This led me to ask a question that has always bothered me. If intonation is needed for the meaning of the words, then is it therefore *not* available to give meaning to whole sentences. For example, in English we routinely use a rising intonation at the end of a question, and sometimes that rising intonation is the only sign that we are asking a question rather than making a statement. Are Chinese able to do the same, or would a rising intonation change the meaning of the final word in the sentence? The answer they gave me was that the use of intonation within words does not prevent them from using it somehow to give "emotion" to their sentences. I'm not sure that this is quite the answer I was looking for, but it's all I got.

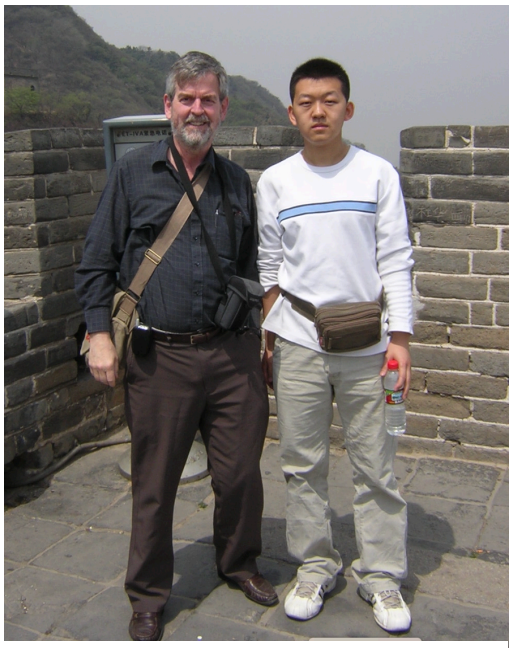
Thinking about it afterward (this morning when I woke up early due to jet lag), I found I had another question prompted by the complications of speaking Chinese and by the fact that the Chinese characters convey no information about pronunciation. How does a Chinese person learn the pronunciation of a word (that is, a character or pair of characters) that they've never seen before? Or, in other words, how does a Chinese dictionary convey pronunciation? I asked the student who was my guide today that question and learned the answer, although not until overcoming a bit of misunderstanding.

I started by saying, suppose you come across a Chinese character you've never seen before. He said that doesn't happen, because in Chinese you must learn all the characters when you first learn the language. I guess parents and teachers must spend a lot of time saying out loud what thousands of characters represent, and after that (if they have a good memory), their children don't very often meet one that is unfamiliar. (Although I feel sure that if, like me, they are forced into reading the writings of scholars in the humanities, they would experience this frequently.)

Eventually though, he accepted that unfamiliar characters do turn up, and that he looks them up in the dictionary. There the pronunciation is expressed with the "pinyin" system, which is a system of Latin letters for expressing sound, much like we use in our dictionaries. In other words, although the Chinese use their characters to represent words, they use our letters to represent sounds! Did they always? Of course not, and he explained that until the start of the People's Republic (thus just a half-century ago), they had special Chinese characters to represent sounds, and they used these. But with the start of the PRC, they switched to pinyin. He also said that the intent was to use the Latin letters to replace the Chinese characters in all uses, but this never caught on.

I've jumped ahead to my day today, which started with this student picking me up, together with a driver, for a day at the Great Wall. The student was introduced to me as Frank, but his Chinese name is Zeng Tao. He got his undergraduate degree in English, and he is now working on a master's degree in economics, which means that he is not part of the policy school that I am visiting. The reason he was selected as my guide is that he went to school with Yanwen, and because of his English abilities she has hired him frequently to escort guests like me. It's a good choice, as he is quite articulate, seems to enjoy the job, and in my case he is also interested in economics.

We drove to the same place on the Great Wall that I had visited in my previous trip, although I didn't tell him that. One has the choice of going right or left, and last time I went right because they said it was easier. This time I said left, and indeed it was steep. But I didn't feel the need to go far. Nor, I suspect, did Frank, as he seemed concerned about my safety, walking a step behind me with his arm out prepared to catch me if I fell. That wasn't really a concern most of the time, as I kept a good grip on the handrail. However, it turns out that crowds of little Chinese girls coming back down the wall are even more scared than I, and I had to leave the handrail to let them go past. Anyhow, we got to the top of the first rise, took some pictures, and didn't attempt to go further.



With Frank on Great Wall, from trip



Great Wall, from trip

As before, the Great Wall was a stunning sight. And as before, the air was hazy – probably with pollution – so my pictures won't be as wonderful as the setting has the potential to be.



On Great Wall, from trip



Great Wall, from trip

Back down from the Wall, we passed numerous stalls selling souvenirs, with very aggressive salespeople (all women, I think) in front of each. I stopped at one and found some refrigerator magnets showing the Great Wall that I wanted to buy for the grandkids. I asked the price and was told that each was ¥45. That's like five dollars, and even I knew that was outrageous. Frank pulled me away, and as we walked away the price dropped to ¥35, ¥25, and lower. Lots of these stalls had the same items, so he suggested that we pick another stall, I should pick out what I wanted, and then he would do the bargaining. I picked three of them, and he negotiated a price of ¥20 for all three. I got out my wallet and reached for the money, but he stopped me and said that if I was paying, the price would go up. So, he paid it himself, and even then, the price rose to ¥25. As we walked away and I tried again to pay him, he said to wait until we were out of sight of the booth. I did, and now I realize that I never did pay him back. Fortunately, I'll see him again tomorrow. (But did I remember? No. I finally paid him when he took me to the airport on my last day.)

Our next stop was for lunch. The driver took us out into the country somewhere, down a lane between orchards and lined with tall trees the trunks of each of which were painted white up to about four feet high, making quite an attractive sight. (I wish I'd gotten a picture.) Every hundred yards or so there were turnoffs for restaurants, and each had a woman or girl stationed at the road to motion people in. The driver passed several these and eventually stopped at one that struck me as the least likely. Unlike the others, it had nobody standing in front. And when we pulled into its parking lot, we found no cars at all, and the building looked rather dingy to me. I wasn't surprised when the driver started to turn the car around to leave, but then a woman came out the door and gestured

frantically for us to stay. I asked what was going on, and Frank said the driver thought the place looked too expensive! Frank, however, doubted that, and he went in to check the menu. He came out, said it was quite reasonable, and we all three went in to eat.

The restaurant consisted of a row of private dining rooms, with doors opening onto a front corridor that ran the length of the long straight building. We had one of the rooms to ourselves, with a single square table that was already set with plastic dishes on a plastic tablecloth. Frank pored over the menu for some time, talking with the waitress at length before he settled on our selections. The food appeared very soon after that, starting with a dish of hot stir-fried broccoli that was delicious. All the dishes were placed in the center of the table, and rather than serve ourselves helpings onto our own plates (which were smaller than saucers), we each just used our chopsticks to take bites from the central dishes. Other dishes included some very spicy fried clam strips (at first I was sure that Frank said it was lamb, or actually "lambs," but I finally placed it as clams), an egg dish that was sort of a round omelet that we each pulled pieces off of with our chopsticks, and a plate of what looked like skinny green beans that he said grow only in the mountains (which, by the way, is where we were). There was also a pot of egg drop soup, for which fortunately we each had our own bowl.

There was tea. This was actually the most interesting. Each of our teacups had a lid in place when we entered the room, and it turned out that each cup already had inside it the ingredients for the tea. These included not only shredded leaves of green tea, but also a little strip of orange rind, a berry of some sort (like a raspberry), a bit of grape, and a white flower that looked like a miniature daisy. When hot water was added, the flower, the orange, and some other bits stayed floating on the top, while the rest did its work turning the water into tea. I watched our driver use the lid of the cup to herd the flotsam away from the side of the cup so that he could drink, and I did the same. The tea tasted especially good, I suspect because of the added fragrance of the things that were floating in it.

I was curious, after my dinner with Xing Xing, what all this would cost, even though I wouldn't be paying (Frank has assured me that the school is paying for everything). I watched as he paid, and it appeared to be about ¥160, or about $20. Not as cheap as I'd paid with her, but not bad.

As we left the restaurant, Frank suggested that we stop at the restroom. But then he led me outside. The restroom was in a separate building, next to the orchard beyond the end of the restaurant structure. In it, the men's room had only holes in the floor to use, and instead of opening onto a deep pit below, as I would expect in an outhouse, the bottom of each hole was a white porcelain ramp leading out the side of the building into the orchard. There was no flushing mechanism, and I suppose that one person's pee was supposed to wash another person's poop down the ramp. That did not seem to have worked perfectly. In any case, the objective was apparently for the restroom to help fertilize the orchard.

We next went to the Ming Tombs. As Frank explained, the Ming dynasty included 16 emperors. The first two reigned somewhere else, and the last didn't get a tomb, but the other 13 all had tombs here. Only one has been excavated and is open to the public, apparently that of the emperor Dingling. The name, I'm afraid, rather dampened my expectations, but I went ahead. The park containing the tomb is very like the Temple of Heaven that I'd seen on Sunday: lots of trees and walkways, with a central axis leading up to a temple building and then the tomb. The trees, in this case, are Cyprus trees and hundreds of years old. Many of them were growing at such an angle that other cut tree trunks were being used to support them.



Trees at Ming Tombs, from trip

The tomb itself is far underground. Along with groups of identically clad T-shirted schoolchildren, we followed a path around to the entrance, where we descended so many flights of stairs, I lost count and began to worry about climbing back out. At the bottom were several chambers, two of them deliberately empty to foil grave robbers, and a center one containing not only the coffins of the emperor and his two empresses, but also their thrones and some smaller boxes containing their belongings. The coffins and boxes were all painted bright enamel red and could have been painted yesterday (perhaps they were, although I guess the Chinese are really good at making shiny paint that lasts).



Coffins in Ming Tomb, from trip

In front of each throne (carved stone sofas, basically) was a large blue and white vase. I've always heard of Ming vases, so I commented that now, at last, I had finally seen what was undoubtedly a genuine Ming vase. Nope. Frank said they were surely fake, and he pointed to various features that meant they were cheap imitations. Later I also read in my guidebook that the red coffins and boxes were also cheap fakes, put here just for tourists.

From there we entered another set of stairs that we began to climb. These ended mercifully soon in an exit back into the park. Apparently, we had started our decent at the top of a hill without me realizing it, and we were emerging out the side of the hill.

All that remained was the drive back to Beijing, which should have been uneventful. Frank and I talked nonstop for quite a while, and we rode along an expressway that was surprisingly free of traffic. At some point, however, the car slowed way down, then speeded up again, and did this several times. My first thought was that the driver was having car trouble, but when I looked at him in the rearview mirror, his eyes appeared to be closed. Of course, I wasn't sure of that – he was Chinese, after all, and I thought maybe that was the way his eyes always looked. I said something to Frank, asking if the driver was OK, and he said he was sure that he was. As I continued to watch (Frank went on talking about whatever), the driver opened his eyes, straightened in his seat, and arched his back, in exactly the way I've sometimes done when I've been struggling to stay awake while driving. And the car started drifting from lane to lane. I interrupted Frank and said I really thought that the driver was having trouble staying awake. he spoke to the driver, then said he thought I was right, and that perhaps the lack of traffic had made it hard for him to stay awake. He also suggested that he (Frank) should keep the driver talking, and that's what he did for the next twenty minutes or so. That worked like a charm, as we'd already learned at lunch that the driver loved to talk. The rest of our ride back was uneventful.

When Frank dropped me off here, I asked for his help with my room's air conditioner. It is a device high on the wall next to the window, and I had originally supposed it was a heater, not an air conditioner, since I'm used to air conditioners that stick out windows. (I had not noticed the rather conventional hot-water radiator that was also on the wall, under the window.) But when, at dinner with Dr. Dong, they fussed over the setting for the air conditioner that looked just like this one, I realized what it was. I found the remote control for it in the drawer of my bedside table. Unfortunately, I couldn't get it to work, and all the controls were labeled in Chinese. There was even a whole book of instructions in the drawer, also entirely in Chinese. Hence my request for help. It turned out, as I had suspected, that the batteries in the remote were dead. After Frank established this and got new ones from the front desk, it worked fine. You just use up and down arrows to set the display to the temperature you want, and it does the rest. I have no idea why it has some ten other buttons, but I guess I don't need to know. Fortunately, since Beijing has warmed up a few degrees since the weekend, I now have air conditioning.

These air conditioners, by the way, seem to be everywhere in China, and I don't recall seeing ones like them at home. They have two parts; the inside unit that is controlled by the remote and that blows out the cold air through louvers that move slowly up and down so that the air is distributed; and an outside unit with a fan, hung on the wall near (but not in) the window where the coolant is cooled. These are connected by what looks like a single hose, but that must be two hoses bound together. I see the outside unit near the windows of most buildings, the only exceptions being the most modern and largest buildings that presumably have central air.

Wednesday, May 17

In the evening I first tried to have dinner in the same student restaurant where I eat breakfast, but I ran into the same problem: no way to know how to order. I asked people there if they spoke English, and soon gave up. Instead, I walked across the campus hoping to find the restaurant where I'd eaten dinner the night before with Dr. Dong. I found it, and though of course they did not have a menu in English, they did have one with pictures, so I took a seat and started going through the pictures. Unfortunately, although they were very colorful, few were of any recognizable food, and those that were (whole shrimp with tentacles, for example) did not appeal to me. Finally, I pulled out my phrase book, found the word for noodles, and asked the waitress for that. She responded, "noodles?", and it turned out that she, finally, did speak a bit of English. I succeeded in ordering a bowl of noodles with a few vegetables, plus a small bottle of water.

Back in my room I found it hard to stay awake, so I let myself fall asleep at about 9:00, even though I knew that would result in my waking early. Wrong. Although I awoke several times (including with a dream that I will spare you), I didn't awake finally until 9:00 AM, which you may recall is after the hot water ends. So today I did without a shower.

I headed over toward the Water Stone coffee shop, where I intended to spend the morning. On the way, I stopped at the offices of the school, intending to give a gift of a Michigan T-shirt to Yanwen and to get instructions for when and where I should meet somebody for my lecture this afternoon. She was not there, and my appearance caused a flurry of activity on the part of others, tracking her down and settling me in the conference room with a cup of tea. Soon they brought me a phone with her on the other end, explaining that she was in a meeting. I apologized for interrupting her, and she then told me what time she and another professor would pick me up. I finished my tea (Except you don't really finish it, do you? It's got all those leaves at the bottom.) and then went on to the coffee shop where I spent the morning.

I'm getting the hang of this place, at least for some activities. I had lunch at the Modern Plaza, easily ordering a dish of noodles and dumplings, then had a short coffee at Starbucks before returning to my room to be met for my lecture. The lecture was in a different building, also quite new and well equipped. After it I chatted with one of the MAE students I've admitted to Michigan who had come over from another school for the lecture. Frank joined us, as the student's boyfriend, and Frank used my camera to take a

picture of the three of us. I'm back in my room, now, waiting to be picked up for dinner by Frank and his girl friend, who will take me back to Modern Plaza for hot pot.

Thursday, May 18

Dinner with Frank and Xing was delicious and fun. Xing is doing graduate work in journalism management, hoping to become a successful businessperson. Frank, in contrast, studied English as an undergraduate, is now doing a Masters in economics, and wants to study abroad for the experience, perhaps doing a PhD. He was very interested in our joint PhD program in the Ford School. But it's clear that he intends to go into government eventually, and he hopes to work his way up in that, here in China. He is a member of the Communist Party, and I think he has the makings of a politician.

We walked over the bridge to the Modern Plaza and took the elevator up to the sixth floor where I had already eaten lunch several times. I'd seen the hot pot restaurant there, but I thought I wouldn't know how to handle it by myself. I was right; I very much needed instruction and examples. The three of us sat at a table with holes in the table for two hot pots. These are metal pots of boiling broth, kept hot with electric burners under the table. One can ask the staff to add spices to these, and we had spices in one, none in the other. Each of us was given a bowl of a brown sauce, which I think was sesame although it tasted rather like peanuts. We had no plates, which I found confusing until Frank showed that each portion of food would be placed on top of the sesame sauce before eating, so that it flavored everything we ate. Fortunately, the sauce was delicious, and it went well with all the ingredients that we then cooked in the broth and ate: very thinly sliced beef and lamb, mushrooms, tofu, various green vegetables, and slices of lotus root. This last is the color and texture of potato, and it also tastes rather like that, but it is distinctive in being full of holes, sort of like Swiss cheese except that the holes are arranged symmetrically. I had particularly noticed this as I'd walked past the restaurant in recent days and feared that it was some sort of awful sea creature. Not at all – it was one of my favorites.

We cooked, ate, and talked for a couple of hours, and the conversation never flagged. Frank and I talked more than Xing, although she did her share, and they both came across as happy, energetic, decent people. I asked how Frank had gotten the name Frank, and he explained that he happened to attend a foreign language school when he was very young, and his teacher, after getting to know the students, had assigned each of them an English name that was thought appropriate. He didn't know why his was Frank, but since he stayed in that school, most of his friends know him as Frank. (He'd never heard of Frank Sinatra.)



Lotus root from Wikipedia 2023

At the end of the meal, we had eaten most of the meat and a good portion of the other ingredients, but there was one large plate that we hadn't touched, with various greens plus an egg. As we got up to leave, I asked about it, and Frank said that some people end the meal by breaking the egg into the hot pot and making egg drop soup to finish. Since I had already said I was full (which I was), we hadn't bothered with that step.

This morning Frank picked me up again at 9:00 to take me to the Forbidden City. Again, we had a car and driver, but presumably because of the previous one's inability to stay awake, this was a different driver. He drove us to Tiananmen Square where he dropped us off, the plan being for us to walk from there through the Forbidden City to the other end, where Frank would phone the driver to pick us up. Another example of the convenience of cell phones; it worked perfectly.

We intended first to visit the tomb of Chairman Mao. It is a large building close to the middle of the Square, the only building in the square at all, as opposed to along its sides. When we approached the front of the building, though, there was no indication of anyone entering, and the sign there said that the entrance was open only 2:00-4:00 PM on Thursdays. That seemed clear, but Frank was not convinced and said we should walk around the building to see if they were letting people in. They clearly were not, but I went along. Along the side we saw a guard, so Frank asked him about getting in, and was told we needed to go to the other side of the building to leave our bags. That made no sense to me, but we continued around the back of the building, where there were lots



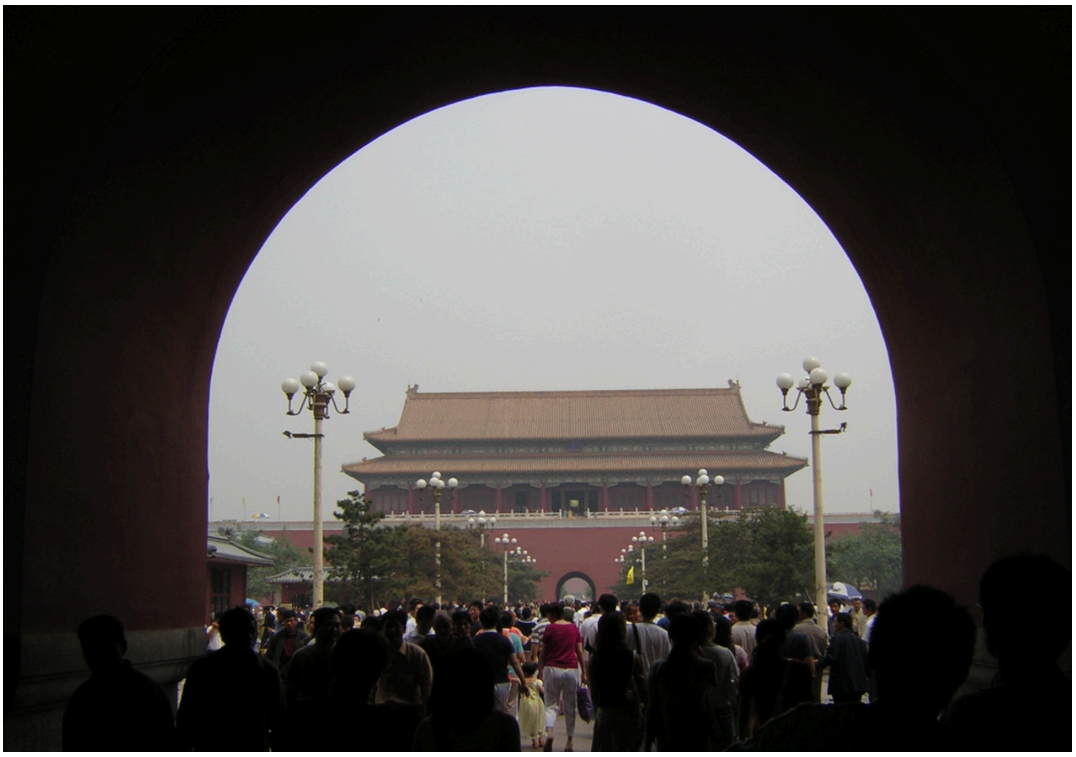
Mausoleum of Mao Zedong from Wikipedia 2023

of people, but nobody entering or leaving the tomb. Continuing around to the other side, another guard motioned to a place at the side of the Square where we should leave our bags. Instead of heading for that, though, Frank led me to a crowd of people near the front of the building and said to get in line, and that he would hold my bags while I went through the tomb. Sure enough, a double line was forming between the fence around the building and a line painted on the pavement. As Frank took my tote bag and camera, the lines began to move briskly around to the front of the building and inside. We had managed to arrive at just the right moment when people were being let in, since that hadn't been happening when we had viewed the front of the building from the other side just a short time before.

The line moved steadily, into the building and through a first room with a large statue of Mao, then a second room with his body under a class case. His face was made up in white, and a light shown on him so that his face glowed. It might have been eerie if we weren't being kept moving by the guards. Within a few seconds we were out of that room and into a third one that was full of counters where women were selling Mao memorabilia. I wanted to buy some, since I don't expect to have another chance to buy anything from inside Mao's tomb, but the crowd around each counter made it difficult. I waited until a space opened up and then forced my way in, pointed out several items that I wanted, paid, and left. Outside the front of the building, it turned out there were still more sales counters, including some different items, so I bought a few more. Then I joined Frank and we headed for the Forbidden City, which is at one side of Tiananmen Square.

I had been there before on my previous trip, and my recollection was entirely of one palace after another, all beautiful but all pretty much the same, separated by vast expanses of stone pavement. That is accurate, but only to a point, apparently a point that I never reached on my previous visit. This time, since we were going all the way through, we reached a portion of the city near the back that is a small park, or garden. It was much more pleasant, and we found a bench there in the shade and sat and talked for quite a while. This made it a much more enjoyable experience than what I remembered. It also made it more understandable that royalty would ever have been willing to live there.

Also different from before and more pleasant, while we were still just surrounded by palaces and stone, was a stop at Starbucks. Yes, I'd heard that there was a Starbucks inside the Forbidden City, and I'd been watching for it since we entered. I didn't see it, but at some point I saw a young man – a Westerner, naturally – sipping from a Starbucks cup. I asked where he'd gotten it and he directed me back the way we'd come, saying the Starbucks was inside one of the shops in the wall of the city that appeared to be selling something else. At first, I told Frank we didn't need to go back, but then I changed my mind. Buying a Starbucks coffee inside the Forbidden City was just too good to pass up. We worked our way back through a couple of courtyards and found the shop, which was just a single short counter inside a bookshop, with half a dozen or so customers, all Western, waiting in line. While we waited, I chatted with the woman in front of me, who



Entering Forbidden City, from trip



Inside the Forbidden City, from trip

looked Chinese, sounded British, and said she was from Houston. I got iced lattes for



Further back inside Forbidden City, from trip

Frank and me, the first time I ever managed to get him to let me pay for something.

I learned a lot from Frank about the Forbidden City, the emperors, and the various dynasties, but I don't remember much of it. He assured me that the whole thing was built for the pleasure of these people, but I can't say that it looked like it would be much fun to live there, except for the garden area.

From there we went to a restaurant not far from the university, where once again Frank and I had lunch also with the driver. This was a more conventional restaurant than the one we'd eaten in on Tuesday in the countryside, though. The most interesting dish we had here was one of fish in a bowl surrounded by slices of corn bread. Frank had pointed to the picture of this on the menu before he'd ordered, asking if I would like that, and since it looked like pieces of fish, not a whole one, I thought it would be fine. It was pieces, all right, but they were just short sections from a very long fish, and they had plenty of bones. My initial efforts to eat one of them just gave me a mouth full of bones that I had to pick out and put on my plate. Frank then showed me how to use the chopsticks to separate the meat from the bones, and after that I managed to eat some and enjoy it. Fortunately, we had several other dishes to eat as well, so I had a good lunch.

I spent the rest of the afternoon at the Water Stone, doing e-mail, until time to be met for dinner with a couple of the professors. I was picked up at my residence by Prof. Xu, who

from his card I see is a Vice Dean of the School of Public Administration, and who spent a semester a few years ago at Michigan. You might think from that that he would have been an easy person to be with. But I found being with him instead very awkward. Fortunately, we were joined at dinner by Prof. Zhong, with whom I'd had dinner on Monday, and with whom I got on well.

It's hard to explain my difficulty with Prof. Xu, who is certainly a very nice man and was more than eager to communicate. It was partly that I found his English hard to understand, but he wasn't unique in that. I think it was mainly that I couldn't interpret whatever signals he may have been giving me about what we were doing, and so I never knew where we were going, what we were doing, or what was about to happen next.

I met him in the lobby of my residence, and he began talking to me about something extraneous as he walked with me out of the building. I supposed that we were walking to his car, so each car we approached I thought would be it, but then we'd pass it. Eventually it became clear that we were walking to the restaurant. I thought he had said something about a restaurant outside the campus, but we seemed to be walking deeper into the campus. In fact, we were heading for the west gate, which I thought of as rather far away (we'd driven part way to it for my lecture on Monday). Along the way he talked to me about various things, including some of the buildings that we passed, except that in those cases we didn't pass them; we stopped. It was as though in talking he would forget that he was walking, and he would just slow to a stop. (Pat claims that I do that when I try to talk and drive, but that's not true. Quite.) Since I didn't know where we were going, the first couple of times this happened I thought perhaps we'd arrived, although I couldn't see a restaurant anywhere near.

Anyhow, we'd start up again, and eventually we exited the campus through the west gate. Our path then took us along some busy streets, where for some reason he often seemed to prefer walking in the streets themselves, rather than on the sidewalks. For a while I walked on a sidewalk with him in the street, but as I was already taller than him, the difference in height felt unacceptable and I hopped back down in the street with him. Other times, he was between me and the sidewalk, which meant that the traffic (mostly bicycles here, fortunately) was closer to me than to him.

We walked block after block, passing many restaurants that were not our destination, but I never knew that until we passed their doors. At one point, his phone rang, and it turned out to be Prof. Zhong saying he would join us, and I was relieved. Since he was meeting us at the restaurant, that had to mean that there actually was one that we were going to. We were now walking along quite a major thoroughfare, which Prof. Xu suddenly indicated we would cross using a bridge. As I trudged up the stairs, he suddenly picked up the pace, taking the steps two at a time, and then had to wait at the top as I came up after him. At the bottom of the stairs on the other side of the road there was a man in some sort of medieval dress, then another like him a few yards further on. I asked what that was about, and he said it was for the restaurant, so I thought we must be there. But we kept walking. Finally, when I'd almost given up, he suddenly turned in to the entrance of a restaurant in a building that, I admit, was probably worth the walk. It was

an old one-story wooden structure, very attractive with lots of character. The woman at the door seemed unable to find Xu's name on her list of reservations, but he spotted Prof. Zhong already at a table and we went on in.

With the presence of Prof. Zhong, the conversation over dinner was fine, although there were a few silences that I was unable to fill. Dinner included a bean soup, in a clear broth, that was rather good and different from what I'd had before. The most challenging dish was some little pork ribs that were delicious. But they each had been tied with some sort of string, to keep the meat on the bone, I suppose. And I couldn't see how to untie them with my chopsticks. Perhaps I should just have picked them up in my fingers, but I don't see Chinese using their fingers at all, even with things like bread where that would not be messy. They always hold things with chopsticks. I tried to eat the meat around the ties until I could slide the ties off the meat and then off the bone. That worked sometimes, but not always. Like the fish at lunch, I got some tasty morsels, but not many, and I had to work at it.

After we had pretty much stopped eating, and I was wondering what would happen next, suddenly Prof. Xu said we would get a taxi to go back. I was greatly relieved. We did catch a taxi, saying goodbye to Prof. Zhong who was going a different direction. Prof. Xu then had the taxi drop us at a place that I at first didn't recognize at all. It certainly wasn't the gate of the university. What it was, it turned out, was a tall office building right next to the university that Prof. Xu wanted to tell me about. Every university, he explained, derives some revenue by developing some of its property to rent to businesses, and this new skyscraper belonged to Renmin University, as I then could see from the sign at its front. Construction on this had been started in about 1995, but it then stopped when they ran out of money. Their current president has managed to borrow enough from banks to complete it, and the building just opened a few months ago. It is quite impressive and beautiful, especially all lit up at night. Unfortunately, there is so much office space in Beijing right now that they haven't been able to rent out very much of it. I wondered whether they were earning more than the interest on their loans, but Prof. Xu didn't seem to know.

As we talked about this on the sidewalk, I gradually got my bearings and figured out where we were, which was not far from the east gate of the university that I am familiar with. Now I just wondered at what point Prof. Xu would show signs of walking in that direction. Eventually he did, although his conversation kept stopping him. Eventually we made it to and through the gate, again coming to a stop inside it. Finally, he stuck out his hand to say goodbye, and left. I walked the rest of the way to my residence alone, pondering what an odd experience this had been. Not odd in any dramatic way at all, but just rather subtly disorienting.

Friday, May 19, Zhengzhou

Frank took me in a taxi to the airport and made sure I was checked in for my flight to Zhengzhou. After going through security, I found a newsstand and was delighted to find the latest copy of the Economist. I'd been looking for it in Beijing without success, and

Frank had tried to help me, going so far as to get an illegal copy of it off the Internet and giving it to me on his thumb drive. I've got it on my hard drive now, but I much prefer to read the print version, which I did on the plane.

I was met at the airport by, it turned out, Dean Gao of the policy school of Zhengzhou University, another professor, and a graduate student named Rebecca who acted as my interpreter, since the other two don't speak English, or at least don't claim to. The hope is that the students who come to my lecture (or lectures – we haven't sorted out yet whether I'll give one or both) will understand English, but just as protection they took a copy of my PowerPoint slides and will translate them into Chinese. (Actually, they used another translator, and the slides were to help her, not the students.)

As at Renmin University in Beijing, they have me staying here in a "hotel" on campus. It is attached to a larger building whose purpose I don't know, and it is just a small building with only a couple of rooms. But the room is a suite, with a sitting room, a small dining area, and two bedrooms. Except for the bathroom, it is quite modern and stylish. The bed here is larger than the one in Beijing, but I think perhaps it's just as hard. I'll know soon.

Here there are no time constraints on hot water, but they warned me that since this is the only room that is occupied, the water may take some minutes to heat up. The bathroom is small and, while it has a bar for a shower curtain, there is no curtain. That's not a great loss, since the bar for it is between the tub and the wall, not between the tub and the room. The tub drains through a hose down a drain in the floor, which of course is needed.

Rebecca and Prof. Tong came back for me after I'd settled in, and we set out for the "bank of the Yellow River." This, she said, would be very beautiful, and we'd then have barbequed fish for supper.

The drive to the Yellow River was longer than I'd have imagined, at least half an hour and probably more. We had to go through most of the city, without benefit of expressways, and then a fair distance in the country. I commented that I thought cities were usually built next to rivers, not far from them as here. Not when the land is flat and the rivers often flood, she said.

Throughout, the contrast with Beijing was stark, in that the road was filled with people on foot, on bicycles, on motor scooters, and also pulling carts and peddling other sorts of vehicles, as well as plenty of cars and trucks. It was much more like India than like Beijing, presumably because this city is not rich. Prof. Tong drove like a professional, meaning that he came very close to as many persons and vehicles as was possible, using honking to give them fair warning. Rebecca and I sat in the back talking, Rebecca at least, nonstop.

We were not yet in sight of the river when we stopped at the dock of some hovercrafts. This turned out to be our destination, and we joined a group of about a dozen passengers

to ride the hovercraft on the river. When we climbed on, it was parked on the mud, but when the motors were started it easily floated down the mud slope into the water of a canal, which led us out to the river. The Yellow River may or may not be yellow, but it is certainly not blue. It is extremely wide, and apparently in this place very shallow. There are mud flats scattered around it that are not covered with water, and presumably between those there is mud not far below the water's surface. Hence the need for a hovercraft. We hovered, if that's the word, along the bank of the river for some distance, a guide keeping up a constant patter in Chinese over a microphone. Rebecca tried to translate some of it, but the sound of the motors made it almost impossible for me to hear her.



Yellow river, from trip

The craft took us after a while to a mudflat in the middle of the river, on which half a dozen men and women waited with horses and firecrackers. We got off the craft and walked on the mud, which was springy and not soft enough to dirty our shoes. The people then tried to get us to buy their packages of firecrackers and to pay to ride their



On mudflat in Yellow River, from trip

horses. Nobody did either, that I noticed, so I didn't learn where one would ride to. Not too far, I presume, since the mudflat was surrounded by water. We then got back in the craft and returned.



Restaurant on Yellow River, from trip

Next, Prof. Tong attempted to drive us to the place where we would have supper. This wasn't easy, as the road he tried to take was blocked, and he was directed instead along a very nice, paved lane that was not much wider than a sidewalk. It took us successfully to the bank of the river where (as we'd seen from the hovercraft) four or five houseboats were docked. The top of the front one, with an awning over it and no sides, was the restaurant. It had just six tables, each a wooden square surrounded by little benches, perfect for a kindergarten. That's where we ate our dinner.



Fishing, from trip

First, though, we had to catch our fish. There was a wading-pool-sized hole in the mud on the shore, filled with water, and one could use a net at the end of a pole to pull out a fish if you could find one. Someone from the restaurant did this for us, indeed pulled out a couple of them and flopped them on the ground for us to look at. We picked the larger of the two, after inspecting its color and other indicators of its good health – including I suppose the fact that it was gasping for breath. The one we didn't take went back into the pool. Our chosen fish was killed by throwing it hard onto the ground (twice – the first time didn't do it). And we



Fishing, from trip

went to our table to order the rest of our meal while they cooked the fish in the front of the houseboat.

Now, much as I like the taste of fish, I hate bones, so I wasn't entirely looking forward to eating this. When Rebecca asked if I'd like chicken as well, I suppressed the thought of the chickens I'd just passed walking on the shore and said yes, thinking that would at least give me something I could eat. Wrong! The fish turned out to be quite manageable once they showed me how, largely because it was so big that there were big chunks of delicious meat and few bones. When the chicken arrived, however, it was a plate piled high with steaming chicken parts, every part you can imagine except those that they use at KFC. Most obvious were the feet, which were the first to take me aback. I dug through the pile with my chopsticks hoping that under such things I'd find a normal breast or thigh, but all I uncovered was the head. And yet, they'd ordered this at my request, so I had to try, even though I did express my dismay. I was able, fortunately, to find plenty of bony bits whose identity I didn't recognize and from which I was able to bite off some really good bits of meat. I did try, also, to eat something from a foot, but without success. Prof. Tong then showed me how, putting a whole chicken toe into his mouth and sort of sucking the skin off and scraping with his teeth. I didn't try that.

I've forgotten to mention the first two courses, though. Before the fish and chicken arrived, they brought is a very nice plate of what was basically scrambled eggs and spinach, but with a Chinese flavor. And even before that, they brought us a plate of small fish, about the size of sardines, that had been deep fried. This, too, took me aback, but like sardines they were something you could eat whole, and we did. These, and every other dish, were delicious. I came to appreciate the fact that my hosts clearly thought this was a treat. It was.

Saturday, May 20

Rebecca was to pick me up for breakfast at 7:30, so I got up at 6:30 to be ready. She arrived right on time, together with the same two others – Dean Gao and Prof. Tong – and we walked a very short distance to another building where breakfast was being served to just a small number of people, faculty only, apparently. The breakfast was, of course, purely Chinese: several vegetable and egg mixtures served into compartmented rectangular metal plates, sort of like TV dinner trays. To drink there was no coffee, and not even tea – just some sort of soup.

I quickly decided that I was going to be in trouble if I got no coffee all day, so I mentioned that I hoped that we could stop for coffee somewhere on our way to the temple. That caused a flurry of discussion and activity, as they realized that they needed to give me coffee for breakfast. They eventually solved this by sending Prof. Tong out to find some, and when breakfast was done the rest of us returned to my room to wait for him. He appeared a few minutes later with a box of coffee. Yes, that's right: a box. It was a box from Nescafe, labeled "complete coffee kit," containing a ceramic mug, a spoon, and some twenty or so foil packets of instant coffee already mixed with powdered creamer and sugar. My room is equipped with a water heater/cooler – that is, one of

those things like we have at work, with a big upside-down bottle of water on the top and two spigots, red and blue, for hot and cold water. I quickly made myself a cup of hot coffee and my guests sat and watched as I got my fix of my particular addictive substance. Actually, they didn't all sit. Dean Gao got up and said he had to teach, so he left. Rebecca and Prof. Tong stayed though, and it was the three of us that embarked on our day's tourism after I finished the coffee.

Our day can be summarized very simply: temples. We drove to another city, over an hour away through the countryside (which I very much enjoyed seeing, from the comfort of the back seat of our Buick), where we first went through the Zhongyue Temple. Then we had lunch in a hotel in the city, after which we drove up into the mountains to an even more famous temple, Shaolin. The two temples seemed awfully similar to me, and each was also pretty similar to the Temple of Heaven I had visited in Beijing. That is, they were more like parks, arranged around a row of "gates" and other pretty Chinese buildings, containing various objects of worship.



Zhongyue Temple, from trip



Zhongyue Temple, from trip

Just inside the grounds of the first temple, a white goat was being unwillingly led in by three people. I asked about it, since both the goat and I seemed to fear that he was heading for sacrifice. I was assured that that was not the case.

For the first temple we had a guide who didn't speak English, so Rebecca did her best to translate bits of what she said. For the second one we got an English-speaking guide, and Rebecca got a break. That mainly meant that I had to listen to every word, rather than just the ones that Rebecca distilled for me, so I heard more than I necessarily wanted to know. Some of it was very interesting, though, such as the male and female pair of thousand-year-old ginkgo trees growing happily together in one place, and the 1500-year-old single ginkgo growing too many yards away from the others to have ever produced any offspring. Or the stone carving that was supposed to show how the three Chinese religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) are one, which it does by showing a single face that, looked at differently, is two faces facing each other.

The second temple was followed by two other attractions that were different, though. First was a nearby place where the ashes of the Buddhist "abbots" were buried over the centuries, each underneath a "pagoda" the height of which gauged both the importance of the abbot and, what may be the same thing, the economic resources of his disciples. These were not what I would have pictured as pagodas, which would have been buildings. These were smaller, essentially oversized tombstones, but made of brown brick and shaped like pagoda buildings, octagonal with 3, 5, 7, or 9 levels and corresponding sets of eaves. There were lots of these in this place, forming a sort of brown brick forest of pagodas.



I want to hold your hand, from trip

The second thing we did requires some explanation. Rebecca had explained to me that this city, and indeed I guess this temple, was the place in China where two things had originated: Zen Buddhism and Kung Fu. After learning this, I never heard much more about Zen, but Kung Fu was everywhere. And the highlight of our visit was to be a Kung Fu demonstration. We finished touring the temple at 3:15, just right for attending the 3:30 show.

The room in which it was held was basically a theater in the round, with rows of nice theater seats on three sides of a central stage. It was already almost full, but we found good seats in the back row along one of the sides. The performance lasted maybe half an hour, and it apparently included most of the things that Kung Fu masters do, including acrobatics, twirling various weapons, and breaking steel bars on their heads. There was not much fighting (or pretend fighting) at all, but there was a little. The men who did all this had shaved heads and I asked Rebecca if they were monks and did they live there. She said, "of course." Although this was all very professional and impressive, it also felt touristy, since they apparently do several shows a day, seven days a week, and they are surrounded by lots of infrastructure selling souvenir paraphernalia. (Prof. Tong bought me both some post cards, at my request, and a set of small Kung Fu figurines that I would not have bought myself.)

More interesting was that Kung Fu is so obviously important to the local people. Near the temple was a large field filled with boys in uniforms practicing their Kung Fu. There were hundreds of them, perhaps thousands. And as we drove away from there, through the neighboring villages and city, it seemed that every school yard was also filled with kids in different uniforms doing it. Best of all, in the open area near the entrance to the

temple's surrounding grounds, there happened to be a Kung Fu competition going on. This wasn't for tourists, although a few of us were watching. The audience was several hundred more boys in their uniforms either sitting in front of a stage where the competitors performed, or standing around the edge, many with flags. A table of judges was scoring the contestants, who came on stage one at a time, introduced themselves sometimes with a bit of talent unrelated to Kung Fu, such as singing a song, and then performed their Kung Fu specialty. The shouts and applause from the watching boys were thunderous. (OK, not really thunderous; that just seems like the normal description of applause. But it was very enthusiastic, and the joy of the kids was as fun to watch as the performances.) The performances were every bit as good, in my opinion, as the ones we had paid to see.



Kung Fu show, from trip



Kung Fu school, from trip

The drive back was uneventful, and in fact I tried to sleep through part of it, though I don't think I succeeded. Asked whether I would prefer Western or Chinese food for dinner, I rather eagerly said I'd prefer Western, since I really had had my fill, by now, of Chinese food. After I'd had a bit of rest in my room, they picked me up and took me to a very large, 5-star hotel. "They," in this case, included three deans of the School of Public Administration, my hosts. One was the man who had met me at the airport, and who now seemed to be a rather lesser dean. The other two were Dean Qin, who is tall and young, and seems to be at sort of a mid-level, and then a somewhat older dean whose name I never got (he gave me his card, but it's all Chinese). He was clearly the boss (I'll call him the überdean, since I don't have a name for him), and he spoke to me throughout the evening in Chinese, translated by Rebecca. Aside from learning that he wanted me to be friends with him, I didn't really get much out of the conversation.

The restaurant provided a large buffet, much but not all of which was western. I chose selectively, avoiding even western foods that had bones or shells, wanting finally to be able to dig in with abandon. There was also a station where a cook was grilling meat. As someone suggested, I ordered a steak. This turned out to be a thin piece of beef, cooked well done and served with a Chinese sauce. Though hardly what we would call a steak, it was too large to eat easily with chopsticks, and it therefore qualified as western food. In fact, it was delicious and easy to eat with knife and fork. At some point the überdean returned from the buffet and informed me that he had ordered me another steak, which I

said was fine. When it was brought to the table and placed next to my other dishes, so was a small plate of small, very flat fish that had been cooked at the same place. I ignored it for a while, assuming that it was for someone else. But eventually the überdean explained that it was a very special fish from this region and that he had ordered it also for me. I leaned over to Rebecca and said that that was what I had been trying to avoid. She said she understood, but that perhaps I had better try it. I did scrape off some meat and ate it. It was good, but I wasn't about to deal with any more of it. The überdean said no more about it.

Here in Zhengzhou I have given up trying to avoid drinking alcohol, since it requires too much explanation, and I've taken to having beer with my meals. I had both beer and coffee at this dinner, and that gave überdean plenty of opportunities to propose toasts. At some point Rebecca suggested that I should propose a toast in return, which I did, a couple of times. The überdean also explained at one point that he would be presenting me a gift at the start of my lecture tomorrow, after introducing me. I wasn't sure why he was saying this now, but Rebecca told me quietly that I should be prepared to offer him something in return, so perhaps this was his way of letting me be prepared.

Overall, although I found the food on this occasion reasonably agreeable and certainly easier to deal with than some of the Chinese food I've had, the evening was uncomfortable. I did not enjoy dealing with the überdean, even though I repeatedly said that I did. Much of this may have been because of the need to converse with him through an interpreter, but I don't think so. I really think that he did not have much interesting to say, and neither did I. I'm afraid I expressed understanding far more often than that was really the case. I got into trouble once when Rebecca said, "The dean is asking if you agree with what he said." Perhaps I should have just said yes, but instead I admitted that I hadn't fully understood what he'd said, and we repeated a bit of the conversation. I've forgotten, now, exactly where that ended up, but I think I was able to say then that I agreed with him partially, but also expressed some disagreement. It was a somewhat painful process.

Sunday, May 21

My lecture was scheduled for 8:30 AM. The deans and Rebecca picked me up at 7:30 for breakfast, which we took in another hotel, closer to campus than the one the night before. I hoped for a western breakfast, but this hotel's buffet didn't provide it. What I had was all Chinese, but they did have coffee. At Rebecca's suggestion, I did try a few things I hadn't had before, and these were very good. My conversation with the überdean was no more comfortable than the night before, and on one occasion I was totally flummoxed by a question he asked that I couldn't understand. I eventually figured out that a word I'd heard, from Rebecca, as "quarter" was actually "culture," and sorting that out helped a good deal.

After breakfast we went to the building of the School of Public Administration, where my lecture would be in a room on the third floor. First, though, we went to an odd little room on the second floor where a long low table was surrounded by a U-shaped arrangement of

upholstered chairs against the walls. I was introduced there to the woman who would serve as the translator for my lecture – a professor, it turned out, of education management and psychology. She and I, together with the überdean and Rebecca, sat there for maybe fifteen minutes trying to chat, although it wasn't clear why. Eventually the überdean led us upstairs to the lecture room.

This was a tiered classroom with maybe 80 students waiting for the lecture. At the front a table had a large flower arrangement and three chairs behind it, in two of which the überdean and I took our seats. This and another table off to the side were equipped with microphones, a laptop, and a projector for my presentation.

The überdean introduced me at some length in Chinese, then presented me with what is a rather astonishingly nice round glass plaque, with a picture of a horse inside the glass. It is in its own box, which will be somewhat cumbersome to carry home, but very much worth the effort. As planned, I thanked him profusely and then presented him with . . . a Michigan key ring. Pretty pathetic, I thought, but it was the best I could do. A T-shirt would have been larger but seemed inappropriate for an überdean.

For my lecture, I spoke into a microphone at the front table, while the translator (whom I later learned to call Judy) sat with her own microphone in the front row so that she could see my slides. I did my best to speak in only short bursts so that she could then translate them, and this worked well for the most part. Of course, I have no idea how accurate her translations were, but since she did ask for clarification from me a couple of times, I suspect it was pretty good.

About twenty minutes into my lecture, her microphone suddenly ceased to work. Prof. Tong tried to come to the rescue, tinkering with the microphone and then the sound system, but for ten minutes or so the sound kept kicking in and out, which was very frustrating for her. Finally, looking around the room, she asked if there wasn't another mike, and we found one in amongst the equipment on the smaller table. Once she switched to that and Prof. Tong made some adjustments to stop the feedback, things worked smoothly from then on.

I found this manner of presentation, alternating with a translator, easy with only a couple of exceptions. I had the laptop in front of me so that I could look at and control the slides that were displayed behind me. Once I had finished speaking about a particular slide, the temptation was strong to move to the next slide, since I wanted to know what I needed to be saying next and I couldn't always remember. I did it once and then realized that I was depriving both Judy and the audience of the slide that she was still talking about.

The other problem was harder. After saying a sentence or two for her to translate, and while she was doing it, my mind naturally formed the next sentence that I wanted to say. But often her translation took long enough that my mind moved on to the sentence after that as well, and as she finished I would lose track of what it was that I meant to say next. I had to force myself to keep my mind on just what she was translating and what I wanted to say next, not let it move beyond that.

As planned, I spoke for about an hour, then took a break in which students were invited to come forward to ask questions. Several did, and Judy translated for them as well. I'd wondered how we would get started again, but as these questions ran out, I saw that the students had taken their seats again, apparently without any prompting. It was very natural for Judy and me to start again, and I lectured for another hour or so – perhaps more, since I went to almost 11:30. I thought that was the end of what was scheduled, but when I asked if there were any questions, four or five students responded with questions. The first of these took such a long time for Judy to understand – she and the student engaging in conversation for quite a long time – that I thought this wasn't going to work. But it did, and the remaining questions were more straightforward.

All in all, I felt that the lecture had gone well, and that the students, at least for the first hour, had seemed extremely interested and engaged. During the second hour I saw less note taking, and I wondered if they were still paying attention, but perhaps they were.

In the car on the way to lunch (which was at the 5-star hotel again), I sat between Rebecca and Judy. I asked Rebecca if she thought the students had understood the lecture, and I mentioned that they seemed less interested in the second half than in the first. I'm not sure that she understood, or was even listening, because she began telling me that, because of drinking coffee at dinner last night, she hadn't gotten to sleep until 4:00 AM. Now, today, she was feeling a headache and was having difficulty concentrating. I said that was too bad and wished she could get a nap this afternoon.

Lunch was with only Dean Qin, Judy, Rebecca, and Dean Qin's son, who is a tall (taller than me) high school student. After we'd eaten, we had a lengthy and interesting conversation about the political system in China, motivated by the fact that Dean Qin is a political scientist. But the conversation was mainly sustained by Judy, who talked one-on-one with me through most of it, only occasionally bringing Dean Qin into it on particular issues.

Judy, I should explain, did undergraduate and graduate work in Canada, returning to China only in 2002 to be a professor here, so her English is the best I've encountered in China. She also seems to be older than many I've met; I would guess in her early 50's. Dean Qin seemed younger.

We talked first about democracy in China, which Dean Qin sees as a steadily growing phenomenon, but entirely internal to the Communist Party. Both he and Judy, as well as Rebecca, say that they are party members, so that prompted me to ask more about that. It apparently is not trivially easy to become members, as one must demonstrate somehow that one deserves membership. I never quite learned how that is done, however. I did learn that Judy had tried several times before she succeeded. They clearly feel that being party members is necessary for being important and participating members of society, for making them feel that they are doing their part for it. Judy believes that the party does a good job, overall, of running the country, even though it certainly makes some mistakes. I described our system of checks and balances and asked if the party had something like

that to prevent individuals with bad ideas from implementing them. She said that it definitely does. For some reason I was inclined to believe her, even though she didn't give me any specifics.

I also asked about the religious sect Falun Gong, thinking that perhaps she would say that the government's treatment of it was one of its mistakes. She did not. She explained her own limited experience with Falun Gong, some of whose members had once approached her, apparently trying to recruit her. They claim to be just a group that engages in something that she called Chi Gong, which is a technique for mobilizing the "air" in one's body to improve its health. This is something that she already believed in and began to practice, years ago, after a surgery had left her in a weakened condition. But although Falun Gong claims to be just doing a form of this, they do it in front of government buildings on Tiananmen Square and next to busy streets, full of traffic. As she sees it, if you really wanted to improve your health with Chi Gong, you would never do it on the concrete of Tiananmen Square or near the noisy traffic and fumes of a busy street. You would do it in on the earth and in the relative quiet of one of the many parks that are not far from Tiananmen Square. So, she can understand why the government thinks that Falun Gong must have some sort of political agenda. Also, they showed her leaflets with photographs of members who had been beaten by the government, but she saw no reason to believe that these were authentic, since they could easily be of anyone. She concluded by saying that of course this was just her experience, but it left her feeling very distrustful of Falun Gong and supportive of the government's position against them.

Regarding our plans for the rest of the day, Rebecca had told me the day before that in the afternoon we would go to the "new campus" of the university, which is on another side of town. There has been no mention of that today, however, I suspect because it has been raining steadily. Instead, the überdean explained this morning that at 5:00 PM today I would be meeting somebody rather important, though his exact position was never clear to me. From the überdean I had the impression of an official in the Education department. But from Rebecca, this seems to be her "tutor." In any case, that meeting is to take place here in my room at 5:00 PM (it is about 4:00 now).

In addition, when we returned to my room at about 2:00, Rebecca said that she would be back for me at 3:00 to go to a museum. She also explained, with some distress, that while the überdean had complimented her on the job she did last night, he was very critical of her performance this morning. It seems that he had inferred from my facial expressions that I was confused, and therefore that she was not doing a good job of translating. She is very nervous that she will be fired, not just from her job as interpreter (which is something she is doing for the first time), but that she will not be allowed to complete her studies. All of this she attributes, perhaps correctly, to her lack of sleep last night and her headache today. I suggested that I really don't want to go to a museum, and that we should cancel that and she should get a nap. She said that the visit to the museum was already scheduled, so it had to go on. But a bit later she phoned and said it was cancelled after all. Still later she called again, apparently to tell me that I should prepare to discuss culture with the education guy.

Ugh. So now, I guess, I'd better do two things: Prepare to discuss culture. And practice looking unconfused. I'm not sure I'm capable of either. But I'll try. I don't want to destroy the life of poor Rebecca, who has tried so hard and, considering that she is just a graduate student studying philosophy, done so well.

Monday, May 22

Whew. That worked out OK, I'm pretty sure. Rebecca and her tutor appeared as planned exactly at 5:00 PM. He and I exchanged cards, and I invited him to sit on the couch, but he selected instead a chair, as did Rebecca, and I sat on the couch. While waiting I'd thought a bit about things to ask, and I started in. He responded, and so did I, and we had about a 45-minute conversation mediated by Rebecca. At that point he got up to leave, and I gave him a gift of a Michigan keychain. He apologized for having nothing for me, but promised to send me a copy of the book he is working on (with Rebecca) when it is published. He seemed content, and off they went. He seemed happy, and it certainly appeared that Rebecca did well with the translations, although of course neither one of us can know for sure.

Actually, I have some reason to think she may not have. Our 45-minute conversation was remarkable in that it hardly ever seemed to me that he responded to what I had said, or to my specific questions. Instead, he spoke in generalities and platitudes. It may be that her translation was garbling my questions, his answers, or both, but at least what she had him saying were coherent sentences, if not very interesting. I'm inclined to believe that she got it right and he just wasn't a very interesting guy. But who knows?

Rebecca returned an hour or so later, together with Dean Qin, to take me to dinner. While still in my room with them, something reminded me that I had neglected to pass out the cards advertising my glossary book at my lecture, as I had done in Beijing. (I don't think I've mentioned this here. My publisher heard I was coming to China and asked if I would do this.) I pulled them out of my bag, gave each of them one, and asked Dean Qin, through Rebecca of course, if he would be willing to distribute them to students. He said he would, and that was that.

In the car on the way to dinner, however, Rebecca brought it up again. Since her tutor was going to send me his book, she wondered if I'd be willing, in return, to send him a copy of mine. I said of course, when it is published later in the summer. And she asked if I would please e-mail him that I would be doing this, presumably to let him know right away that he'd be getting this gift. I made a note to do that. Since then, Rebecca has brought this up several times, and she is clearly doing all she can to stay on the good side of her tutor. As well she should, apparently.

Dinner, at a hotel where the buffet included both western and Chinese food, was mostly unremarkable. But near the end, I happened to notice what was on Dean Qin's plate: a turtle. It was clearly a turtle shell, with the head of the turtle sticking out one end. I saw no legs, which he had apparently already eaten. I expressed surprise to be seeing a turtle, and he grinned and used his chopsticks to flip the top of the shell over, as though it were

hinged at the butt. The inside was empty, again probably because he had already eaten it. He picked up the bottom of the shell and started gnawing on it happily (he's a happy guy), spitting out the many inedible bits as he went. I stopped watching before he ate the head.

Today we started early once again, first with breakfast and then with another day of being tourists. I did learn one thing at breakfast. For years I've seen some rather forbidding-looking eggs at Chinese breakfast buffets when I've been in Asia, and I think I've heard of something called pickled eggs, which I presumed were these. Here I'd seen lots of brown colored eggs, and I supposed they were the same. As I watched someone eating one this morning, and saw that the egg itself after they peeled it was also brown, I decided to ask what it was. Rebecca explained that it was an egg that had been boiled. Why is it brown? Because it's been boiled in tea. Oh. I ate one and it was an ordinary hard-boiled egg.

In the morning we went to yet another temple, this one about two hours drive away. It's called the White Horse Temple, because of a couple of horses that its Buddhist founders brought from India. I rather expected a statue of a white horse prominently somewhere in the temple, but no, it only contained the usual lions and Buddhas. Outside the temple there were a couple of stone horses, but they certainly were not special.



Pagoda in White Horse Temple, from trip



White Horse Temple garden, from trip

What was special, I thought, was a pagoda in a garden next to the temple grounds. This was tall and beautifully shaped. I took lots of pictures of both it and the garden, from various angles.

When we left the temple, it was lunch time, so as we drove through the small city we were in (along a tree-lined road that was very nice, by the way), Rebecca said that it might take a while to find a place here that would serve western food. I repeated what I had tried to say the day before, that I do like Chinese food and that we shouldn't look for western food. I had only meant, when she'd asked on Saturday, that I'd prefer western food that evening, because I had eaten nothing but Chinese food for a week. This time she began to get the message and was astonished. "You LIKE Chinese food?" she almost screamed? "But we've been trying to find western food for you ever since Saturday." Again, I explained, and I think perhaps she understood, although it seems that the idea of preferring one kind of food one day and another the next is alien to her. She spoke in Chinese to Mr. Tong for a while, and on we drove.



Street in Zhengzhou, from trip

At some point we came to a fork in the road, and rather than take it, we stopped. Tong spoke, then Rebecca. "If you want western food, we should go left. If you want Chinese, we should go right." "Chinese," I said. And off we went, for perhaps another half hour before we stopped. Even then, we didn't exactly stop for lunch.

We'd been on an expressway, and at one point I noticed a couple of bricks in the road ahead, about five feet apart. Had we stayed in our lane, we'd have missed both of them. But staying in a lane is not a Chinese custom, it seems, except when another vehicle is behind you honking for you to move over. Our car drifted to the right a bit so that we managed to hit both bricks perfectly. No harm done, that I could tell. But a little while later, when we left the expressway, the car suddenly felt like it was driving on corduroy. I said to Rebecca that something seemed wrong. She said no, we were fine. But Tong pulled over, walked around the car, and made a face when he saw the right rear tire. Completely flat. I don't really know that one of the bricks had anything to with that, but it's too much of a coincidence to believe otherwise.

Tong took it in stride (he seems a very levelheaded, easy-going guy). Rebecca less so, since she was feeling car sick and now felt trapped in the car. I said to get out and get some fresh air. She said she couldn't leave me. I said I'd get out and did (though I terrified her when I opened my door into the traffic). We stood on the shoulder of the road during the time it took for Tong to get the tire replaced with the small spare from the trunk. (He didn't do this himself. We'd stopped in front of a building of some sort, unmarked, and he got a couple of men from there to come out and help.)



Flat tire, from trip

I'm afraid I may have been disappointed in how easily this crisis was resolved, as I'd hoped to have more to write about it here. But I did enjoy the fact that we had stopped right at the time and place that lots of kids were going home from school, walking past us along this road. Almost as soon as I got out of the car, several girls across the road saw me and shouted "Hello!," and they smiled happily when I helloed back. During the ten minutes or so it took to change the tire, many of the children looked at me either with curiosity or with pleasure, and where happy to say hello.



While changing flat tire, from trip

Riding on our miniature spare tire, we drove a short distance to what turned out to be our destination. It was a hotel across from a tourist attraction that I'll mention shortly, and Rebecca and I went in for lunch while Tong went off to get the tire repaired.

Sitting at a table large enough for eight (we seem to do that a lot, even though smaller ones are available), she got the menu and then asked what I liked. My answer: noodles and anything without bones. She then did what my Chinese hosts always seem to do: spend an incredible amount of time discussing items on the menu with the waitresses, flipping back and forth among its pages, before eventually placing her order. This time (perhaps because we were somewhat after the usual lunch hour and the staff wasn't busy), she ended up with three waitresses at once helping her.

In no time, the first dish arrived. It was a plate of goat. Goat bones, none more than an inch and a half long, and most of them with a bit of meat on them. I picked one up with my chopsticks, found some meat on it, and ate it. It was delicious, and I cleaned off that bone well. My second one was not so good, as I found no meat at all on what seemed more like a knuckle. My third attempt was a bit better, but I was relieved when the next dish appeared at that point. Mr. Tong, by the way, had arrived just after the goat, and was wolfing it down. The second dish was a soup of some sort, which I attacked with relish but not skill, until Rebecca instructed me to use my chopsticks for the vegetables and the spoon only for the broth. She was very pleased to see that I liked it, and I gather that, having found a Chinese food that I like, she's going to give it to me for breakfast tomorrow.

The third dish was what looked like another soup, though perhaps a better word for it would be a stew – a fish stew. The pieces of fish, which were bite size strips that seemed to have been deep fried before being put in the stew, had tiny bones. I ate one but didn't try another. Finally, Tong and I were each brought a bowl of noodles, and Rebecca a bowl of rice. The noodles had some tomatoes and other vegetables on top, and the mixture was very good. Between the noodles and the soup, I had a big lunch, even though I pretty much ignored the other two dishes. At some point Rebecca muttered something about it being hard to order dishes without bones.

After lunch we crossed the street to what turned out to be the entrance to the Longmen Grottoes Scenic Zone. This is a stretch of a good-sized river, on both sides of which the stone cliffs were carved into caves and niches, in each of which was also carved a Buddha and other accompanying figures. This was done starting about 1500 years ago and ending I'm not sure when, but I think about 900 years ago. There are hundreds of these caves, and thousands of Buddhas, ranging in size from many meters tall to less than one centimeter (really). The stone is brown limestone, and the result is a totally remarkable brown cliff that looked pockmarked from a distance but looks like multiple temples from up close. Of course, the years and other forces (thieves, for example) have been hard on some of them, but most are intact and well preserved. The largest cave is so large that it and its Buddha are easily viewed from across the river, where apparently the female emperor (why is that not an empress?) who commissioned it to have the Buddha's face look like her, enjoyed looking at it. Another one, called the cave of fifteen thousand Buddhas, is the one with Buddhas only a centimeter high. These cover the side walls like wallpaper and account for the cave's name.

All of this is accessible from walkways and stairs that have been added to the cliffs in recent years. We hired an English-speaking guide to take us through it, and he led us up and down more stairs than I might have liked. It was worth it, though, to see all these carvings. My inclination is to be more impressed with the accomplishment of carving such things out of a cliff face than if it had been done from a block of stone, although of course I don't know anything about sculpture. I gather that in either case, you just remove the bits you don't want. But many of these are quite high on the cliff face, and that, at the very least, must have been a challenge for people in 490 AD.



Longmen Grottos, from trip



Longmen Grottos, from trip



Longmen Grottos, from trip

With all this walking, standing, and climbing, I found it a challenge, and I was glad when we were able to hire an electric tram to return us to the park entrance. At my request we bypassed yet another temple, high on the hill across the river from most of the caves. I said I'd seen enough temples by now, and that they were all pretty much alike. Rebecca couldn't believe I thought that.

Back at the entrance, Rebecca and I did some shopping in the numerous souvenir shops while Tong went to get the repaired tire put on the car. He did his task faster than Rebecca was able to negotiate the price of something she was buying (a gift, it turned out, for Tong). Her negotiations must have gone on for half an hour as I sat in a conveniently placed chair reading my phrase book.

On the way back from all of this, Rebecca explained another thing she has to do, besides acting as my translator. She is writing a report on my visit – or perhaps just on my lecture, I'm not sure – that will be sent out to the news media. She worked on it last night, but then realized she was missing a lot of the points in my lecture and wanted to get the PowerPoint slides from me. After dinner, when we returned to my room, I copied them onto a thumb drive that she'd brought with her. I asked, though, if she had the PowerPoint program, and she didn't know. Suspecting that she might not, I translated the files into several other forms, and hopefully at least one of them will work for her. Otherwise I expect her to be in a panic tomorrow.

Dinner was once again at a hotel where there was a partially western buffet, the same at which we'd eaten the night before. It had been unclear to me who might show up, for this my final night in town, and I was not encouraged when Rebecca took us to a round table with ten chairs. It turned out, however, that there were only four of us, Rebecca and me together one side, Tong and Dean Qin together across from us – way across.

Dean Qin and I started a conversation, with Rebecca translating. Except that she kept forgetting that, when I said something, I was talking to him and not to her. Instead of translating she would just respond as though I'd said it to her. A couple of times I had to remind her that she needed to translate for him, or that I was asking my question of him, not of her. Of course, for all I know he may understand English and not need the translation. In any case he seems so nice and happy that I can't imagine it's a problem. It did seem to me that, since he's a dean, when we tried to converse, she should just translate.

At this dinner I had one plateful of Chinese food (selected by me, and thus without bones), and one plateful of western food. I concluded that, just as western cooks should probably not attempt Chinese cuisine, Chinese cooks should not attempt western. Unless it comes out of a box (I long for some raisin bran), western food here is going to be either not very western or not very good.



With Rebecca, from trip

Tuesday, May 23, Beijing

Now I'm gnawing on bones that I ordered for myself. They are hard to avoid. I'm back in Beijing and I went to the food court in the Modern Plaza again for dinner, where I selected a bowl of noodles with slices of some sort of meat that looked good. But the meat turned out to be slices from a limb, I guess, because each slice had a couple of bones in it. Fortunately, there were plenty of noodles and broth to go with this.

Rebecca and Dean Gao picked me up this morning, this time without Mr. Tong who has always been present before and drove the Buick. Instead, Dean Gao drove himself, in his own car, which is a Suzuki minivan that I've seen many of on the roads. It differs from minivans in the US in being a good deal narrower. You wouldn't want to seat three people in it side-by-side, at least not three Americans.

Breakfast at the same hotel we had frequented before included the soup that Rebecca had promised. It was OK, but I've now learned quite a few items from that buffet that I like better, all Chinese including the brown egg, and I ate them as well. Then we returned to the hotel, where Mr. Tong was waiting to drive us to the airport. I had explained my preference for getting there early, and we did, despite traffic that sometimes seemed impenetrable.

Along the way, Rebecca mentioned that she had hoped to talk to me more about globalization, which really had not come up much except in my lecture. I said I'd be happy to, and she began explaining how she saw globalization as being a continuation of what Marx had already discussed in 1844. Without knowing much about Marx myself except "Workers of the world, unite!" I agreed, and we talked about forces that have distinguished modern globalization from what came before. At some point, though, she asked if I agreed that the globalization being experienced now by China is the same as what Marx espoused, or at least I think that's what she asked. I said no, it seemed to me that China, in 1978 when it made the major shift to fostering markets and encouraging business, had abandoned Marx in everything but name. She seemed not to understand, so I said it more plainly: "In 1978 China said goodbye to Marx." She screeched at the ludicrousness of that thought, and she began chattering in Chinese to tell the others what I'd said. She, at least, and perhaps they, found this so ridiculous that it was uproariously funny. I don't think she was offended; just amazed by my ignorance.

At the airport, there was a half-hour wait before check-in for my flight would begin, so we sat in a café and sipped Chinese tea. This was in plain glass tumblers, rather tall, one-third filled with loose, coarse green tea, and then filled with boiling water. This is a normal way to drink tea if you are not being fancy, I gather. I found it hard to hold the glass, it was so hot, but this didn't seem to bother any of them. After we drank a bit, the waitress came around with the pot of hot water to fill it up again, which I declined hoping the glass would cool. The tea is admittedly pretty good, and it seems to be as addictive for the Chinese as coffee is for me. Rebecca carried her tea bottle with her while we toured and refilled it from the tea provided at lunches.

They saw me off in good spirits, with many (false) assurances that I would try to visit Zhengzhou again. (Not that I disliked it, but there are so many other places to see in China that I doubt very much that I'll return to Zhengzhou.) The rest of the trip was standard, except for the odd fact that even though the airport had plenty of gates, two flights were departing from our gate just five minutes apart. At about 35 minutes before mine was scheduled, the waiting crowd stood up and got in line to board, only to remain still as another group walked past us through the gate. An electronic sign above the gate, fortunately, gave the two flight numbers and the words, in English, "waiting" for ours and "boarding" for the other. After boarding for the other flight was done, the sign switched to "boarding" for us, and we did. Although the signs were clear, and the attendants were checking boarding passes, I asked each one I passed "Beijing?" just to be sure. I really didn't want to end up somewhere else.

Frank (remember him?) was waiting for me in Beijing and eagerly helped me with my suitcase, which has grown to a size and weight I didn't know it was capable of. He brought me in from the airport in a taxi, checked me back into the same hotel and room as before, and offered to help me shop tomorrow. I accepted the offer, on the condition that he let me buy him lunch tomorrow. He tried to delay decision on that until then, but I insisted. We'll see if I pull it off.

When I left Beijing on Friday, I was ready for a change. The main reason, I think, was that the bed here is far from comfortable, but it also had something to do with the difficulties of communication. Well, the bed in Zhengzhou was indeed more comfortable, but the communication was way harder. I now feel like I'm coming home, and Frank feels like the easiest to understand person I've met in ages. It's good to be back.

Thursday, May 25

I'm waiting to go to dinner with Dean Dong, and some other faculty.

My time in Zhengzhou improved my knowledge of things to eat for breakfast, so for breakfast yesterday and today I've quit ordering Won Ton soup and gotten fried bread instead, which I like better. Otherwise, my routine here is much as before, including a daily visit to the Water Stone coffee house to do my e-mail (which had accumulated considerably while I was away from it in Zhengzhou).

On Wednesday morning, as we had arranged, Frank took me by taxi to Silk Road, which he understood would be a good place to shop. He was right; it was perfect. Silk Road was originally a section of the city, east of the center and near the neighborhood of embassies, where many small shops were set up informally to cater to foreigners. At some point the government consolidated them and organized them into a nice building, filled over some five or more floors with small independent shops. They are organized into sections, and floors, selling particular types of Chinese-made items, including many of the sorts of small souvenirs and handicrafts that I was looking for.

Not only had Frank brought me to the right place, but it was wonderful having him with me. He could translate, of course, but that wasn't needed too much since these shopkeepers dealt with tourists enough to know the English they needed. More important was the bargaining. I'd look at things until I found something I wanted, then turn it over to Frank to do that for me. Usually, he'd just talk with them for a while, picking up and looking at various items other than what I wanted and sometimes moving away from the shop altogether, and then eventually tell me what price he'd gotten, which I'd then pay. Other times their negotiations may not have quite concluded, and the shopkeeper would come to me with a price, which I learned to offer perhaps half of and then work our way to agreement. In most cases we did reach a sale, although in one or two we did not, and then moved on to look at similar merchandise in other shops. It worked well. Frank also pointed out a few items that he thought I might like, and he had a good sense of this.

When we were done, we looked for a place to have lunch. On the top floor were several fancy restaurants, but when I told him I wanted to eat noodles he led me to the subbasement where the employees ate, and there we found a food court that was as loud and busy as any place I've been. We found a table and Frank parked me there to save it while he went to the shop that sold noodles and bought our lunch with a cash card that we first bought from the centralized cashier. Once again, the system seems to avoid having too many people deal with cash, although in the shops upstairs, unlike the Modern Plaza, each shopkeeper took payment directly.

From there we hopped into a cab and returned to the Starbucks in Modern Plaza where, as planned, Frank bought me a coffee. I had paid for the taxis, lunch, and of course everything that I'd bought. When we entered the taxi, Frank just said a couple of syllables to the driver, which given the propensity for Chinese to talk extensively about any transaction, surprised me. I asked what he'd said. "Modern." He went on to explain that the Modern Plaza, next to campus where I'd hung out so much, is one of the best shopping centers in the city and everybody knows it.

That evening, I was taken to dinner by one of the students I've admitted to the MAE program, together with his fiancé. He had reached me first by e-mail and then, just before I'd left for Zhengzhou, by phone to set this up. Unlike Dr. Xu before, they gave me the choice of walking or taking a taxi to the restaurant and told me how far it would be. We walked, mostly through narrow back streets many of which had people cooking and selling food right out in the street. The restaurant was quite upscale, and we had a private room with a large round table and lazy Susan. We had Peking Duck and several other dishes, and there was enough left of everything that the couple took with them some seven containers of leftovers. We had a nice conversation, though there was nothing particularly notable.



Summer Palace, from trip

Today Frank took me to the Summer Palace, this time back on the tab of the university. It had rained hard during the night, and it was still drizzling the whole time we were there, which was unfortunate. We had umbrellas, but the whole point of the place is to enjoy the outdoors, and that was hard to do. Also unfortunately, many of the structures including the entire famous "long corridor" (which I'd seen in 2001) were under construction, being renovated for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and couldn't be seen at all. The day was mostly one of Frank and me talking, which I think we both enjoyed.

Afterwards we went back again to Modern Plaza where we had lunch, and then Frank helped me buy a small second suitcase, which I've decided I need in order to get things home from here. He also helped me mail postcards at the post office on campus. Now, waiting for my last dinner in Beijing, I'm well fixed.

Unfortunately, I've been sneezing and blowing my nose all day, so I must be coming down with a cold. The cold drizzle this morning didn't help, although I'd noticed the symptoms already last night.

Thursday, May 25, Later

I'm now back from dinner, with nothing more to do but sleep, get up at 5:00 AM, and fly home.

Ms Yu was to pick me up at 5:30 for dinner, so I went down to the lobby then to meet her. I didn't see her, so I stood out on the steps of the hotel to wait. As I waited, I watched something that has been going on most days since I've been here: groups of Korean students standing on opposite sides of the front sidewalk, holding signs and sometimes shouting and cheering. Nobody seems to know what they are doing, except to guess that it is some sort of election campaign for governance of a foreign student association. They seem to be having a good time, but it is not clear what they are accomplishing.



Not sure what they are campaigning for, from trip

Eventually Ms Yu approached me from behind, having been in the lobby for five minutes looking for me. I don't know how we missed each other. She mentioned, as we left there on foot, that Dean Dong had phoned that he was already in the restaurant, where he'd gone directly on returning from the U.K. Ms Yu had told me, when she called on Tuesday to arrange this, that we would be taking a taxi to the restaurant, so I expected to see one. Instead, she explained that we were walking to the west gate, which is the one furthest away from the hotel. That seemed odd to me, although I later recalled, as we caught a taxi outside the gate, that taxies are very restricted in their access to the campus.

Waiting for us outside the west gate were Prof. Xu and another professor whom I recognized but couldn't (and still can't) recall the name of. Prof. Xu flagged a taxi and motioned for me to get in back, with him in the front seat. I assumed that the other two would join me in the back seat, but they didn't; they caught another cab. We started for the restaurant and soon were so tangled up in traffic that we didn't move, for quite some time. After a while, Prof. Xu answered his cell phone and learned from Ms Xu that she was already at the restaurant, having obviously taken a better route. We got there eventually, to a restaurant whose name had something to do with sunflowers.

Ms Yu was waiting for us outside, and I expected her to rush us inside to join Dean Dong. Instead, she and Prof. Xu started reading the Chinese characters on the front of the restaurant. On both sides of the entrance were narrow vertical panels with perhaps a dozen large characters painted on them. Yu and Xu got great fun out of reading them,

which was challenging as they were written in a script that was not standard. As they figured them out, they translated them for me, but as I've found in most such translations, the meaning didn't seem worth the effort. Only when they finished all of that did we enter the restaurant.

Dean Dong welcomed us with enthusiasm and showed us around parts of the restaurant, which specialized in the cuisine and culture of a rural province in northeast China where Dean Dong had worked on a farm during the cultural revolution. He showed me many wooden farm implements, just like what he said he had used. The decoration of the place was quite different from others I'd been in, presumably reflecting the norms of that province.

We were seated in a separate room, as always, although this one had a rectangular table instead of the usual circular one. The group engaged in the usual long discussion of the menu, with each other and with the waitress, until they had settled on their selections. The waitress returned a moment later, however, to say that they were out of beef. We substituted chicken. The group had thoughtfully selected beef because it comes without the bones, but they said now we might need to eat with our hands.

Soon the dishes began to arrive, one by one, and Dean Dong introduced each of them to me and watched eagerly as I sampled them and commented on them. First was a mushroom soup, which as I expected in China was a broth with a variety of interestingly shaped mushrooms in it. Second was a dish consisting mainly of what looked like long slimy strips of jellyfish. Fortunately, it wasn't. The long slimy things, like wide clear noodles, were said (not very plausibly) to be made from green beans. I managed to slurp up several of them during the evening. Third was a dish of eggplant, which included bits of some sort of meat as well as other vegetables and sauce, and which I'd have been happy to eat all of.

Then came a plate of rolls: oval, orangish brown, kind of flat. These, Dong explained, were made from corn meal. During the cultural revolution, the northeast part of the country was poor and not very productive, so they primarily raised corn. (The connection seems to be that corn grows without much attention, unlike other crops, so the poorly motivated workers of the agricultural communes could grow it without much effort.) So, they ate a lot of corn, such as these rolls. With that introduction I didn't expect them to taste like much, and indeed they didn't. They certainly were not as tasty as our corn bread, and I suspect that they came from a less sweet kind of corn.

Next (perhaps – I'm losing track) was a watery corn porridge, also from the region and representative of Dean Dong's youth, apparently. My first taste of it mainly suggested the need for salt. But I hadn't been supposed to try it yet. Dong held up a small plate of some sort of vegetable, thin strips of something white, and said to take just one of these. I did and started to move it toward my mouth, but he stopped me. He showed me what to do: Take a spoonful of the porridge into your mouth and follow it immediately with the vegetable. I did, and sure enough, the combination was delicious. He explained that the vegetable was soaked in salt. I asked why we didn't just put the vegetable into the

porridge. No, you can't do that, was his answer. So I didn't. And I ate many more spoonfuls, following instructions.

There were, I think, just three more dishes. One looked very much like a western beef stew, with chunks of meat (perhaps not beef, if they were out of that), potatoes (which were the first I'd seen in China), and other vegetables. Another was the promised chicken, with a chicken foot prominently evident. And the last was a wide flat dish with tofu and cabbage in a white sauce. I had just a few tastes of each of these (only one of the chicken, and not the foot), mainly because they were further from me on the table and hard to reach. The advantage of a round table with a lazy Susan was obvious.

After introducing me to each of these dishes, and moving more quickly over the last three, Dean Dong and the rest of us settled into eating normally. That is, we ate whatever we liked, using our chopsticks to grab a mouthful from the dishes that we all shared and eating it. Occasionally someone would use a serving spoon to put more than a bite of something in their own dish and then eat that, but that was the exception. This did not surprise me, since it had been the practice at most of the meals I'd had in China. There seems to be no concern at all about our dipping into the common dishes with the chopsticks that we've been eating with. Of course, you just grab the bit you are going to eat. You don't dig around in the food or stir it, so perhaps the idea is that you really are only touching what you will eat yourself.

Late in the meal, when I might have expected some sort of desert (although there was still lots left of everything), out came a plate of dumplings. Dong had explained before that in the south of China they eat rice, while here in the north they eat wheat (when they can afford it), in the forms of noodles and dumplings. He now explained that only in the north can you get good dumplings. I reached for one, but he held me back to wait for the sauce. A dish of brown sauce was brought in, looking like soy sauce, along with separate small dishes for each of us, into which some of the sauce was poured. We then could eat the dumplings, after putting one into our own dish and drenching it with sauce. They were very tasty.

Throughout the dinner there was, of course, lots of talk, mostly in English. At one point, Dean Dong told me that all the staff at the restaurant were from other provinces, not Beijing. How do you know, I asked, can you tell by looking at them? "No," he said, "I asked." Then he called our waitress into the room, and we all began asking her details about her situation.

She was from rural Henan Province (where I'd just been, in Zhengzhou) and had come to Beijing only a month and a half ago to seek employment. This wasn't hard to find, as there was a sign on this restaurant, like many others apparently, that it needed staff. Since Ms Yu had mentioned to me that this neighborhood, near the university, is quite expensive to live in, I asked the waitress where she lived. I expected that she lived far away and had a long commute by bus. Hardly: she lives at the restaurant. All the staff do, in rooms upstairs. She's paid ¥600 a month, which is about $70, but she also gets her room and board, and her work clothes are provided. She works seven days a week; I

didn't ask what hours. I presume that she must save most of her tiny pay, since she has neither the time nor the need to spend it. I hope she thinks of herself as doing all this for some sort of future.

This information was very interesting, of course, but so – in a rather disturbing way – was our ability to get it. Our group asked her about all this, happily discussing it and frequently laughing about it for reasons I didn't always understand. She laughed too, and seemed happy, but I'm sure that's part of the job description. I participated, but I felt vaguely uncomfortable.

In showing me around the restaurant at the start, Dean Dong had pointed out a stage in the larger room, just outside our little one, and he explained there would be show of entertainment typical of the northeast province at 7:00 PM. Sure enough, at about that time we began to hear music and loud talking by some performers whom we couldn't see from our room. After a bit Dean Dong had the door closed so that we could continue our conversation. Then, somewhat later, he indicated that we were done with dinner, since we'd pretty much stopped eating, and we went out to the larger room to watch the show.

I sat at a table, far from the stage, and Dong sat with me. On stage were a young man and a young woman. I'd expected them to be in some sort of traditional costumes, but they weren't. The man was bare-chested and wore slacks. The woman also wore slacks and a top, normal western dress. They each had microphones and were alternately performing in various ways. She sang in a voice that was louder than it was beautiful. He didn't sing, but he talked a great deal, also loudly, and judging from Dong's laughter he was very funny.

At some point he pulled out a musical instrument, which looked and sounded like a Chinese version of a recorder. His first trick with that was to place his head, arm, and shoulder on the stage, holding the recorder to his mouth, then play a tune as he lifted his feet above his head. It wasn't a great tune, but it was an unusual talent. His next trick was less unusual and involved less talent: playing the recorder with his nostril, which he did while strutting around the room. Finally, he took what I first thought was a long rope, attached one end to the mouthpiece of the recorder, and played it by blowing into the other end – so apparently it was a skinny hose. All of this, as I said, was interspersed with Chinese chatter that kept the crowd, and Dr. Dong, in stitches.

Eventually he indicated that we should leave, but then he noticed other aspects of the restaurant that he should show me. We looked at many posters that appeared to be propaganda from early in the history of the PRC, and he translated lots of Chinese characters for me. He also laughed a lot, but I was never quite sure, despite this, whether he was taking the propaganda seriously.

Finally, we went outside, and he drove us all in his car back to campus, where he dropped me off at the hotel amid many goodbyes. Along the way he mentioned that he learned to drive in the U.S. in 1992, where he got his driver's license. But then he didn't get to

drive much at first, because he had been dean at another school where the job came with a driver, and if he'd driven himself the man would have lost his job.

Odds and Ends

The traffic lights in Zhengzhou (though not in Beijing, that I've noticed) include prominent electric signs counting down the seconds until they will change, red for the red lights and green for the green. I like the idea for the green, but I'm not so sure about the red. Hmmm. I don't recall whether these traffic lights even had any yellow. Perhaps the timers were instead of yellow.

I saw a railroad crossing – what I guess we call a level crossing – where the tracks cross a road, and much like at home there are black and white striped gates on either side to keep cars off the tracks. But these gates were bamboo poles, not wider boards. I would think that drivers might easily not see them.



Street sweeper, from trip

In Zhengzhou, both on the city streets and on the expressways, one saw workers with large brooms sweeping up the dirt and trash. The brooms were straw or some similar dried plant, and the straw part was very large. It looked more like the broomsticks had big collections of sticks, about two feet long and splayed out at a sixty-degree angle, tied to them. It was hard to believe that these could be very much help in tidying anything up, if that really was what they were trying to accomplish on the roads.

On our long drives on the expressways to the tourist attractions, I got to read lots of road signs offering helpful advice to drivers, in both Chinese and English. My favorites were "No drunken driving" and "Driving when fatigued is forbidden."

Chinese people smoke, a lot. When a driver took us some place and then joined us for lunch, he invariably lit up as soon as he sat at the table. And the drivers smoked while driving. My hotel rooms provided helpful ashtrays, but one of them was rather snippy. A sign said, "Please don't smoke in bed."

One of my colleagues at a meal was drinking a glass of something that I couldn't place, but it looked like it might be dark beer, unlikely as that seemed. No, he explained. It was a mixture of Coke and beer.

The sidewalks outside the university have a curious sort of litter. Little paper flyers, about one inch by two inches, printed in Chinese and with numbers on them. They seem to be everywhere, stuck to the pavement. Frank explained that these ads are a problem

that nobody likes, sort of like spam on the internet. They are advertising companies that provide fake documents, such as diplomas.

In one hotel restaurant, I was warm, so I took off my sport jacket and draped it over the back of my chair. While I was at the buffet, someone came with a cloth that they used to cover my coat. Similarly, in Starbucks and in at least one other restaurant, there was typically one chair at each table that had a loose cloth cover over the chair back. Frank explained that these too are to cover your coat if you take it off. The point, presumably, is to avoid getting food on your coat. However, I saw no sign of bibs to protect the clothes we were wearing, which seem much more likely to experience a spill or dribble.

Women here very commonly carry umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun. I'm told that a white skin is considered attractive, and this is done more for looks than for health.

In many of the temples there were statues and other objects that, tradition had it, would bring you some sort of good fortune (wealth, health, etc.) if you touched them. As a result, their stone was darkened in these places from years, or perhaps centuries, of being touched.



The expressways, especially in Beijing, routinely have flowers, or flowering bushes, planted in the narrow middle strip, along with metal fences that are mostly concealed by the plantings. This serves to beautify and, I suppose, protect drivers from oncoming headlights. It's much more attractive than our cement barriers, though perhaps not as effective.



Out in the country, the expressways had another interesting feature. Like all such roads, there are many hills that have been cut into, with a flat slope angling down to the road. To keep that slope from eroding and washing down onto the road, we often simply pave it. Here, in at least a few places, they have imbedded blocks of stone or cement forming patterns of arches. Inside the arches there is dirt, and I sometimes saw workers there keeping the weeds down. Again, much more attractive than what we would do.



In a similar vein, the parking lot we used at one of the tourist attractions was paved with cement blocks that had quarter circles cut out of them, so that the paving left circles of earth in a nice pattern. In most of the parking lot, these circles had nice green grass growing in them, protected from the pressure of the car tires by the blocks. The effect was of a semi-grassy parking lot where the grass formed a polka dot pattern.



At the airport in Zhengzhou, near the gate, in addition to the usual normal chairs for waiting, there was a row of stuffed recliners that provided vibration and massage. I didn't check them out except to photograph them in use, but I gather there was an attendant whom one paid to use them.

