Chapter 31
Beijing 2011



Journal of Trip to Beijing, China, May 1-14, 2011

Tuesday, May 3, 2011, Beijing

This is an unusual trip for me, as I don't have very much scheduled for me to do. I was invited to visit Beijing several months ago by a scholar Ma Ming, who goes by Mark, and who teaches at the Beijing Institute of Technology. He told me that he had funding from his government to bring scholars here and that he wanted to talk with me about his research, which is related to a paper that I published back in 1979. The visit would have to be for a minimum of two weeks, in order for his funds to cover my travel, so that's what I'm doing. How much we will talk about his research, I have no idea. It is far removed from my own current expertise and interests, but I was happy to make the trip for its own sake. While here, it looks like I will give one lecture to faculty and students, on a topic that I now need to decide, and I will have a session with students alone, presumably discussing whatever research topics interest them. Otherwise, I'll have lots of free time, which I'm looking forward to.

I left home on Sunday afternoon and flew through Seattle to reach here. Both flights were uneventful. I did not get an upgrade on the flight to Seattle, but I was fortunate to have an empty seat next to me from Seattle to Beijing, so that I was able to curl up in assorted positions to sleep for most of that 11-hour flight. Aside from being able to sleep, though, it was far from luxurious. The food was worse than usual (I often like airplane food). And the movies were so bad that I didn't regret that the screens for them were too far from my seat to see very much.

I arrived in Beijing at 9:30 PM Monday evening, and was met by one of Mark's students, Henry. He's an undergrad, about to graduate and already done with his courses and his

paper (a thesis, I gather), so he has plenty of time to be my host and guide. I gather that he will be taking me to various sights around Beijing.

I hope that he knows Beijing better than he knows the airport. He'd never been there before, and he first took me up an escalator before realizing that the exit was back where we had started. He took me out to the taxi rank, where he also got confused about where exactly we needed to queue for a taxi. But it all worked out. The drive to campus was only about a half hour.

I'm staying in what Mark had described as a 3-4-star hotel on campus. It's a 17-story hotel that seems to have been built to house some of the athletes for the 2008 Olympics, and it is quite nice. He explained today why the ambiguity about his star rating: It's hardware is 4-star; its service is 3-star. I agree.

The room is large, modern, and pleasant. I was mystified for a while by some of the electronic controls next to the bed, which turn on and off the TV as well as various lights, but I worked it out. There's no wireless, but an Ethernet cable is provided and the internet connection through that is slow but workable. The bathroom has everything I might want and more, except there is no Kleenex. Toilet paper will have to do. I say, "and more," because – unique in my experience – the amenities provided in the bathroom include condoms.

Like many hotels, this one has notes in several places suggesting how you can save the environment by saving the hotel money – reusing towels and sheets, for example. But one note is new to me and seems to be truly for my benefit. It's on the wall of the walk-in shower, and it says (printed on a green sign in the shape of a footprint) "Dear Guest: When you enter into the washroom, please take care of the ground. If you have a bath, please use a shower mats or robe." Not sure what the robe refers to; there isn't one.

I'd slept a lot on the plane, so I wasn't sure how well I would sleep last night, but I felt it was important in order to avoid jet lag. I set the bedside alarm for 7:00 AM and turned in, only getting up three or four times soon after as I remembered things I'd forgotten to do, like taking my meds. I had a very eventful night, waking up about every two hours remembering lots of dreams. The last time was at 7:06, which meant that the alarm had not rung. I see now that I had set it but not turned it on. And I now don't see any way to turn it on. I may need to count on either my iPhone or my dreams to wake me in the future.

There are two restaurants on the ground floor of the hotel, a Chinese one that is open for breakfast at 7:00 and a western one that is also a bar and that does not open until 10:00. Turns out that only the latter has coffee, so my breakfast this morning was missing that. The Chinese buffet was minimal, but acceptable, even though I don't know what most of it was. At least it did not require me to order from a Chinese menu.

After breakfast, I went for a walk hoping to find a coffee shop. At that point I didn't yet know that I'd find coffee later in the other restaurant. Right across the street from the

hotel is a major freeway, and that may be the reason why there are not many shops along this street. I walked a ways in several directions, and while I found some food vendors cooking on the sidewalk, and a few small shops that had nothing to offer of interest to me, I certainly did not find a coffee shop. There's an elevated walkway over the freeway, and I crossed to the other side briefly, but it was no different over there. Thank goodness that there's coffee in the other hotel restaurant, or I don't think I could survive.

Back in my room, waiting for its 10:00 opening, I connected to the internet and started catching up on e-mail. But before long, the phone rang, and it was Mark. He said he was at the front desk, so I said I would come down. I did, but did not find him. The woman at the desk motioned that he'd gone around the corner, and I understood her to say that he'd gone into a men's room that was there. I sat and waited. Pretty soon he appeared from the elevator. Turns out he had gone up to my room to meet me, passing me on one elevator coming down as he went up.



Mark, from trip

We spent the next several hours together. He first came up to my room where he showed me several of his research projects on his laptop. Then we went down for coffee, and later for lunch in the Chinese restaurant. After that we went for a walk through the campus, stopping for while at his office before returning to the hotel where he dropped me off.

For lunch in the Chinese restaurant, Mark tried to let me choose what we would eat, but the large colorful menu with its many pictures was just too much for me, and I insisted that he choose. We had two dishes that I think were appetizers, one small slices of beef and the other some sort of green noodles. The latter, it turned out, were made from "fern roots." I had mentioned liking noodles, which may be why we had that, and it was good. We also had, as our main courses I guess, bowls of noodles with some sort of sauce. He ordered one with tomato sauce and one with eggplant sauce, then gave me my choice. I took the eggplant, but in the end was not able to eat all of it. It wasn't unpleasant, but I found it a struggle to get much of the slippery noodles into my mouth with the chopsticks. My efforts to do so only accomplished splattering quite a few drops of the sauce onto my shirt.

Mark asked at the start what things I liked, and I mentioned pork, chicken, and beef. Then he asked about fish, and I said I liked fish, but didn't care for bones, and had found that fish in China usually had bones. His response was that all fish have bones, which of

course they do. And he ordered a fish dish for us that, when I started to eat it, he said "watch out for bones." Yep.

According to his card, Mark is Chair of the Department of Applied Economics in the School of Management and Economics. But he shares a small office with another Associate Professor. Just what his status is, I'm not sure.

Thursday, May 5


Henry, from trip

Yesterday, Henry picked me up at 11:00, at my request leaving me time to get coffee after the restaurant opened at 10:00. We took the subway – three of them, actually – to the place where most of the 2008 Olympics were held. That includes the "Bird's Nest" stadium, that was featured, and that was every bit as impressive in person as on TV. It also includes the "Water Cube," which was not so impressive to see, at least in the daytime. We walked around the stadium and other parts of the park, and eventually bought tickets to enter the stadium, because that seemed to be the only place to buy souvenirs. There were several big stores there, although they had only a few things that I wanted. [It must have been there that I bought plastic coasters, designed after the Bird's Nest, which we are still using 14 years later.]

From there we walked in towards the city looking for a place to eat. We passed a long, low building with windows on the street, many of the windows being the entrances to very small shops some of which were restaurants. They had small stepstools outside their windows for patrons to climb to enter. We didn't eat at one of those. But we did eventually come to several slightly larger restaurants, at one of which we ate. It too had only a few tables and was tiny. Apparently, the kitchen was above it. A door at the side looked like it just opened to a closet, and in a sense it did. But then I saw a wooden platform descending inside it, just to the left of the door. I expected a dumbwaiter, but it was not so dumb. On the platform I saw the toes of the shoes of a man, and when the platform was low enough, his hand appeared with a bowl of food that he passed to the waitress. He then rode the platform back up. This was repeated several times while we were there, including when he brought our food. I had a bowl of noodles.

After lunch we walked back to the area of the Olympics and just past it found our other objective: A museum of the 55 minority ethnicities of China. This was an outdoor museum, in the sense that each ethnicity had its own small compound, with one or more

buildings in the style of that ethnicity's homeland, all furnished and decorated as it would be there, and attended by a person in native garb. Most people in China are Han Chinese, and I couldn't help thinking that their attitude toward the minorities was very similar to what ours is, or at least used to be, toward native Americans. And I suspect that the minorities' attitudes toward the Han may be like native Americans' attitudes toward white people. I tried to discuss this with Henry, specifically with reference to the Tibetans. He was convinced that the Tibetans are far better off as part of China than they would be had they remained independent. They are, he says, rich. I wonder.

We also talked about China's governance. Henry is proud of having become a member of the Communist Party, which apparently is not a trivial accomplishment. While I spoke of what I take to be the disadvantages of their system – the lack of freedom – he certainly wasn't concerned about that, and didn't believe some of the things that I told him about the treatment of dissidents. He probably assumes that I've been just as subject to western propaganda as he has been to Chinese propaganda.

The ethnic museum was very large, as it would have to be to include all 55 minorities. I was amazed at how realistic everything looked, with primitive buildings that looked like they'd had centuries of wear. I asked if they had been brought here from far away, but Henry seemed sure that it had all been built recently. Anyhow, I was getting tired, and so we didn't attempt to visit more than a few of these displays. I opted for a taxi back to my hotel, as I really had had enough. I spent the rest of the day in my room, and didn't even go out for dinner. I just ate some of the fruit that Henry had given me when I arrived. And went to bed early.

Friday, May 6

I told Henry that I did not want to plan any activities for Thursday, since I wanted time to myself, partially to work but partially just to be by myself. During the night Wednesday, I heard it storming outside and thought perhaps I'd picked a good day to stay in. In fact, I guess the rain stopped and it was dry most of the day, even quite pleasant that afternoon when I went out. I worked during the morning then went for a walk at lunch time looking for a place to eat.

The street inside the campus next to my hotel crosses most of the campus, and part way along it I found a small restaurant and stepped inside. There were just a few tables, and there were what seemed to be two kitchens, one on either side. I've since learned that one was for fast food and the other for slightly more elaborate noodle and rice dishes. There were several people standing at the window of the latter, and as I waited, I noticed a man at the nearest table eating a bowl of noodles that I thought looked good. When I got to the front of the line, I pointed to that and asked for the same. The woman behind the window understood, told me the cost of it through a patron who translated, and took my money. She motioned me to sit, so I did, at the same table where the man was eating. The woman with him told me the name of the dish, and I did my best to write it into my iPhone in case I'd want to order it again. It was indeed good enough that I went there again today, planning to use what I'd learned. But before I could say it, the woman

recognized me and said it aloud herself, as a question, and I just nodded and paid. The dish was just noodles with a few vegetables and some egg, but it tasted fine.

From there I went out the south gate of the campus and explored the neighborhood a bit. I quickly found a sign for a café, but when I went through the door, I only found a set of stairs, and I wasn't prepared to walk up them and into a place that might not be a café, so I moved on. I learned this afternoon, from Henry, that this was indeed a very popular café, and I have now been up those stairs. But on Thursday I had to explore further before finding a café that I ventured into.

This was called Stairway to Love, the possible implications of which I didn't really think through until later, since the sign said it was a café and had wifi. It was in fact a very small café, and the man who served me was very friendly and solicitous. I sat in a very comfortable chair, drank two excellent coffees, and accessed the internet on my iPhone for a couple of hours. The man even gave me a card, which looked rather like a gold credit card. It is apparently good for something when I return, though I don't know what.

That evening, I ate dinner in the hotel restaurant, as I had once before. When I sat down, they immediately brought me the same bottle of juice – blueberry juice, I think – that I'd had my first time when I dined there with Prof. Ma. They seemed to have decided that was my drink. As for food, I found a dish of meat balls in the menu and pointed to it. For some reason that I still don't understand, the waitress seemed reluctant to believe me, and there was some fuss involving her and other staff before they accepted that this was my order. The food, when it arrived, was OK but nothing special, so I don't know what the problem was.

It was at this restaurant the first evening that I ate there, that I had them try to correct my reading of the menu. It was a large book of a menu, with a hard cover, and the dishes all appeared with colorful photos and labels in Chinese beneath them. Fortunately, there also were labels in English for each of them, but these were written sideways next to the photos. To read them, I turned the menu 90 degrees. But the waitress came over and corrected me, turning the menu back the way she thought it should appear. I decided not to change it back, but simply changed my position and tilted my head so that I could read the labels sideways. Eventually she noticed this and apologized once she saw what I was reading.

Today I joined Phil Potter's group of Ford School students for a meeting they had scheduled with a man at Microsoft. We'd agreed that I would meet them at 7:50 AM at the west gate to Renmin University [the Chinese university that has a relationship with our Ford School], which is up the road about a 20-minute walk from my hotel. It was an easy walk, but since I didn't know what to look for, I asked people many times to direct me to Renmin University, each time being told to continue as I was going. When I got there, it was unmistakable, with a large sign identifying it.

I soon met Phil and then waited with him in their hotel lobby until the students showed up, along with Ann Lin, the second professor accompanying them on their trip. A bus

had been arranged to take us to Microsoft, where we met for the better part of two hours with the regional director of technology, a U of M alum. He was open and frank in his answers to all our questions, and it was a very good meeting. There was some mention of the role that the communist party plays in business, and he said that he used to be a member of the party but is not now. A student asked why he left the party, and he said that he became an American citizen when he was in the US. That may help to explain why he was so open with us.

Later, as I spent the afternoon working in my hotel, Henry came with his girlfriend and took me to the café I mentioned above. He showed up with a bag of small tomatoes that he had bought for me to snack on. I'd told him the first day, when he brought me fruit and candy as welcoming gifts, that I'm diabetic and couldn't eat sugar. He thought tomatoes would be perfect, which they are. Except that I'm not used to eating them as fruit. The Chinese are. They serve these small tomatoes along with other fruit – melon, pineapple, and grapes – for dessert.

We spent perhaps two hours nursing coffees at the café and talking about all sorts of things. Both he and his girlfriend are members of the communist party, and I tried to convince them that, although it is run by that party, China really is no longer a communist country. They resisted that.

I spent my evening with Phil, Ann, and Ann's dad, who flew in today from Taiwan where he lives, to attend a function at yet another university. He took us to a nice restaurant in a good hotel, and we had what was certainly the best meal I've had yet in Beijing. This was true even though it included some dishes that I might have been reluctant to eat had I felt I had a choice. One was river shrimp. These are very small shrimp, so small that it would be hopeless to try to extract them from their shells, so you just eat them whole, shell and all. They were crunchy, and delicious. I went back for more.

Another dish was something that Ann explained to me before it arrived, and ordered only after assuring her father that yes, we'd not be put off by visible fat. It was a square of very fatty pork that Ann said had been cooked in a way that removed the grease. It didn't look appealing, but again, once I started eating it, I loved it.

There were several other dishes including small spareribs that were out of this world. The only challenge with them was trying to eat them with chopsticks. I managed, though, and ate six or seven.

Throughout dinner we engaged in conversation that was mostly about China and its history. Ann's father was smuggled out of China to Hong Kong when he was ten and the communists had his nationalist family on the run. His mother stayed behind and was imprisoned and tortured by the communists. At one point she was stood on a table and her hair tied to a beam above her, then the table removed so that she hung by her hair. They know this because, several decades later after normalization of relations between the US and China, they were able to get her out of China to the US, and then to Taiwan where by then they lived.

Ann's father is now a well-known and respected scientist, with many connections in China, and he has strong and interesting views about the strengths and weaknesses of China.

Sunday, May 8

I spent yesterday with my student, Jenny Lin, and her family. Jenny is a PhD student in economics and has been working with me for the last two years. She's an American citizen, raised in California, but she was born here and lived here with her grandparents (her mother had gone to the US to study) until she was five. She just happened to be visiting Beijing this week, so she contacted me, and we spent the day together, as tourists.

I'd heard from the students that Peking University is very pretty, so that's where we went first. She had never been there, even though her mother had graduated from there. It was indeed a very pretty campus, with traditional Chinese architecture. Most attractive was a lake that we walked around. There was a tall Chinese tower next to it that made for some beautiful photos. [Sadly, I cannot now find those photos.]

At one point we needed a restroom and tried several buildings looking for one. Some buildings were just locked, while another was open but had men inside who were not at all welcoming. Then we found a modern building that seemed open, and we followed a couple of people into it and passed a guard who was stationed inside the door. Once past that, Jenny pointed out that the people we followed had used a card to open the door, so we had snuck in illegally. This apparently is often the case here; by acting like we were there appropriately, the guard didn't bother us. After we'd found restrooms, we returned to the entrance to exit. Jenny saw people ahead of us using what she thought was a card to open the door to get out. She was sure that we'd not be able to get out, but when we got there, we saw that it wasn't a card reader, but just a button that they were pressing to open the door. We got out, again without comment from the guard.

We left the campus and walked a short distance to where there were many restaurants in a row. Jenny read their signs and explained what their specialties were, including from many different regions of China. Many specialized in seafood, and it was one of those that we selected. Jenny was dismayed by the menu, because it was all in Chinese, and her Chinese is not good enough, she thought, to handle it. She did fine, and we had soup and two other dishes that were all good.

The fish was fresh. We know that, because they brought it out to show us, still alive, flopping around at the bottom of a black plastic bag. As Jenny pointed out, we had no way of knowing what they did with it back in the kitchen, or even that this was the same fish that we got to eat. But I presume it was. It was served in a large wide metal bowl that it had been cooked in, cut into pieces and submerged in a broth with vegetables in which it had been boiled. She had asked that it not be too spicy, and she was then surprised when it was served with many dozens of small red peppers floating on the liquid. But the waiter came immediately with a ladle and scooped most of them out into

a bowl. Jenny decided that the spiciness was perhaps controlled by how long the peppers were left in. She had also asked for a dish that would have few bones, both for my preference and for hers. But since this was the whole fish, it inevitably had plenty of them. Still, quite a few of the pieces of fish that I got from the dish and ate were free of bones, and all were very tasty.

By the time we finished lunch it was 3:00, and we didn't have time to do much else before picking up Jenny's mother and meeting her uncle for dinner at 5:30. But we had a bit of time, so we took the subway to Tiananmen Square, site of Mao's tomb and across the street from the Forbidden City. This required taking three different subways, all of which were far more crowded than Jenny had expected. It took longer than she'd expected too, so we didn't do much at the Square. We did however enter briefly into a garden next to the Forbidden City that I later learned was celebrating Sun Yat Sen, who led the liberation of China from somebody (I'm not sure, either the British or the emperors or both) in the early 20th century. He is revered in both communist China and Taiwan. The garden was very pleasant, and we'd have happily stayed longer if we'd had more time. I wanted to buy a cold drink there, but they didn't have diet soda, so I just got water. Jenny chose a frozen yoghurt on a stick, which she found disappointing and threw away half-eaten.

We took the subway back part way along the route we'd taken to get there, because Jenny's grandmother's "house" was near one of the places where we'd transferred trains earlier. Once there, though, Jenny had no idea where we were or how to get to the house, so we then took a taxi for what was a very short distance. I say "house" because this was an apartment (or condominium, I guess, since they owned it) on the 7th floor of a high-rise building. This is about the only form of living in Beijing, so it makes sense that people speak of them as houses, I guess.

I'd never been to a person's home in China, so I was interested to see what it would be like. It was not much different from apartments in the US. The only thing unusual that I saw was a small room off the kitchen, which Jenny described as being "for cutting." Since it had a window and the kitchen itself did not, I can only think that it was better for cutting vegetables (which the Chinese do a lot!) because of the light and/or the ventilation.

The apartment had been purchased by Jenny's parents for her paternal grandparents some years ago, as both were frail and needed care. Jenny's aunt lives there with her grandmother (her grandfather died earlier this year), and I met them both, though they spoke no English. Jenny's mother was also there, visiting from California, which was the reason for Jenny's visit also, so that she could see both her mother and her grandmother.

After a very brief visit, the three of us – Jenny, her mother, and I – took a taxi to the restaurant where we would meet Jenny's uncle and cousin. Or we tried. First, we had a hard time getting any taxi to stop for us. Then the first one that did stop claimed not to know where the restaurant was, so we didn't take it. We did take the second one that stopped, even though it became clear that its driver also had no idea where to go.

Through much of the ride, Jenny's mother was on Jenny's phone talking to Jenny's uncle, who was already at the restaurant, trying to guide us (and the driver – he took the phone sometimes as well) where to go.

I learned that locations in Beijing seldom have addresses, and when they do, they are not helpful, as most buildings are not labeled with numbers. All we had was the name of the restaurant – one of a large chain of Peking Duck restaurants, but one that was fairly new – and the section of Beijing that it was in. Somehow, we did manage to find it eventually, and it was such a large and visible establishment that it was hard to understand how it could have escaped notice. On the other hand, this is a huge city, recently having passed 20 million in population.

The restaurant occupied three floors of a large building, each floor with a large open room, heavily decorated with all sorts of things, including statues of athletes in action, and with side hallways and smaller private rooms. We went to one of those hallways on the second floor, but even there, finding the right room was a challenge. After we exited the elevator, we had no idea which room to go to, and Jenny's mother had to phone her uncle once again to find him. He and his son came out to meet us.

We sat at a round table that was already set with small plates of appetizers at each seat. Before we had even started on these, the waiters brought us additional small dishes, none of which I can now remember except a plate of scallops and a bowl of shark fin soup. Jenny asked if I objected to eating shark fin, as many Americans do because it kills the sharks for such a small part of their bodies. I said yes, but I eat it anyway, which I do. I remembered having it once before and enjoying it. I try not to let ethics interfere with my pleasure.

The main dish, of course, was Peking Duck. Two whole ducks were brought into our room by two expert cooks, who carved them in front of us and placed the sliced meat on plates that were kept warm over candles on the lazy-Susan in front of us. The slices each include some of the duck's skin, as that is what makes this special. A waiter assembled my first portion for me, showing me how to take a pancake with my chopsticks, select some meat and dip that into dark brown sauce (same as we use for Mu Shu, I think) and spread it on the pancake, add some slivers of onion or cucumber, fold the pancake over it, and eat. Delicious, though not quite as good as I remembered it from before, and I don't know why. That didn't stop me from eating a lot of it.

The last thing served by those carving the ducks was a plate with two skinless slices of meat laid across a layer of bones and other bits. This, it was explained, was the head and the tail of the duck, and was the best part. Fortunately, it was only the meat that was the best part, and the bits from the head and tail were only to somehow signal this, not to be eaten. [Actually, I learned later that the Chinese often do eat these parts, but nobody expected me to.]

Toward the end of the meal, they brought us two cards, one for each of the ducks, stating the duck's numbers. This restaurant chain has been in operation since 1864, and each

duck has been given a code number since the start. Our ducks were numbers 148,062,882 and 148,062,883. I got to keep the cards.

Understanding these numbers turned out to be just a bit tricky because of the Chinese custom of dividing numbers into groups of ten thousand, rather than one thousand as we do. Thus their term analogous to million (1 with two sets of three zeros) is our one hundred million (1 with two sets of four zeros). Translating from one to the other takes a little effort, and it caused some confusion at the table as this was being explained. [And it still confuses me, years later. I wonder if what I said is correct.]

When I first met Jenny yesterday, she started by talking about how trying it can be to see her mother, who is constantly critical, as are her other relatives. On seeing her, they'll immediately comment that she has put on weight, for example (and believe me, she is not overweight at all). And her mother will accuse her of slouching all the time. I found her mother extremely pleasant to talk to, and the only sign I saw of this was one comment about Jenny being a picky eater. She did seem rather selective at the dinner, which may be what that was about, but she certainly didn't hesitate to eat what she liked. She was continuing to eat duck long after the rest of us were on dessert.

Tuesday, May 10

I've spent the last three days on my own, and all of it almost entirely in coffee shops, so there is not much to report. I'd found one coffee shop myself, and Henry had introduced me to another. Both have not only coffee, but also wifi and food, including western food. By Sunday I had had my fill of Chinese food, or at least of the sorts I can get here in the hotel on my own. I was eager to finally get some western food, and the first coffee shop did not disappoint. I had a breakfast of bacon and eggs, then later a tuna sandwich for lunch. Each day I've spent several hours in one coffee shop, then moved to the other where I've had still more coffee and, later, supper. Last night I actually ordered Chinese food there, but it was much more western style than I've found in normal Chinese restaurants here.

I've spent my time each day partly working on my laptop on things as Associate Dean, partly writing a new paper that I had an idea for a few nights ago, and partly on my iPhone doing crossword puzzles. It's been a somewhat productive but also very relaxing few days.

I decided yesterday that it was time to get some laundry done. In my room's desk drawer, I found a plastic bag for laundry and a form to fill out with the items to be washed. Oddly, it didn't seem to mention ordinary shirts and underwear, so I wrote them in myself. I left the bag of laundry, with the form, on the bed when I left for the day. To my surprise, when I returned it was still there. So, I took it down to the front desk and handed it in there. But they were unhappy with it for some reason that I could not understand. None of the staff spoke English, but a man in a suit on my side of the counter tried to explain to me, in English, that it would take three days for the laundry to be done. That was a problem, since I only had two-days-worth of clean clothes left. I'm

afraid I got rather irritated with the man until he explained that he didn't work for the hotel, he was just a customer trying to be helpful by translating. I asked him to please tell them that I needed the laundry done by Wednesday, and I left.

Sometime later, I was sprawled on my bed naked watching TV when there was a knock on the door. I scrambled to put on pants, answered the door, and a woman came in with the laundry form that I'd filled out, plus another just like it that she wanted me to fill out. That seemed silly, but she insisted, and even tore the old one in two to make her point. o I started filling out the new form. Only then did I realize that it was not the same as the one I had used. It was the appropriate one for this sort of laundry, listing shirts, underpants, and socks as I needed. There is probably such a form in my desk drawer, if I'd been smart enough to look for it. Anyhow, all is well except that I may have reinforced the image of an ugly American with my irritation. I found my laundry, nicely clean, hanging in my closet when I returned today.

Nothing much else to tell, except some odds and ends. One interesting thing that I learned from Jenny earlier and haven't mentioned: The Chinese, she says, have no word for "yes." They do have a word for "no," but when "yes" is needed they just repeat a word from the question they've been asked. So "Do you know the way to San Jose?" would be answered with "know." "Would you like another bowl of rice?" by "another," or perhaps "like." And so forth. I'm having dinner with the students this evening, and with Ann Lin. I'll have to ask her if this is right. Jenny, of course, was never taught Chinese; she just grew up with it. This may only be the way that her family talks, not others. [Ann later confirmed this, in essence.]

Another tidbit: In restaurants – nice ones, that is – there are always cloth covers on the backs of the chairs. These are to cover your coat or anything else you bring with you (a purse hanging on the chair, for example) to protect them. Sloppy eater that I am, I'm not sure that even I am capable of spilling onto the back of my chair, so maybe these are protecting from spills by the waitstaff.

And a nice innovation: The drain in the bathroom sink in my hotel room has a small disk, inside the drain at the top, that swivels on an axis to open and close the drain. The disk is metal but has a rubber ring, so that it works effectively to keep the water in the sink when you want that. To open it, you just touch either side and it swivels open. This is so much simpler and more effective than the closers we commonly use that require a mechanism inside the drain, linked to a lever outside. And it's much more elegant than a rubber stopper on a chain. I've seen this now in several restrooms, as well as in my hotel. Whoever invented this ought to be marketing it in the US.

Subways: I mentioned riding several of them earlier. These are in two styles. The newer ones are said to be Hong Kong style: there are glass walls and doors at the edge of the platform, protecting you from the moving train. When the train arrives, doors of both this wall and the train itself open. This is so much safer than the older style that is on the older lines in Beijing, where the platform is just open, and a person could easily fall off in front of an oncoming train. I suppose (and hope) that newer subways in the US are of the

newer style as well. I can understand, though, that older ones did not have this feature, since it must take some relatively high-powered technology to synchronize the doors on the platform and the train. I note that the train inside Detroit airport has this feature, so it is probably standard everywhere.

Also on the subway, as we speed along between stops, you can watch video ads outside the windows. These are displayed on extremely long video screens on the walls of the subway. The picture is coordinated with the speed of the train so that it appears stationary. I'm told that it isn't just pre-programmed with the normal speed of trains, but rather that it uses sensors to measure the actual speed of the train and synchronize to that. Remarkable example of Communist China's market economy!

My room is on the 16th floor of my hotel. I soon noticed, as I rode the elevator, that it skipped both floors 13 and 14. Skipping 13 I'm used to in the west, since 13 is unlucky. I wondered if 14 is unlucky here. Not exactly, I was told. The unlucky number is 4, because the Chinese word for four sounds like "death." Therefore, I was told by Jenny's family, tall buildings omit floors 4, 14, 24, etc. If so, then my 16th floor is actually the 13th, as one counts normally. But when I checked back at the hotel, it does not omit number 4. Thank goodness, I'm safe. My only explanation is that the hotel may use the first four or more floors for things other than guest rooms, like meeting rooms, and they feel no need to cater to superstition for those.

I'm currently in the small hotel restaurant where I can get coffee. Before I discovered the coffee shops across campus, I came here often. I noticed that they play music that is distinctly American. It must be a single CD that they play every time, because I heard the same old Jose Feliciano song three days running at about the same time. I mention it now because they were just playing "God Bless America," by Celine Dion or somebody like that.

I really should learn some basic Chinese. All I know are "nee how" for hello and "sheh sheh" for thank you. I usually do fine with gestures, but this morning I tried to signal for my check as I often do, both at home and here, by pretending to write. The waitress brought me a pen and paper.

Friday, May 13

This is my next-to-last day here. I gave a lecture in BIT yesterday, followed by two hours with students answering (and asking) questions. That's the extent of my official role here on this trip, which Mark says is mainly about "friendship."

In fact, I hadn't seen him at all since the day of my arrival, until yesterday. He explained on the phone Wednesday evening that he had been called away by the unexpected death of his advisor, a man in his 80s in another city. I gather from the photos that Mark later showed me that this was a pretty big deal, with huge arrays of flowers placed along the fences near his home to memorialize him. I don't know how many days this took Mark away from Beijing, but apparently he had ignored me more than he intended.

That was fine with me. As you've seen, although it took me a few days to find comfortable places to work, eat, and drink, the two coffee shops have served that purpose wonderfully. Each day I walk across campus to the first of these where I have breakfast and/or lunch, plus coffee, and I sit in a nicely stuffed chair working on my laptop connected to their wifi. In the afternoon, just for variety, I switch to the other coffee shop, a block further away, where I do the same. I've had dinner there twice, ordering Chinese food, but much more in the style of what we have in the US: stir-fried meat and vegetables with rice.

In fact, I've gotten to like this well enough that I have now told Mark, in response to his repeated requests that started the first hour that I saw him, that I will likely come back next year. This is either the perfect time to come to Beijing, in terms of weather, or I've been extremely lucky. It's never been too hot or too cold, and about half the days have been sunny, with only one day of rain. Mark also said, after my talk yesterday where it turned out almost all the audience was students in finance, that he could arrange for me to teach a short course on trade to students of trade. I'd like that, since I'd feel that I had more of a purpose than I had this time. I love the free time, but a little more structure would feel better.

On Tuesday evening I joined the student group again for dinner. Phil had invited me earlier, saying they would be going for Peking Duck. Having just had that on Saturday myself, that was not a great attraction, but I was happy to see Phil, Ann, and the students again.

We walked from their hotel at Ren Da (what they call Renmin University, just as they call Beijing University Bei Da) to the restaurant. Or rather, again we tried. Ann had a map, but I'm not sure where she had gotten it. In any case, after we'd walked quite a way along one street without finding the restaurant, she decided that we were going the wrong direction. We crossed a pedestrian bridge (from whichI could see my hotel), and walked back the way we had come but on the other side of the street. Several times, Ann thought we were getting close, based on the few street numbers that she found, and eventually we did find it, much further away than she'd imagined.

We were an hour late for our reservation, but that wasn't a problem. They probably don't plan to follow one party of 18 with another. We had a room to ourselves, and a large round table with a huge lazy Susan, big enough for all of us without being at all cramped.

I sat between Phil and a woman student. The student knew me better than I did her, but I suspect that I should have known her name. Perhaps she was in my class. I now know that she's from Peoria, and that she has a job lined up in Chicago.

I talked only with her for a while, because Phil and Ann were away from the table ordering our food. You might think Peking Duck would be simple, but no Chinese meal has only one course, and ordering all the other things is an art. I doubt that Phil contributed much to that process, except perhaps to sort out what it was all going to cost.

The plan was that we would all pay for our own meals, and student budgets required that they try to keep the cost down, contrary to the wishes of the restaurant staff. They managed it, though, only slightly exceeding our agreed limit, until one added beer. I'll have to ask Phil later whether he really got as much money from the students as he should have, to cover the bill that he charged on his credit card.

The meal included many side dishes, most of which I could not identify, and some of which I liked. One that I thought I'd like, but didn't, was duck tongue. These were long skinny things, maybe two inches long and just a quarter inch thick. Who knew that duck tongues have cartilage inside them? Do ours?

After dinner we all walked back to our hotels. Having seen mine on the way there, I was set to walk there directly. Fortunately, Ann saw that I was about to head in exactly the wrong direction and turned me around. Since my hotel was on the same street as the restaurant, it wasn't hard to reach if one went the right way. Ann said it would have been a blot on their academic records if they had lost the Associate Dean in Beijing. I agreed, since the Ford School has only one, without a spare.

That was Tuesday evening. Wednesday, I spent all day in the coffee shops, as I've described. Wednesday evening, back in my hotel, I first got a call from Henry asking about the plan for Thursday, when I would give my talk. I knew the time of the talk, but nothing else. He said he would pick me up at 1:30, and that we would check with Prof. Ma about other arrangements. Then he called back and said he'd been unable to reach Prof. Ma. I said that's fine; we'll just meet tomorrow. Later, though, after I was asleep, Mark called and seemed not to have spoken to Henry. He first mentioned getting together in the morning, but he then dropped that and left it that I'd see him for the talk. Thursday morning, once I was already again at the coffee shop, I found an e-mail from Henry saying the Prof. Ma would be meeting me at my hotel at 10:00. I had missed that, but apparently that was a plan from before my conversation with Mark. So, we were on track for Henry to pick me up at 1:30.

Back at my hotel for that, Henry arrived on time. But before we could leave, he got a call from Mark saying that he was on his way to the hotel, so we waited for him. A bit later he showed up in a taxi, which he then used to take me to his office building for the talk. Henry couldn't ride with us, because he had his bike, but he almost beat us there. Mark took me immediately to the room where I'd be speaking, but found it locked, so we went to his office. I was beginning to wonder if this talk would happen, or if it would have any audience.

In fact, it did happen, with an audience of about 15, mostly students. All the faculty that Mark saw in the hall and introduced me to said that they would miss my talk because they had classes or meetings. As usual, it was very hard to know, as I gave my talk, whether I was getting through to the audience, and if I was, whether I was pitching the material too high or too low. Only after I was done were there any questions, and fortunately these were good ones and indicated that they had been engaged. I felt good about the experience.

One member of the audience was a woman whom I later learned was an Associate Professor at BIT, just like Mark. He seems to view her as his rival, or at least his competitor. I don't know why. The questions that she asked were extremely good ones. That was not surprising once I learned that her specialty is trade (whereas Mark is more into international finance). She asked if I could send her my paper, and I readily agreed, if she e-mails me for it. I haven't heard from her yet, though.

I have heard from one of the students. Her name is Yi Tian, English name Kaitlyn, and she has been admitted to the Michigan's MAE program. I gather that she expects to attend, even though we do not provide any financial aid in that program, and it is quite expensive. Presumably either she or her parents have some money. I gathered from Henry – who Mark says is a better student than Kaitlyn – that he would love to attend school in the US but can't afford it. He plans to pursue a Masters in Finance at Renmin University in the fall. Kaitlyn wrote to me with questions about the economic model that I presented. They were good questions, showing that I had not carefully explained something, so I'm optimistic that she will do well.

In the evening, Mark and Henry took me to a Mongolian restaurant. Mark, it turns out, was born in Inner Mongolia, the part of Mongolia that is inside China. He is ethnically Han Chinese, and his parents settled in Mongolia following a Chinese government program that it has pursued in many parts of China (such as Tibet) to bring other regions up to the standard of the rest of China. In Mark's view, this program has succeeded well in Inner Mongolia, which is much more prosperous now than the separate country, (Outer) Mongolia.

The Mongolian restaurant's food was quite different from Chinese food. As always in China, there were several dishes that we shared. The main one was a cast-iron pot sitting on a burner and filled with a stew of pork, potatoes, and other vegetables. It was very good. The side dishes included a plate of mixed noodles and baby lima beans. That was a challenge to eat with chopsticks, and I wanted to see how the others did it. But the only time I saw either of them eat from this dish, they only ate the noodles, not the beans.

The most interesting, unusual, and tasty dish was a lamb soup that each of us got a bowl of and that came with a round wooden container that we all shared. It's hard to describe what was in that container. At first it looked like a giant mushroom, but full of holes. Then it became clear that it was hollow tubes of a tan material, each about an inch long and ¾ inch wide. They were standing on end in the container, touching one another and stuck together, so that the whole thing, when lifted, looked rather like a wide flat sponge. The waitress proceeded to pick it apart with chopsticks, so that we could each grab clumps of it ourselves and put it into our soup, swish it around, and eat it. Mark looked this up in the menu to find the English translation and learned that it was made of oats. Flavored with the soup, it was delicious!

Today, Mark came for me at noon, to take me to a noodle place. This, it turned out, was a fast-food restaurant, very bright and clean, looking like it might be modeled after

McDonalds. But there were waitstaff to take our order, which we chose from a regular menu that included lots of noodles but other dishes (rice, etc.) as well. I had a bowl of noodles with pork that looked a lot like what I always buy in the Tokyo airport, but which I'd known to be Chinese. It was almost as good as in Tokyo. Mark insisted that we also order several side dishes. One was similar to peanuts, though slightly larger and softer; very good. Another was stringy seaweed, also decent. And a third was potatoes. The surprise here was that the potatoes were very thin strips, like the seaweed, and colored the same as raw potato. But they were tender, so I presume that they were cooked somehow.

Most interesting about this restaurant was something Mark said was true at the one the night before, but I hadn't noticed. The waitress took our order on what looked like her phone. In fact, as she showed me later, it was labeled (in English) as a "Wireless Terminal" and the software configured specifically to this restaurant. As we ordered, she entered our choices into this, which sent them immediately, not just to the kitchen, but to the portion of the kitchen that would prepare them. Then, when the food was ready, she got a signal on this to pick it up. Very cool. Surely it won't be too long before we have the same in the US, although it makes most sense at fast-food restaurants with waitstaff, since it speeds things up. And we don't have many of those, because of the cost of labor.

I'm back in my hotel now, waiting for Mark to come for me again to take me to dinner. He says he'll show me another kind of noodles. As I mentioned, early in the trip I'd said noodles were something that I like. They are not good for me, but they seldom have bones, shells, or gristle.

Saturday, May 14

I'm now on my way home, on the flight to Seattle. Mark did come for me as planned, but he surprised me by having with him four students, none of whom I'd met before. It was never entirely clear that he had met them himself, since none of them seemed to be studying with him. Three were Master's students, or prospective ones, and one was an undergraduate, the boyfriend of one of the others. And all were foreign. Three were from South Korea and the fourth from Ghana. This turned out to be a nice thing, because at dinner I was able to talk to them about the political situation in China – the repression of dissent – without having to hear the party line.

We walked through campus to the East side, where Mark took us to a small Japanese restaurant. One of the students objected, however, and said there was a much better one across the street, so we went there. On the way, we passed a common site in Beijing at this time of year: vendors selling pineapple on a stick. They cut the outside off a fresh pineapple right there at their carts, carve it into a sort of spiral shape that makes it easier to eat than if the surface were smooth, put it on a stick, and wrap it in clear plastic. Mark bought one for each of us, and as I happened to get one that was not yet wrapped, I started eating it right away. So did the student from Ghana, but the others all waited, probably not wanting to spoil their appetites. I had no trouble finishing mine before the meal, nor any trouble eating my dinner, but I did drip an awful lot of pineapple juice on

the table that I had to mop up with napkins. Napkins here are just tissues, and they are provided in the nice restaurants in wooden dispensers on the tables.



Our group for dinner, from trip

For dinner, Mark had us each select a single dish for ourselves, most of us choosing a bowl of noodles, though one chose a rice dish. Then Mark also ordered a few side dishes, including several forms of sushi. There was plenty to eat.

I had asked Henry, my first day with him, if he knew about the Chinese artist who had been the designer for the Birds Nest Olympic Stadium and who had been arrested in April. He did not, and he was very skeptical that anything like that could have happened. I couldn't at that point remember the man's name, but I had since looked it up: Ai Weiwei. At dinner I asked the students if they knew about him. Only one of them did, the student from Ghana, and I asked how he knew about it. He said that, because he studies human rights, he uses a proxy server to get access to things on the web that are blocked in China. So yes, he knew all about it. We all then talked about what it is like to live in a country where you can only learn what is going on in the world through the filter of what the government lets you know. They all agreed with me that this was unacceptable, although since they were in China only temporarily as students, I don't think it bothered them too much. As we talked about all this, Mark listened but did not participate. I wondered if this conversation was making him uncomfortable, but if so, he didn't show it.

That's about it for this trip, except for a couple more odds and ends. One is the Gingko trees. There are lots of them here, lining many of the streets. I commented on that at one point and was told that of course they are sprayed so that they won't produce berries, since the berries smell awful. Perhaps I should suggest that to our neighbors, as there are so many Gingkos in our neighborhood.

Not surprisingly on a campus, there are lots of bikes. It struck me, though, that only about half of them are locked, and almost none of them are locked to something immovable the way we would do in the US. I gather that bicycle thievery is not quite as rampant as it is, or would be, in the US. When I asked the students about this, they all said that they locked their bikes, and that those that are not locked are probably just too old to be worth stealing.

At meals, starting with my first meal with Mark, I was surprised and not entirely happy that Mark would repeatedly reach out and serve some food from one of the shared dishes onto my plate. Given that I might not actually like all these dishes, that seemed rude to me, as well as intrusive. Jenny later explained to me that this is standard Chinese custom, and indeed is it very impolite, if you have a guest, not to keep serving them food. In fact, she is routinely criticized by her mother and other relatives for not doing that as much as she should. So, I can't blame Mark.

Finally, today as I was checking out of the hotel and had to wait a few minutes for them to print up the bill for my signature, the woman brought me a small paper cup of hot water to drink. I'd learned at one of my first meals that a cup of hot water, not tea, is often served with a meal. For someone who is used to ice water, that seems odd. To my surprise, it tastes rather good and not significantly less so than Chinese tea. Maybe that's because the tea often seems weak.

I didn't try to sleep on this flight, even though I again have an empty seat next to me. Instead, I watched four movies: "The Tourist," with Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie; "The Green Hornet" with nobody much; "How Do You Know," with Reese Witherspoon, Paul Rudd, Clyve Owen, and Jack Nicholson; and "Salt," with Angelina Jolie again.