

# Month-long Trip of Daughter and Father in China

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Feb 21, 2017

### Abstract

My daughter and I spent Jan 5-25, 2017 on a self-guided tour of the southeast coast of China. My primary point is the salubrious impact of the trip on our relationship and generally to advocate such parent-child experiences. However, the bulk of the narrative and accompanying photos illustrate the wonders of modern China with my emphasis being on the incredible growth that has occurred and continues. Sharing of this travelogue with others has led to feedback that you might read in the 'comments' at the end.



Figure 1-1 Rosa and Roy in traffic mirror

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## 1 Introduction

My daughter and I took this trip to be together on an absorbing journey that would remove us from the day-to-day concerns at home and expose to a completely different culture. This essay or travelogue is meant to help us remember and our friends discover what we saw in China. Along the way, the essay exposes some of our dialogues and inter-personal experiences. Furthermore, I have tended to extrapolate about differences between the US and China and about the direction of the world, despite not being qualified for that.

The essay is organized chronologically and starts with the flight to China and ends with the flight from China -- itself a full day affair each way. Our trip within China took us from Shanghai in the middle of the county's coast to Guangzhou in the south. We took the train and divided the 1,200 kilometers from Shanghai to Guangzhou into stops at a farm near Mazhan and at the island city of Xiamen. The essay is divided into sections that accord with the places we stayed: Shanghai, Farm, Xiamen, and Guangzhou.

### 1.1 Daughter

Rosa and I both take this trip with the primary objective of getting to know one another better. We live in the same house for most of the past 21 years, but have never spent 3 weeks together constantly. Rosa notes that this may be here last holiday of this length for some years, as she expects to enter the workforce after graduating this May.

A photo next to my bed shows Rosa as a toddler. Children are cutest when they are youngest. However, abilities to reflect on life are greatest later.



Figure 1-1 Rosa as a toddler

I am old enough to be her grandfather which makes for numerous, odd situations. This trip itself is perhaps one such manifestation. She's young enough to not have gotten married and had children. After that happens, she will probably not want to travel alone with me. I'm old enough to have the time and money to afford such luxuries, as a 3-week trip to China for two travelers.

## 1.2 My China History



*Figure 1-2 Roy in Guangzhou in 1982*

For me this trip is also an opportunity to revisit a country which has changed significantly since my last visit. I've been to China several times. In 1982 Marilyn Zimmerman and I took a trip around the world and one stop was Hong Kong. After a few days in Hong Kong, which was then a British Colony but is part of China, we took a train to what the British called Canton and the Chinese called Guangzhou. In addition to a few days in Guangzhou, we also took a trip to a village that specialized in cut-paper art. I was befriended by a local in Guangzhou who feared that should his helping us become obvious to the authorities that he would be punished. Marilyn and I stayed at a four-star hotel near the train station, but were impressed with the relatively primitive facilities though very spacious and clean. Next I was in China in the 1990s in Beijing on my way to lecture in Korea. Later as an honorary professor at Dalian Maritime University, I spent a couple weeks in Dalian. Both trips impressed me with how much China had progressed since 1982. I might say that the country seemed to have moved from a 3rd-world economy to a developing economy. In the past 40 years, I have worked with many Chinese graduate students and professor. I have had more Chinese PhD students than American or British and the Chinese were typically my best students. They have kept me informed as to changes in China, and I am expecting to see a developed economy.

## 2 USA to China

Getting ready to go to China takes time. Flight itself is an adventure, which is why this first section is devoted to the start.



*Figure 2-1 Visa stamp in passport*

## **2.1 Preparation**

Preparing to go from the USA to China is unlike preparing to go from the USA to Canada. One needs a visa to go to China and to get a visa one must demonstrate pre-paid all travel arrangements. I went to the Chinese Embassy three times, first with my application, then with further documentation, and finally to retrieve the Visa stamp and pay the \$140 fee.

The popular, Fodor-style guide books for China are not unlike those for Canada, but the language is a new experience for Americans. I borrowed multiple books about calligraphy, grammar, and phonetics because a simple phrase book does not begin to capture the differences between Chinese and English.

## **2.2 Fifteen Hour Flight**

We left Baltimore at 8 a.m. and waited 5 hours in Boston for our non-stop flight to Shanghai. In the waiting area were almost exclusively Chinese people, and many were students or researchers returning to China to take advantage of USA academic winter break and to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

The flight was surprisingly comfortable for us as our seats in the last row had a gap between the 'window' seat and the window. Rosa and Roy took turns sleeping supine on the floor in that gap. We also were adjacent to the galley in which people congregated for free, endless snacks. Roy watched an intriguing Chinese movie called "The Rise of a Tomboy". A math-prodigy, college girl has developed a mathematical model for love, and the movie revolves around her attempt to prove the model correct. I found the movie delightful as a love story and a reflection of Chinese view of math and human relations. An auspicious beginning for the trip.

## **3 Shanghai**

Jan 6 at 8 p.m. Rosa and I arrive in Shanghai. In seeking directions, we get offered a ride by an expatriate American living in Shanghai. We arrive at our youth hostel and go to sleep.

This section next recounts our experiences in Shanghai on a day to day basis from Jan 7 thru Jan 11. We stayed at a hostel a block from the center of the shopping and financial district the first 3 days, but at a local hotel near the Qibao Ancient Village section of Shanghai 20 kilometers from the center for the last 2 days.

### **3.1 East Nanjing Road and People's Park**



*Figure 3-1 Crowds on Nanjing Rd one block from our Hostel*

Our hostel is one block from the world-famous East Nanjing Rd shopping area which intersects the world-famous Bund at one end and the People's Park at the other end. We stroll up and down Nanjing Rd and the Bund entering famous hotels and stores and are impressed with the vast numbers of people. Among the events into which we stumbled, one was a Chinese Economic Forum at a posh hotel. The hotel had a man-made waterfall and river running through it. We got free coffee, tea, and water.

On Jan 8, we go to People's Park. The Park is approximately the size of Central Park in Manhattan and similarly surrounded by massive skyscrapers. We notice an interesting arrangement of umbrellas on the ground with elderly people near them and realize the notices on the umbrella announce the characteristics of the parent's daughter or son for whom the parent is seeking a husband or wife. Later we visit the Shanghai Museum which is a four-story museum loaded with sculpture, ceramics, painting, and calligraphy from thousands of years of Chinese history. Each day we are of course also sampling the interestingly different food of China, which emphasizes fresh vegetables cooked in a wok.



*Figure 3-2 Umbrella Match Making*  
*Figure 3-3 Rosa in People's Park (left)*



*Figure 3-4 River through hotel (left)*

*Figure 3-5 Southwest corner of People's Park aerial view (upper left)*

*Figure 3-6 Roy in People's Park (above)*

### **3.2 Financial District and Train Station**

On Jan 9, we get an all-day pass on the metro. First, we go to Pudong, the world-famous financial district with many futuristic sky scrapers. We go inside the 5-star, Grand Hyatt Hotel which is on floors 53 to 88 of a skyscraper. The lobby features the Hyatt cathedral-look with rooms along the outside but an interior that is hollow. We tour a sumptuous buffet restaurant and enjoy the spectacular views of Shanghai from the windows that go floor to ceiling. Next, we go by metro to the Hongquiao Railway Station, which while one of several major railway stations in China, also is the largest railway station in Asia. The place is a city unto itself. We get our train tickets here for the rest of our 3-week journey, as we will be returning to Hongquiao Station on Jan 12 for our trip to Mazhan. Then we go to a campus of Shanghai Jiao Tong University that is marked on the metro map as a stop devoted to that university. Across its campuses, it has 42,000 students and was founded in 1896. I am reminded of my many pleasant experiences with university life. However, we also note in one of the lecture halls that the doors



are open to the building and the halls are cold, but the individual classrooms are heated and warm. (Later we will discover this is a common practice in China).



*Figure 3-7 Financial District as seen a couple blocks from our hostel*



*Figure 3-8 Shanghai Rail Station*



*Figure 3-9 Ancient Village*

### 3.3 Ancient Village and Brain Hospital

On January 10 we leave the youth hostel, because Roy thinks we would do well to be based in another part of Shanghai after days of walking on the premiere shopping street of East Nanjing Road; he wants to see something closer to everyday life. Rosa wants to go the Ancient Village in the Qibao area of Shanghai. So, we go there and then find a nice hotel. For \$17/day we get a nice room with two beds, full bathroom, cable TV, and free breakfast buffet. Unfortunately, Rosa has gastrointestinal distress. Rosa stays in the room, and Roy explores the ancient town. That evening we eat in a restaurant bazaar above the metro station one block from our hotel. Rosa has rice, vegetables, fruit smoothie, and pastries to try to reconnect with her regular diet in the US.

Roy feasts on a Chinese breakfast buffet with spicy-pickled vegetables, meat egg rolls, porridge soup, sautéed vegetables of various sorts, boiled eggs, orange juice, coffee with milk and sugar, tea with milk and sugar – he's a happy camper, but Rosa only eats the fresh fruit. Rosa again stays in the room and Roy explores the neighborhood.

Roy finds green fields, canals, a garden center, and finally the Shanghai Blue Cross Brain Hospital. This 8-story, multi-winged building is the first Roy has seen dedicated to the 'Brain', namely neurology and neurosurgery. Roy spends about 4 hours in the hospital which is modern and impressive. He walks everywhere, including through the intensive care wards and around the hyperbaric oxygen suites. Finally, on almost exiting, he discovers a public, blood pressure machine and takes his pressure. It is 198/125. Far too high.



*Figure 3-10 Shanghai Brain Hospital*

He watches a dozen other people measure their blood pressure, and theirs are all normal. He takes his again and it is 195/127. Sobering. Roy was feeling fine for days but maybe he was not tired because of this skyrocketing blood pressure. Anyhow, he headed to the hotel and had a peaceful night.

### 3.4 Reflections on Shanghai and Rosa

My expectations of China have been confirmed by Shanghai. More high-rise, modern skyscrapers fill the horizon than any other city I have visited. New York City and Hong Kong have a great density of skyscrapers in certain blocks but Shanghai has newer and more overall. The shops are well-stocked with contemporary items. With public transportation, one can easily get between any two locations.

Rosa hit a rough patch in the road half-way through the Shanghai visit. Unclear on what she had or why, she thought of whatever had changed since Baltimore – perhaps the quality of the air was to blame, perhaps the foreign diet or even the smells. Our interpretation in the end is that she had a 2-day gastrointestinal disorder. After she recovered, she was again able to enjoy China.

## 4 Farm

On Jan 12 Rosa is feeling better and eats a full breakfast. She guides us again to the giant train station, and we begin our journey to the farm. We had reserved a room in this farmhouse on Airbnb.

### 4.1 Cangnan

On the way from Shanghai to the farm, the nearest train stop is Cangnan. At the Shanghai train station, Roy talks with a woman named Joy in the line. She is studying business English at the university, and he show her directions to the farm and she comments we will have challenges getting from the Cangnan train station to the farm. In the train, each person has assigned seats, and Roy did not see Joy during the ride. On exiting the train, Joy approaches us and offers to further help. She has quietly written a 7-page guide supplemented with 3 sticky notes. We can show the Chinese to people who might help us, should we get lost. What a blessing! Furthermore, as we struggle with getting a taxi to the bus station, she gets into our taxi, goes with us to the bus station, and puts us on the right bus. Such acts of generosity were common in our visit to China, and we are very grateful to those, such as Joy, that we met in China.

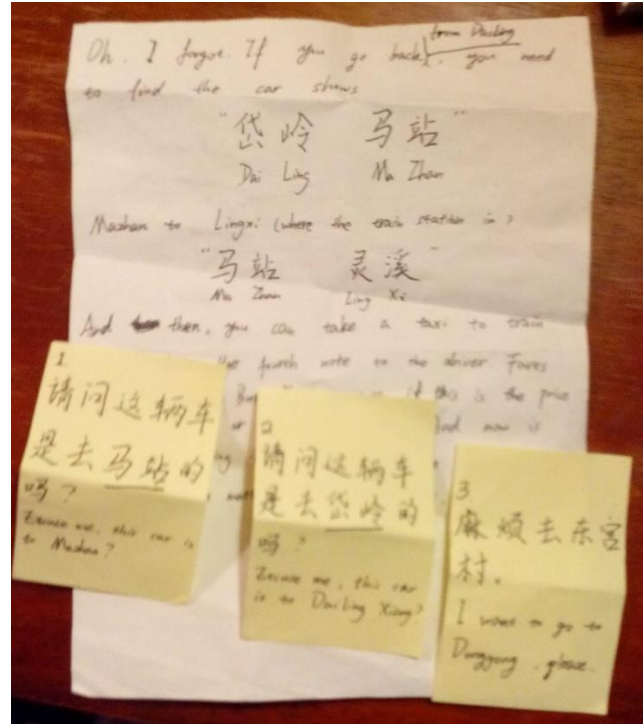


Figure 4-1 Part of letter from Joy

### 4.2 AirBnb Review

This is a review that I wrote for Airbnb: "We (father and his daughter) have had a wonderful 5-night stay at an Airbnb in Dailingxiang Donggongcun, China. Dailingxiang is a farming community of one-hundred homes a couple kilometers outside the village of Mazhan which itself is 40 kilometers from the city of Cangnan. We came to China from Baltimore, MD, USA on a 3-week vacation honoring the daughter's 21st birthday and her final winter break from college. We

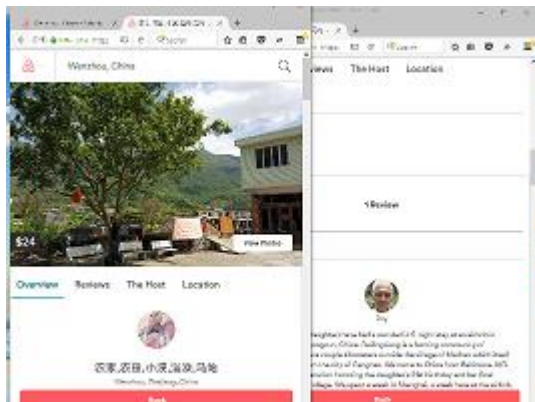


Figure 4-2 Airbnb Ad and Review

spent a week in Shanghai, a week here at the Airbnb, and will spend the final week in Xiamen. We recommend this Airbnb most highly. The hosts are generous, the accommodation comfortable, and the location ideal. The hosts are a couple who farm here and whose son-in-law in Hangzhou speaks fluent English and readily communicates by email, phone, or other modalities. The home has good Wi-Fi, comfortable beds, and a beautiful bathroom. The view from the main bedroom is breath-taking. The house is meticulously clean. The hosts provided home-cooked meals each day which were superb. Fresh ingredients from their farm and the sea were cooked before our eyes. We ate with the cooks.

Such an opportunity could never be had at a hotel and added to the wonder of our stay here. We call this “the heavenly farm in the mountain by the sea”. After a week in Shanghai this heavenly farm is a welcome visit to nature and Chinese rural life.

The area is mountainous, and the mountains go directly to the ocean. In our days in Dailingxiang we largely hiked the gorgeous mountain trails that overlooked either valleys of rich, terraced farm land or the ocean. The town of Mazhan is easily reached on foot and presents a rich array of eateries and shops. Prices are very reasonable and about half what prices are in Shanghai. Westerners are uncommon in this area, and English is not much spoken, but the people are so friendly that one can easily communicate by gesture. We heartily recommend this Airbnb and the area." That ends the review for Airbnb.



*Figure 4-3 My bedroom in farmhouse*



*Figure 4-4 Across the street from the farmhouse*



*Figure 4-5 View from my farm bedroom window*

### **4.3 Mountains and Ocean**

China between Shanghai and Guangzhou is largely hilly or mountainous and coastal. 95% of the Chinese people live near the coast. This has had interesting historical implications in terms of the isolation of certain groups of peoples but, more so, for being the interface to those international shipping.



*Figure 4-6 Mountains and Ocean*



*Figure 4-7 Roy on mountain road (above)*

*Figure 4-8 Rosa on beach (left)*

#### **4.4 Farming**

The USA was originally almost entirely an agrarian society with 99% of people working on farms (now the figure is the opposite with 1% working on farms). China was also mainly agrarian but has moved over the recent decades to being 50% agrarian. The village where we stayed manifested why a much larger portion of people are farmers in China than in USA. The many farms in our village are each very small and are cultivated each by hand. Each family has its own small piece of land. The land is extensively used as witnessed by the elaborate terracing of land in this mountainous area.



*Figure 4-9 Terraces*



*Figure 4-10 Farm Plot beside the farmhouse where we slept*

#### **4.5 Hakka**

Our farming area is inhabited by a minority called the Hakka, and one can witness here some of the special traditions of the Hakka people, such as burying their loved ones in flower-shaped mausoleums built into the cliffs. The first morning two military bands were playing at 6 a.m. in

front of our house. I went outside and clearly something festive was beginning. Any passer-by was offered free food. Soon dozens of people gathered in special clothes and with various banners. This was the beginning of a Hakka funeral. We joined a 1-hour, ceremonial march from our farm house up the mountain, with banners waving, bands playing, and firecrackers bursting. Eventually at the burial site, special ceremonies consecrated the ashes of the deceased. We marched back to the farm house were a feast with dozens of diverse dishes was served along with wine and alcohol in large quantities.



*Figure 4-11 Hakka Buffet*

This was after the funeral and dozens of courses were served. Roy in one corner drinking wine.

#### **4.6 Cangnan Again**

On our last day, we got a mini-van from the farm to Mazhan. In Mazhan, the driver obtained boxes of rice and other goods to deliver to Cangnan and more passengers. We arrived at Cangnan several hours prior to our train departure and had a chance to explore the town near the train station. We also had a hot bowl of noodle soup at a local restaurant.



This photo taken from the front of the Cangnan Train Station is meant to indicate the extent to which high rise apartment buildings abound in areas that China is developing. This was a typical scene in urban areas in my experience.

*Figure 4-12 Cangnan Train Station*

#### **4.7 Rosa and Me**



Rosa and I both enjoyed our stay on the farm. The typical day had her first eat breakfast and then we hiked from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. Then supper. Then retire to our separate bedrooms. The home had Wi-Fi throughout. I worked on the computer doing email or such. During our long hikes, we talked about life. Allow me to illustrate the dialog with the following sequence. I wrote



*Figure 4-13 Rosa reflecting in Buddhist Prayer Cave*

*The Botanical Gardens had many Buddhist Temples.*

in an earlier draft of this travelogue the following:

Rosa is passionate about climate change. She is convinced that the world is doomed soon unless she and her peers dedicate themselves to mobilizing people via social media to counter climate change. I remain in the 1950s where the main threat was seen to be nuclear war. My solution was to escape into artificial intelligence to replace people with a superior form. Rosa's way is to try to influence people socially and politically to change.

Rosa responded by email as follows:

"Our debates and discussions about climate change arose from your continual dismissal of it as a concern (often via poking fun at me). Climate change is not my central passion in life, but something I consider of grave concern, something that is already dramatically reshaping both ecological and socio-cultural systems across the world. Given its indirect (yet powerfully complex) potential to create war and conflict, I see it as equally important, if not more important, than the threat of nuclear war. However, through our discussions, I came to understand how ever-present war was in your upbringing - which explained why your focus was/is where it is. I resolved to respect your standpoint and agree to disagree. Second correction: I don't think social media and Facebook are the solution to climate change - not even close. My interest in the power of online networks in democratic societies lies in their potential to mobilize masses of people to reshape their frameworks of understanding and collaborate to enact positive change. In sum, my central passions in life are 1. writing and 2. engaging with social, political, and economic issues that impact humanity. Climate change is one of many issues to which I am engaged. Social media is one of many tools to which I am fascinated, whose creative, mobilizing potential, I reckon, has yet to be fully realized."

I had simplified reality and misrepresented it. She has more clearly articulated her concerns and I am glad to copy into this document what she said which stands as a correction of what I had said. My point here in part is to illustrate the kind of dialog Rosa and I have been able to have recently. In the past, we too often allowed our differences to explode into anger and go unresolved: I would say something sarcastic about the importance of fighting climate change and she would respond that I did not know enough and was very wrong and aggravating and then the conversation would end. I am hopeful that now we can agree that the world faces many challenges, of which climate change and nuclear war are two prominent ones, but that we enjoy the opportunity to debate our respective views about which is more likely to impact us when. We both realize that all too soon opportunities to communicate will become more limited as she moves on with her life and I get seriously old.

## 5 Xiamen

We spent a week in Xiamen which is considered one of the most livable cities in China. Not small but an attractive city on a small, mountainous island – like Manhattan on a smaller scale and prettier.

### 5.1 Hotel

We are staying at the Kellywood Hotel for \$17/night and get a buffet breakfast for \$3. The hotel is 16-stories high. The buffet breakfast was largely many different vegetables. The eating area shows the popular red colors.



*Figure 5-1 Tables were patrons sat*

*Figure 5-2 Breakfast buffet food (left)*

### 5.2 University and Botanical Gardens

The first day we walked 10 miles round-trip to Xiamen University which is one of the better universities in the world. The city shows wealth and activity. We visited several MacDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chickens, and a Walmart (not that those are a sign of wealth, and those were also in Shanghai. But Xiamen is 2 million people, whereas Shanghai is 30 million, and everything feels a little different from Shanghai). The next day we went to the 5-square-kilometer Xiamen Botanical Garden.



*Figure 5-3 Xiamen University*



*Figure 5-4 View from Botanical Gardens*



*Figure 5-5 Rosa Botanical Garden*



*Figure 5-6 Roy Botanical Garden*

### **5.3 Neighborhood of Hotel**

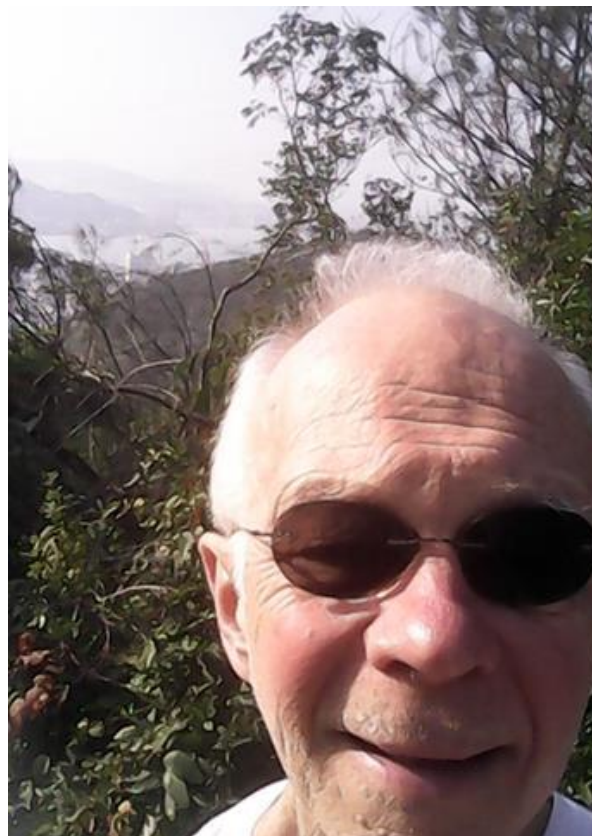
The following are photos from the neighborhood around our hotel. I found it a beautiful mix. In front of us was a major, international port with very busy dockyards. Behind us was a quiet, well-maintained, large, picturesque residential neighborhood of large apartment buildings somehow incorporating also quiet, tree-lined streets with small shops. Behind the apartment buildings was a mountain park with trails leading to the top from which one could see in all directions the rest of Xiamen, the sea, and the mainland.



*Figure 5-7 Street behind Xiamen Hotel*



*Figure 5-8 Dockyard in front of hotel*



*Figure 5-9 Roy on hillside behind hotel*

#### **5.4 Train Ride**

We took the train from Xiamen to Guangzhou overnight. We left Xiamen at 5 p.m. and arrived in Guangzhou at 6 a.m. It's only 700 kilometers between the two as the crow flies but we took the super-slow train that pulled into side tracks every opportunity it had to let another train pass it.

The railway station in Xiamen is like the others we visited -- namely massive. And each big city has multiple big train stations. The trip showed us an inside view of the life of working class Chinese and was impressive for its orderliness.



*Figure 5-10 Hard sleeper*

The train ride showed us Chinese, working-class life. Every cubicle had 6 bunk beds, the top of which left little room to move. Every bed on the entire train of dozens of cars was occupied.



*Figure 5-11 Upper bunk*

Every other car on the train had a toilet which looked exactly like that pictured to the right here except that after being used by many people repeatedly, it no longer was as clean. This kind of toilet is typical in working class China. Every other car also provided hot drinking water from a boiler.



*Figure 5-12 Squat toilet on hard sleeper train*

## **6 Guangzhou**

We spent the first Guangzhou day and night at the Riverside Youth Hostel on the river in downtown Guangzhou. The long lines of skyscrapers along the picturesque riverside reminded me of Shanghai and Xiamen. The temperature was 70 degrees Fahrenheit and vegetation tropical and green. The next day we went to a modern hotel adjacent to the airport so that we could conveniently be at the airport by 5 a.m. to begin our journey home.

### **6.1 China Bank**

I took some photos of the full day we had in Guangzhou from 6 a.m. till midnight which included for me going to the China Construction Bank to exchange Chinese Yuans for American Dollars.

This experience itself was telling of Chinese life. Normally one cannot exchange Yuans for Dollars but only Dollars for Yuans. However, since I had a receipt for my exchange for Dollars to Yuans, I had special permission. This Chinese Law allowing me to exchange was not well known by the banks whose staff also did not speak English. Getting this transaction done took me 5 hours, 3 banks, 'discussions' with a dozen bank officials, and finally signing about 5 official documents -- this was to change 1300 Yuan to 180 Dollars. I was not able to picture the process but did get photos outside the bank to simply illustrate normal traffic in Guangzhou.



*Figure 6-1 China Construction Bank and neighborhood*

The photo on the right was taken from outside the bank and shows how tall the buildings are.



*Figure 6-2 Street corner by Construction Bank*





*Figure 6-3 Ground Level view outside bank -- busy*

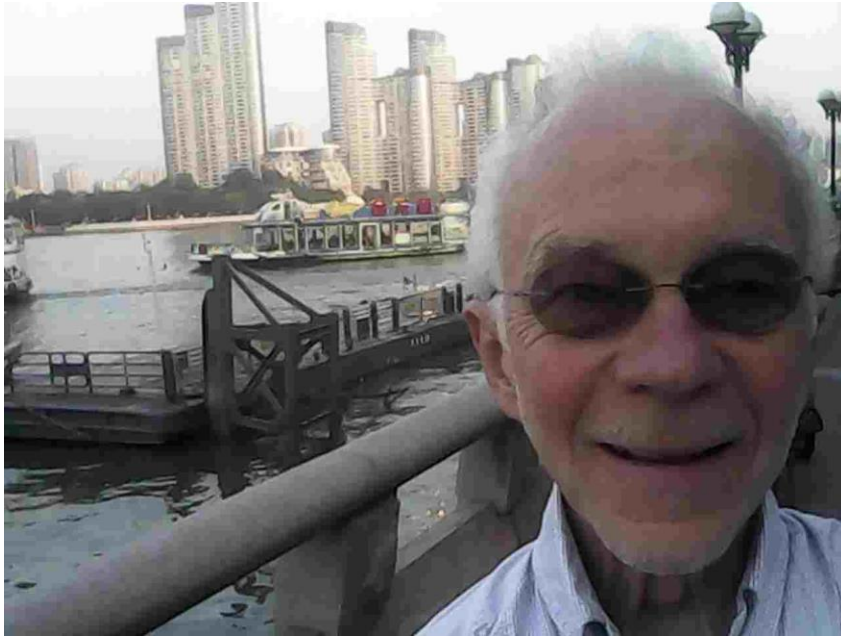
On the way to the hostel for the night I was more relaxed and took some pictures along the river. Our hostel faced a major river and gorgeous boardwalk. As usual one can be overwhelmed with the growth of skyscrapers in every direction. One might also observe that many of China's great cities are built beside a river (as often is true elsewhere in the world).

## **6.2 Riverside**

As the name of our hostel, the Riverside Hostel, suggests, we stayed on the riverside and could enjoy a large boardwalk and scenic views across the rivers to the skyscrapers on the other side.



*Figure 6-4 Guangzhou as seen from our Riverside Hostel*



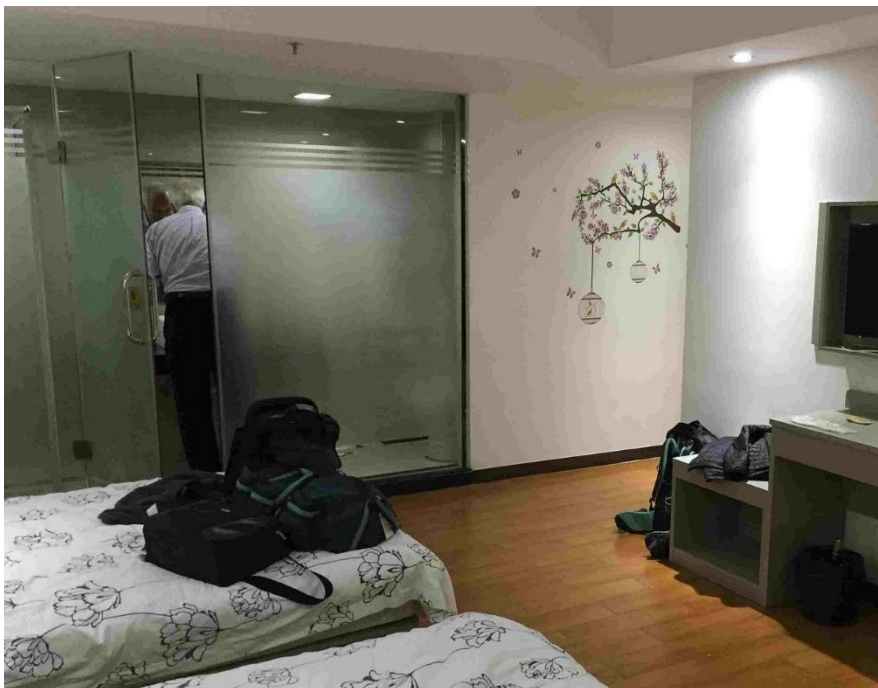
*Figure 6-5 Another view of the riverside featuring the photographer in another selfie*

## **7 Coming Home**

The final chapter of the trip is coming home.

### **7.1 Hotel and Plane Ride**

We moved on Jan 24th from the Riverside Hostel to the S&P Holiday Inn Hotel beside the airport. That was a two-hour subway and bus ride from the Riverside Hostel. We wanted to be



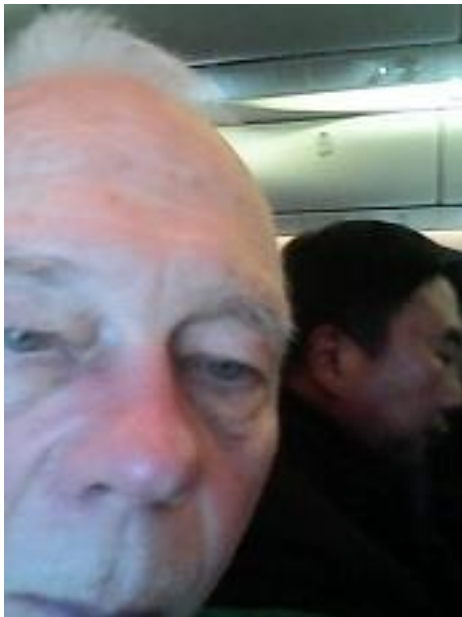
at the airport by 5 a.m. and no public transportation would get us there in time. This Holiday Inn provided a free shuttle bus. The room was very nice with features as fancy as any top-flight American hotel. That night we feasted at a local eatery with clay-pot eggplant, fried noodles with eggs and vegetables, hot-and-sour pork with rice and cabbage, and tea.

Unfortunately for those who travel economically half-way across the world, the trip home may or may not be as fun as the rest of the trip. For Rosa and me,

*Figure 7-1 Hotel Room -- Roy in Bathroom*

we no longer had the great seat assignment we got on the way from the USA to China. Between her and I was a person who spoke no English and we had nowhere to lie flat. Neither Rosa or I slept the entire trip. The plane was a modern Boeing 787-9, but I miss privacy and a place to get flat with the ground -- I should be flying in a private jet but must wait for Rosa to make her first billion dollars, which she says will only happen after hell freezes.

One nice feature of modern airfare is the extensive access to media. The plane had Wi-Fi (plus onboard chargers) and a built-in, touch-screen LCD that allowed access to many movies from every part of the world. On this trip, my favorite movie was "48 Hours". Please read the review by Roger Ebert at <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/45-years-2015>, and you'll see that this is a very subtle but very intense story of marriage, age, and lost love that continues to haunt me and leads me to invite you to help me understand what the moral is. My point is not to diverge into a movie review but to note that a trip has various advantages. One is that the traveler takes time to explore opportunities not otherwise explored. I rarely watch a movie in Maryland and if I do, it's simply some minutes of something on the television while I eat alone. The movies that I watched on Hainan Airlines both to and from China were themselves worth the price of admission.



*Figure 7-2 Roy on plane.*



*Figure 7-3 Rosa on plane*

These two photos illustrate how we were separated by a gentleman in the middle.

## **7.2 Land north of Beijing**

Rosa and I traveled from Shanghai to Guangzhou and then flew from Guangzhou to Beijing. In that route, we saw much of the coast of China which is where 95% of the 1.4 billion people live. Much of inhabitable land along the coast is densely populated. However, when you get away from the coast the story changes.

I did manage to get a good view of the land between Beijing and the Arctic Ocean. It's barren. Immediately north of Beijing the land becomes very mountainous and uninhabited. An hour further north and the land is snow covered, as one enters first Siberia and then the Arctic Ocean on the polar route to Canada and then the USA.



*Figure 7-4 Immediately North of Beijing*



*Figure 7-5 Further north of Beijing*

### **7.3 Baltimore**

On landing in the USA, the first thing I noticed was the radical shift in racial groups. My experiences in China found me surrounded by Chinese 99.99% of the time. In Baltimore, half the people in the airport and on the street are Afro-Americans.

In terms of body build, 99.99% of the Chinese were slender but about half the Americans are overweight. The diet is different here too, as the amount of refined sugar in the American diet is almost mind-numbing after 3 weeks in China.

Finally, the degree of poverty in Baltimore hits me in a way it did not in China. When I came across abandoned buildings in China the reason was that the property was about to be razed and replaced with a new building. In Baltimore, large neighborhoods are abandoned with no intention of being replaced.



*Figure 7-6 Baltimore's abandoned buildings and overweight people*

The overweight lady crossing the street faces another abandoned building.

#### **7.4 Reflecting on China**

I have heard for years about how China is the economic engine that is driving the world. Before I went to China I had read the following numbers (all given in US dollars). In 1970 China's GDP was 90 billion and now is 11,000 billion. By contrast the USA real GDP has grown from 4,700 billion in 1970 to 16,400 billion now. Since our GDP has been growing at 2% per year for many years approximately and China's at 7% per year, one might predict that in a decade the Chinese GDP will be \$22 trillion and the USA GDP will be \$20 trillion. I saw more signs of growth in China than I see in the USA and now have a gut feeling of what it means that China will surpass the USA in GDP soon.

On Feb 15, my daughter sent me the following email:

On Monday, I met with my finance & budget professor one-on-one. He has been a chief budgetary consultant for both the MD state government and for the national government in DC. He has won many awards in this area. We talked at length about China's intergovernmental fiscal policy, expropriation of land, state owned enterprises, non-performing loans, lack of transparency, etc. As a budget expert, he has a great degree of skepticism about China that he wasn't afraid to express. Oddly enough, he considered those who admire China in the way that you do as typical of progressive liberals in the US. He compared it to the progressive liberal reaction to the massive Soviet economic uplift earlier in history. This, in particular, struck me.

My email reply was:

I am sorry for the dissonance between what I've been preaching about China and what your teacher preaches. This afternoon I went to the local public library, found 10 books about contemporary China and the changes that are transforming the country, and thumbed through them. Different people paint different pictures of the same phenomenon. The place and its evolution are complicated enough that different people rightfully see different things.

I read three books from the library and summarize them next:

- One of the books that I read is titled *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China* by John Pomfret. That raised many points not covered in

my travelogue, particularly about the brutality of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Pomfret's lived in China in 1981 and in 1989. He focuses on the transition from Mao's cultural revolution to the current state.

- Another book had a similar story to tell. In the book *Street of Eternal Happiness: Big City Dreams Along a Shanghai Road*, the author Rob Schmitz presents the life's stories of several families living on one street in Shanghai. Their lives trace to times including the Cultural Revolution during which some of the characters suffered extensively. In the New China, many of the characters in this book are struggling to find a place for themselves. The desire to make money contrasts with some of the values inherent in the culture. Corruption and censorship impact the daily lives of some of the characters, but the characters focus on maintaining a family and improving their condition in life.
- *China in Ten Words* by Yu Hua is a hauntingly different book written by a man who lived through the Cultural Revolution. He describes brutal, wide-scale violence during the Cultural Revolution and yet remains a great admirer of Mao Zedong. Part of his message is that the competition of capitalism in current day China is more de-humanizing than the egalitarianism of Communism under Mao.

The reality of China cannot be captured by a tourist in three weeks.

In the end, the Chinese people are fundamentally like people anywhere else. I watched television in our hotel room. The shows were in Chinese, but the plots were clear. Other than news in which the Chairman of the Communist Party was typically prominent, the shows tended to revolve around one of two themes: love or violence. Such themes could be true of shows one might sample on US television. Some of the specifics would be different. For instance, spurned lovers would return to their parents for advice in a Chinese show more often than in an American show. The war shows had a similar amount of brutal violence in both Chinese and American versions.

My understanding of China is not nearly deep enough to offer a portrayal as broad or deep as those of the authors of the books that I have read. What I recommend is that you read the sample of books that appeals to you and visit the country. However, don't go on a guided tour with foreigners to see tourist spots but instead take the kind of trip my daughter and I took and combine that with extensive study before and after.

## **8 Planning Your Trip**

Should you want to plan your trip to China, numerous issues merit consideration to begin with time and money.

### **8.1 Time and Money**

Having time for your trip would seem to be a highly personal matter. What time of year you go would depend on where you want to go and what you want to do. Northern China is cold in the winter and mild in the summer, while the reverse is true of the South, which is why we headed south for our January 2017 journey. My daughter is a college student and wants to work after graduation in May. That left us only this winter break in January but your situation might merit going a different time of year.

We managed this trip on a very low budget. Here are our transportation, room, and board costs:

- The plane tickets were \$579 per person including taxes and any other expenses. We highly recommend Hainan Airlines as a good carrier with inexpensive flights. Depending on the time of year you might find something cheaper but most flights cost more. That \$579 covered flying from Baltimore to Shanghai and from Guangzhou to Baltimore.

- Our intercity train tickets were about \$30 per person for each journey of approximately 300 kilometers. Transportation costs within a city or town were negligible. For instance, a bus ticket in Xiamen is 1 yuan or approximately \$0.15.
- Our hotels were approximately \$20 per night – that covered two people in a private room with a private bath. You could travel cheaper alone and getting a bed in a dorm for \$10/night or costs in multi-star foreign hotels would cost you closer to normal USA rates, such as \$150/night.
- For meals, we seldom spent more than 30 yuan per person – say we averaged 20 yuan per person which is \$3.

Talking about yauns (also called Remnibi) and US dollars gets to the issue of conversion rate:

- We exchanged dollars for yuan at a foreign exchange booth at Boston's Logan Airport and got 6 yuan per dollar. We exchanged about \$300.
- In Shanghai, we exchanged about \$500 at a bank and got 6.9 something – say 7 yuan per dollar. Obviously, one should go to a bank and not the airport exchange booth.

At the end of our trip we had about \$300 spare in yuan and converted that to dollars. In China, we spent about \$500. However, before the trip we paid for the visas, trains, airplane and some hotels –approximately  $280 + 1,200 + 180 + 50 = 1,710$ . Thus, overall trip costs including visa, food, transportation to and from China, transportation within China, entrance to special events, and any other incidentals was about \$2,200 for 3 weeks – that's about \$50 per day per person.

My guess is that most people would spend more than \$50 per day per person total cost, but I am frugal and my daughter obliged me. By way of an arbitrary comparison, I searched online now for 'tour of China' and got immediately a Globus 11-day tour from Beijing to Shanghai for \$2,200 per person without airfare to China. That amounts to \$200 per person per day for the China part of the trip only and does not account for private expenses a person might incur in China. If the standard airfare people pay is more than my carefully selected cheap fare, then airfare might easily be \$1,000 per person. For an 11-day trip that adds another \$100 per day to the overall cost. That \$300/day is 6 times the \$50/day that Rosa and I spent. Beware that your China trip could cost you a bundle unless you're careful. Plus, the difference between what you learn on a package tour versus a self-guided tour is the difference between night and day.

If you favor a frugal style of travel, then consider to get paid to travel. You could get a job as an English teacher and make money while in China. When I went to China in the 1990s, I was a guest of a Chinese university and all my costs were covered. The point being that you could investigate many other options.

## **8.2 Eating**

We often would have a snack at a road-side eatery. You could always find many of such eateries, as virtually every block had more than one. Typically, these restaurants were busy, the food was fresh, and you could watch the cooks prepare the food. Often, we would have a hot bowl of noodle soup with vegetables and meat -- with an emphasis on the noodles.



*Figure 8-1 Rosa eating soup*

*Figure 8-2 Restaurant (left)*

My daughter and I both raved at the freshness and flavor of the food. However, we had our problems. My daughter eats almost exclusively a vegetarian diet in the US. She tried to accomplish this in China, but our inability to speak the language along with the Chinese not understanding vegetarianism made life difficult for my daughter. For the Chinese, the opportunity to have meat is welcome. My daughter blamed some of her distress during the trip on diet. I was fine with whatever we had. If you are a picky eater, then be forewarned.

### **8.3 Cold**

People in China in our experience seemed to want fresh air at the risk of being cold. On the farm the daily temperatures varied from a low of 35 degrees Fahrenheit to a high of 55. Yet, the doors and windows were left open. We ate meals in the kitchen while wearing our winter coats. When we visited a university in China, we were surprised to find the doors to the halls open and the hallways freezing. The individual classrooms when occupied were heated. Likewise, in the hotels, the hallway windows were open and the hallway was freezing, but the rooms had individually controlled heaters.

I've been to China in the summer, and my memory suggests that the Chinese are also more comfortable with heat than many Americans. My point is that you should not expect the indoor temperature to be 68 degrees Fahrenheit as Americans seem to expect. Pack your clothes accordingly.

### **8.4 Language**

One might say that the greatest barrier to manage alone in a land where no one speaks your language is the language. To this extent, I had spent weeks trying to come to grips with the Chinese language. My first pass was the typical tourist approach of some traveler phrase books that offered written and oral versions of coming expressions, such as how are you, how much does this cost, and where is the toilet. However, unlike European languages that resemble English on the surface, Chinese bears very little resemblance to English. I found myself spinning my wheels with the cute phrase books.

I next read books on Chinese calligraphy, pinyin, phonetics, and grammar that I borrowed from the university library. These books will not be found in the typical community library and are not for the faint of heart. I found them intriguing. They gave me a good sense of the history of the Chinese language, the distinction between the symbols and how they are pronounced, and how differently the Chinese think about some fundamental issues than we think.



I brought PDF copies of many Chinese books with me on the trip with the intention of studying further once there. I also had software that ran on my laptop and could be used to do translation on the fly and could produce verbalizations. None of my preparation was adequate for day-to-day affairs.

My daughter has come prepared to use Google translate and that seemed to be the kind of tool which I should have trained myself to use. Recall that China blocks access to Google but the Google translate program runs in offline mode after you download the Chinese dictionary in the US to prepare for your trip. With Google translate or something akin to it, one enters one's native language (in this case English) and the program generates a written Chinese version and with appropriate connections can sometimes generate also the verbalization. We managed with that tool as best we could.

Since we were not traveling on the beaten trail and went to hotels or other rooming places where no English was spoken, we found that also the Chinese who worked sometimes with foreigners had on their own smart phones translation software to go from Chinese into English. This was not the case in the typical street vendor of food or anything else but in a large, native hotel it was.

Virtually everyone in China has a smart phone. Very few people speak English. To use a smart phone translator, some younger people would enter pinyin Chinese into their keyboard. However, our host at the farm did not know pinyin. He would painstakingly enter strokes from calligraphy, as his smart phone would bring menus of possible characters containing those strokes. Our ability to communicate with smart phone translators with him was limited. Instead we largely communicated by gesture. When he would ask me whether I wanted to eat, he would move his hand to his mouth several times and then point at me and nod his head, as though to ask 'do you want to eat?'. In that case, the answer was a nod 'yes'. Of course, if I wanted to say that I want to eat now, but Rosa wants to shower first and then eat, I was hopeless with gestures.

### **8.5 What I'd do Differently**

One of the more intriguing questions that one can ask about an experience is 'what would I have done differently?' First-off the experience was great, as already testified. However, with the benefit of hindsight, I might suggest some changes.

I'd have spent more money on food. My daughter at times wanted to go to fancier restaurants than I wanted. In hindsight, a few of those fancier places would have been worthwhile. A bigger meal with more exotic preparation in a higher-class establishment would have been a worthwhile addition to the itinerary.

We always traveled economy trains, but in hindsight one trip on one of China's high speed trains that go hundreds of miles per hour would have been worth the experience. Only once did we take a taxi, but I don't regret avoiding taxis as public transportation is a better way to my mind to experience the local life.

Where might we have gone differently? Rosa and I both agree that the farm was the most special experience. If I take another trip, then I might spend less time in big cities and more time in small towns.

The most important issue in traveling is who you befriend or with whom you travel. I could not have picked a better travel companion than my daughter and would not change that. However, my daughter has other fish to fry and is not prepared to take another trip with me. If I do another such trip, then who might want to join me?

## **9 Conclusion**

This Conclusion Section offers a high-level interpretation of the trip's impact on me relative to China and my child.

### **9.1 China**

Different people see China differently. Where I see growth, she sees air pollution, where I see harmony, she claims corruption underlies the system. While each person might rightfully see the same situation differently, my point might be elaborated with further specifics: trains were on time; the transit system was appropriately utilized, shop staff were helpful, businesses of many kinds were open and accessible, everyday citizens in public places were gracious (for instance, young people gave their seat on the bus to old people), men did not make rude gestures to attractive women -- these and many other comparable specifics created for me a palpable sense of harmony.

China is fundamentally different from the USA in many ways. One difference is the one-party system which brings a certain kind of harmony but also control. For instance, the Chinese government extensively censors the media. Americans think of Facebook as a powerful platform; however, Facebook is not allowed in China. The Chinese equivalent of Facebook is WeChat which has 900 million active users. Would an American trying to understand China become a WeChat user? How does an American respond to the opportunities in China?

### **9.2 Dad to his Children**

I was very impressed with Rosa. Rosa is understanding and resilient. One must be to get along with me for 3 weeks. She can argue her case ardently, yet be sensitive to the other side. I was pleased to be able to develop a friendship with her that augments the father-daughter bond. The trip helped us face many day-to-day decisions, disagree about how to handle them, but then compromise and come to appreciate each the other's values -- to appreciate that we each have a sense of humor and that any arguments are unimportant relative to the underlying respect that we have for each other. At age 65 with a 21-year-old daughter such experiences should have come more often and earlier but better now than never. How does one build on this experience?

My experience leads to the broader issue of how a parent manages to spend quality time with a grown child who naturally has needs to largely connect with peers and not parents. Perhaps taking a foreign trip that the child wants to take is one approach, but I'd offered my children that opportunity years ago, with minimal success. I'd welcome opportunities to repeat this trip experience of bonding with Rosa with any of my children and welcome guidance as to how to achieve that. If you're a child of mine reading this, then please consider this offer: "please let me know when and where you would like to go with me for an extended time, and I'll consider to pay for and help arrange the trip."

### **9.3 Daughter to Dad**

Rosa wrote me a kind 'thank you' note which was not intended for public circulation. However, I am taking advantage of her kind words and want to repeat them here. I quote verbatim the last 3 paragraphs of Rosa's letter to me:

To be candid, and as to be expected, the trip (and China as a nation) was not without challenges and obstacles -- interpersonal, gastrointestinal, and mental. Yet, the obstacles co-existed with the rewards. It somehow managed to be challenging, magnificent, dizzying, humbling, fascinating, and re-orienting -- all at the same time.

Regarding rewards, it was the 3 weeks of unheard stories, endless conversations, and practicing patience and forgiveness with one of the most important figures in my life (you) that mattered most. I listened to unheard stories about your travels

to Turkey, Romania, and Mexico. I gained a deeper appreciation for such things as why you talk to strangers, the arc of your life, what was and is most central to your being. I learned with greater completeness about how your life has been about finding solace and purpose in the potential of artificial intelligence, finding/having a female partner, working very hard, and committing to everlasting learning.

In turn, a reservoir of quality time, a collection intellectual, philosophical, and emotional conversations now fill my head rich with knowledge and memories that I will carry with me for the years and years ahead. This trip was capital "I" important in the grand scheme of my life. It is with the greatest sincerity that I thank you for being willing to have embarked on this trip, emotionally, financially, and otherwise.

A father could not ask for more. I see no longer a girl but a woman who has grown tall, smart, sensitive, and kind.

## 10 Commentary

After writing the travelogue of our trip to China that occurred Jan 5-25, 2017, I shared it with some people. Their feedback has led to another journey. My daughter aspires to write about public policy and extensively uses social media. Being an old-timer, I don't use Facebook and when I tried to upload my travelogue to Facebook, learnt that Facebook does not allow a user to upload a multi-page file. Thus, the old-fashioned way is being employed here to circulate a document, solicit feedback, and then manually incorporate the feedback into a commentary section. The last page waits your pen!

Some of the emailed commentary has been copied into this document. The presentation here is in chronological order. Each contributor is cited, but when I have not yet received permission to use the person's full name or the commenter prefers the relative anonymity of only initials, then the person is only identified with initials.

Elder son Roy said on Jan 27: "I was most pleased with your conclusion where you comment on your appreciation for Rosa's personality."

Younger son Ray said on Jan 29: "I am glad that you and Rosa ended up getting along well with each other and found the experience to be rewarding. It in a way reminds me of our road trip from Colorado to Baltimore and from Baltimore to Sudbury, Canada. .... As I can remember, the Canada camping trip was approximately 2 weeks long and about 6 or seven years ago....one week was spent at the cabin and the other week was spent driving through the northern states. The Colorado trip was about a week and a half since we stopped in Indiana to visit Tony. I can still remember the Midwestern corn fields while driving home."

Neighbor MB on Jan 28: "it's simply terrific that you spent these three weeks together with Rosa. Under the best of circumstances, it's difficult and strange to spend time with your kids when they're near-adults, it seems to me, no matter how much you love them. There's just too much history and baggage while they're on the cusp of their Real Life. I would love to do something similar with any of my kids someday."

Colleague BM on Jan 31: "It will be interesting to see how Rosa shows this to her children or even her grandchildren. I am so glad you had a great time and what a great great idea!"

Colleague RF on Jan 31: " Very interesting. I'm glad you got back in good shape, despite lack of sleep on the long haul back home. In a way, I feel your description has saved me the trouble of visiting rural China. .... Which brings me to suggest that both you and Rosa are correct. Both climate change and nuclear warfare are real existential threats to humanity. Events suggest that we're poor at guarding against either of them. I'd like to add another:

our old friend artificial intelligence. These days I tend to agree with Stephen Hawking (& Elon Musk, apparently) that AI will have extremely pernicious effects on mere people once it gets into its stride -- assuming it someday does. Maybe that's what I should do after 70 years of age: write Cassandra-like essays warning of the dangers of AI. (Okay, I won't be alone, but multiple voices could be useful.) And try to spend more time with my daughter. If she isn't too busy with real life. I have only made one foreign trip with just her & me, to Hungary to attend a wedding (in 2000, I think). Perhaps I could request another as my 70th birthday present?"

Neighbor RD on Feb 1: "The diary of your tip brings back memories of my trip to China in 2002; but then, Abby was only twelve months old, so it was of course a very different but no less exciting experience. .... I find it amusing that you and Rosa argued over whether nuclear war or climate change is the bigger concern. ... I have been retired for three months now and I am enjoying it. I spend a lot of time with my daughter, who is now 15, and sometimes help her with homework. She enjoys grocery shopping, so we go to the Giant together twice a week. That is her chance to tell me what's on her mind (usually boys) and we have some interesting conversations. So, I suggest that you try to find some regular activity to stay connected to Rosa. Don't worry that you are spending too much time with her; she will let you know when it's too much. Above all, listen!"

Dr. Weigang Wang experienced the Chinese Cultural Revolution first-hand, worked with complete commitment and team spirit on his PhD studies on our Univ. of Liverpool team, and now does research on collaborative hypermedia as a member of faculty at the University of Manchester School of Business. On Feb 2 Weigang said: "The travelog is very interesting to me, especially the choices of the places you have visited and the experience you have had in China. It shows me new outlook of Shanghai, Xiamen and Guangzhou. It also presents and describes many places that are normally not on the sightseeing list of foreign tourists -- the ancient village, brain hospital, farm, and hard-sleeper train. These remind me of similar places I had been. From your description and Rosa's text, I can see that Rosa has a sophisticated philosophical mind and writing skills that are like yours. I still remember how fast you type and how fast you write papers and books. I believe Rosa is also an excellent writer. It is very kind of Rosa to be willing to accompany her old father for a long trip in a remote foreign country. I would hope someday I would also have a chance to have a long trip with my son and have the opportunity to understand each other better."

Prof. Lina Zhou and I shared catty-corner offices at UMBC for a decade and enjoyed chatting about work and life; she said on Feb 2: "I read your travelog with deep interest. What a great story of strengthening father-daughter relationships. I am glad to see that both of you have found the trip rewarding and witnessed significant changes that have been taking place in China in person."

My colleague HW on Feb 8 said, "I find the crowds amazing and noted with interest the opportunity to AirBnB in China. The spinning table in the restaurant photo reminds me of my times there and wishing our restaurants used those so everyone gets to try a little of everything as opposed to our style of everyone ordering their own. I also note your image of the squat toilet on the train. Where I worked, we had the Western-style in the offices and squat-style in the factories. I hope your daughter finds the documentation useful for her children someday."

My colleague JD on Feb 8 said: "The last time that I returned home to China was in 2008. Thank you for refreshing my memory about China. I hope to have such a travel with my dad soon."

My high school friend Chris Garner on Feb 10 said: " I forwarded your email about the China trip to my wife and brother. I consider China still an exotic destination and applaud those who go there. You gave some interesting information on the Visa process that I didn't know. ... Many of the people I know that go to China, go to the more industrial areas, and have plain descriptions of the local flora and fauna."

Colleague MT on Feb 13 said: "I would like to have a trip like that someday. What part of your trip would you most recommend to someone else traveling to China?"

Colleague LH on Feb 15 said: "I would say what you observed is true, renovations, highways and skyscrapers are what you will see in most places in China these days, and the public transportation and facilities are better developed than here. I was laughing when you mentioned your perception about the room temperature difference between China and US. Here at work, I often complain that the air conditioning inside is too cold during summer to wear dresses, while it can get too hot inside in winter and we cannot open windows, :-): I feel it is a waste of energy. Maybe it is just a cultural difference."

SPACE FOR YOUR COMMENTARY?!