

China Again 9/27/00

Well, we ended up in China again. The purpose of this trip was to meet with some senior officials at the Air Traffic Management Bureau (ATMB) to figure out the work program for the next two years. All in all, the trip was a bust. The ATMB is undergoing a reorganization whilst the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) (of which the ATMB is a part) is trying to divest itself from the airline business. Currently, they approve all airplane purchases. So, we got caught up in a bunch of politics (Chinese politics at that). Not only that, there was an airplane hijacking while we were there. In typical Chinese fashion, all heck broke loose. Just loading a bus takes a major effort over here, so when there is a hijacking everyone is called out to multiple, simultaneous meetings that can achieve nothing. What we learned was that the crew stabbed one of the hijackers to death and wounded the other. From what we heard, this is the third case where the crew has stabbed a hijacker. They must be issuing knives to the crews.

We tried to meet up with Chen Xuah who was the past deputy director of the ATMB. We were interested in talking to him, we took our chances when we could find him. That means that we had to participate in the noontime karaoke. (Diversion: When Chen was in charge of the ATMB, he got the opportunity to pick out a new facility. A new hotel had been built and so he took the whole hotel over [you can do that there]. It has a fantastic restaurant and a karaoke bar. So, David Massy-Greene and I got drug into the karaoke bar and had to sing. Now these folks are not shy and the amplifier is set up HIGH. We sang a few songs. I got even by picking out Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind". I was told that we were heard all over the building. Hopefully, I can pick off some airport business in the future to offset the humiliation.)

I also did some serious shopping. I've found that you can get Ray Ban sunglasses for 100 Yuan (about 12 dollars) and so I picked up a couple more. I went to the same place I did last time and so I got to skip the big time negotiations. After it was over, the shop lady told me I was cheap. I told her that I came to her all of the time and she laughed. They do enjoy the negotiation and never sell at a loss. All of the times I come here, I run into the same lady (talked about her last time). She was the same 4 foot 10 young lady (about 18 years old). She really worked me over and we had a great time. I didn't really want a shirt, but decided to have a good time. We worked each other over for about 30 minutes. She was bound and determined to sell me a shirt. There was this long sleeved polo shirt (Helley Hanson) which is some kind of name brand. She showed me the good stitching, I told her that they spelled Helley Hanson right, I told her I didn't want it, she told me I should buy four. During the whole transaction, she had a death grip on my thumb so I couldn't get away. She even brought in a "closer". She wanted to sell it for 385 Yuan and I finally got it for 140 Yuan. It was a scream. She was so happy that she was able to sell me something after so much time, that it made up for the low price. I also was able to buy a Mao book for Derek. They wanted 85 Yuan but I got it for 50. Finally, I found some incredibly ugly ties. They have computers and schematics on them. I don't know what I'm going to do with them, but I have them if a need arises.

We also had the obligatory banquet. Since it was at lunch, there was no Mao Tai (yippee). The CAAC restaurant is pretty good and we really only had one surprise. A dish came around which can be best described as Szechwan "trotters". It looked normal, I took a bit of the meet but had to immediately start spitting out bones which one doesn't see very often. I warned my more squeamish compatriots and moved on. The lunch was another example of how screwed up things were. The Chinese spoke Chinese amongst themselves the entire lunch. I finally started up some English conversation, which were just close enough to business to screw them up. They wanted to host us on a trip to Tienjin University (two hours away), but we blew them off. Things will get pretty interesting soon. The big boss (Chen Haijen) is coming to Seattle in October and we plan to delicately bring up some of our problems with his more politically active folks. Should be interesting.

So, it was only a two day trip. I don't know where my sleep cycle is (so forgive the grammar and spelling); My plan is to stay in town for the next four months. We'll see how I do.