

China – Fall 2001

We have had, since several years, an exchange program, sponsored by the Dutch and Chinese Academies of Science, with a university in Wuhan, Huazhong (Central China) Normal University. Normally, I would have visited them again this year. However, this year they were organizing the International Symposium on Multiparticle Dynamics (ISMD) to which I also wanted to go. Two trips to China would have been a bit too much. The Academy agreed to pay for the trip to ISMD; we would discuss in our spare time at the conference what we otherwise would have discussed in Wuhan. Since fares from Geneva to Beijing via Amsterdam are slightly cheaper than direct flights from Amsterdam, and since I had to be in CERN directly after returning from China, I bought my ticket in Geneva and used the first part of it to return from Geneva a couple of weeks before.

Thursday, Aug. 30. In the afternoon I caught the train to Schiphol for the 5 p.m. flight to Beijing. The plane was completely full, but I could sleep some in my window seat, and we arrived on schedule.

Friday, Aug. 31. In the waiting area at Schiphol, I had met a guy I know from Rutherford Lab. near Oxford, also on his way to Beijing for a conference, of which he was one of the organizers. He was being met at the airport by someone from the Institute of High Energy Physics in Beijing, who agreed to also take me along, since I was staying the night at the Guest House of IHEP. Actually, I probably would have arrived more quickly at IHEP if I had just taken the bus and metro, since the conference to which they had to bring him was not at IHEP, but somewhere else quite some distance out of the way. IHEP is well located, right next to a metro stop from which you reach Tienanmen Square and the Forbidden City in 20 minutes or so. The metro trains are very frequent.

I spent the day walking around Beijing, mostly in old areas, of which there are fewer and fewer. I ate dinner at the restaurant of IHEP, where I ran into two other physicists I know, who were also going to ISMD.

Saturday, Sept. 1. I slept late, and then took the metro downtown. Then I walked a long way along the main street past Tienanmen Square and the Forbidden City towards the International Hotel from where a bus would take us to Datong, which is where the conference was to be. This central area of Beijing has been really spruced up since my previous visit. The main impetus had been the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, which was in the Fall after my previous visit two years ago.

Near the Forbidden City I stopped to rest a bit on a bench in the shade. Two men struck up a conversation with me, although they spoke no English. Nevertheless, we could trade essential information like how old we were and that it was very warm.

We were supposed to assemble at the International Hotel at 12:30. However, it was 1:30 before the bus was ready. It then went to the airport to pick up some more people. Then it was a 6 hour drive to Datong, a large part of it along an expressway, some of it recently opened.

The hotel is fine. The room is very large. It looks like the hotel has been just recently opened. The food, though a buffet, was OK. In fact, it turned out that this was a far better hotel than had originally been planned. For some reason the hotel

where we were supposed to go had become unavailable and we got this new, better hotel instead.

Sunday, Sept. 2. A day of listening to talks and discussions during tea breaks. Lunch was a buffet, again OK. Tonight's dinner was the "welcome dinner", which was good. Then we went by bus (the hotel is on the outskirts of town) into town to see the Nine Dragon Screen, which is a tiled wall with the tiles depicting 9 dragons. It was originally part of the gate of the palace of the 13th son of the Ming dynasty Emperor Hong Wu. It dates from 1392 and is 45 m long and 8 m high. It is quite nice, with a pool in front of it reflecting the dragons, the ripples of water making the dragons seem to move. The bus driver got lost going back to the hotel, but eventually found it with the help of a few of us who noticed the distinctive features of the hotel building above the surrounding single-story dwellings.

Tuesday, Sept. 4. This afternoon we took our excursion to the Yungang Grottoes, about 16 km from Datong. They date from 460–520 A.D., most before 494. They contain about 51000 statues of Buddha. Most are, of course, small, but there are also some large ones. These caves are the main attraction of Datong.

After the caves, we went back to Datong and visited the Huayan Monastery, the highlight of which is a hall with five gilded Ming dynasty Buddhas surrounded by Bodhisattvas, soldiers and mandarins.

We did not visit the large locomotive factory for which Datong is also well-known.

I have no complaints about the food. Although there is nothing special, it is good. Nevertheless, some of the Chinese are griping a bit. Maybe this is partly because they come from a different region. After dinner was the "elders meeting" where we have a small party to evaluate the conference and decide where the next one will be.

Wednesday, Sept. 5. Tonight was the conference banquet at a restaurant in Datong. It was pretty good, although a bit chaotic. They seemed not quite up to feeding 120 people at once.

Friday, Sept. 7. The conference is over, and today is the 1-day post-conference tour (for \$58). Normally I don't take the conference tours, first because I hate tours and secondly because you are with a bunch of physicists and end up talking physics instead of enjoying the sights. But this time I decided to do so, since it was to go to a couple of sights some distance from Datong, and I didn't feel like organizing transportation myself. This was probably a mistake, since others said they had simply asked the hotel to get them a taxi (and skipped a day of the conference).

First we went to Xuankong Shi, the "hanging monastery" about 65 km southwest of Datong. It is built against and partially in some sheer cliffs, cantilevered out over the valley. It is quite impressive. After lunch at one of the several restaurants which, together with a bunch of souvenir stalls, is situated in the valley below the monastery, we went through it—narrow stairways or just ladders, narrow walkways, shallow caves with shrines. By the time we came out the number of souvenir sellers had increased dramatically to line the path from the monastery back to the parking lot. These seemed to be mostly just private people trying to make a bit of extra money. Much of

what they had to sell was reminiscent of the type of thing you would find at a garage sale, *i.e.*, old junk.

Then it was only a few kilometers to Wutai Shan, a holy mountain, one of the five Taoist holy mountains in China. The road took us most of the way up, but there was still a half hour or so walking, much of it by stairs, to reach the highest temple. There was a cable car, but we all preferred to walk. The various temples along the way were quite nice—strange that this place is only mentioned in passing in *Lonely Planet*. Some continued a half hour or so further to the top of the mountain, although there was nothing there. But then some people climb mountains for its own sake.

Next we went to Mu Te, an old wooden pagoda from the 11th century, one of the oldest wooden buildings existing today. It is supposed to be entirely of wood—not a single nail. Nine stories (97 m) high, it contains Buddhas on the first three floors. We were not allowed to go higher. Maybe this is a question of safety, maybe there is nothing to see. There was no electricity, *i.e.*, no lighting. So the stairs were dark as pitch and you sort of felt your way going up and down. The Buddhas could be seen because the open doors to the balconies let in some light.

Then back to Datong where we went to eat at a restaurant suggested by the bus driver. (He undoubtedly gets a kick-back.) It was supposed to be a Mongolian dinner, but I couldn't really tell the difference. It seemed rather reasonable at ¥30.

From there we went back to the hotel to get our luggage and then to the train station. The CITS guide got us onto the right train where we had soft sleepers. That is 4 to a compartment. There was the necessary confusion as we traded tickets in order to end up sharing the compartment with the people we wanted to. The train left on schedule promptly at 10:40.

Saturday, Sept. 8. We arrived in Beijing at about 6 a.m., which gave plenty of time for people who were flying home to get to the airport. I was staying an extra day, as a safety margin in case of a late train. Although I didn't need it, the people who had left the day before, *i.e.*, those not taking the post-conference tour, could have used it. Instead of the train, they had been put on a bus, and it was so late that they all missed their plane.

I have heard several stories about that bus trip. It got stuck in a traffic jam on one of the sections of road where the new expressway is not yet finished. The road was full of trucks on their way to Beijing, many with produce to sell there. Apparently this traffic jam is not unusual, because there were lots of people walking up and down among the trapped vehicles selling food and drink. One of the conference organizers was on the bus and he made a lot of calls with his mobile phone. He managed to get a police escort, which only helped up to the boundary of the policemen's jurisdiction. Then the whole process had to be repeated to get police from the new jurisdiction, who showed up after a couple of hours. In all it took 20 hours or so—recall that it had taken about 6 hours to go from the Beijing airport to Datong.

While the others were looking for a taxi to go from the station to the airport, I descended to the metro and headed for IHEP. I was fortunate in that the guest house was not full. So I could immediately get into my room and take a shower and shave. Then out to see some sights.

But first I got side-tracked by a hypermarket: food on the ground floor and in the basement and sub-basement, other stuff upstairs. There were many familiar brands. My curiosity on what is available to the Beijing shopper somewhat satisfied,

I continued on to the Dongyue Temple a few blocks further. It has recently been restored. It is Taoist, but much different from the temples on the mountain. After the first gate there was a small courtyard and another gate, which enters onto a large, rectangular courtyard. A central, elevated walkway leads to the main temple. Around the courtyard are small rooms with statues of a god of whatever and other statues illustrating this “department”—there must be 40 or 50 rooms, many illustrating two departments.

To each side of the central walkway are many steles (vertical stone tablets, often on top of a turtle, which signifies long life). Most describe various restorations of the temple, who worked on it, and who paid for it. There are also statues of “wonder donkey”—head of a horse, body of a donkey, tail of a mule, and hooves of something else (I forget what)—and of “Jade” horse, which is really porcelain, but is so white it was called jade by the people. Both of these are the steeds of gods.

The main hall (1322) is a shrine to the god, Dongyue, of Mt. Tai Shan, who acts as the divine ruler of China, in charge of the 76 departments and 18 layers of hell.

There are two smaller halls, to the left and right of the main hall. The one to the left is dedicated to Lord Binglinggong, third son of Dongyue. He is also called General Weixiong and is in command of the three mountains Longhu, Gezao, and Mao. The hall to the right is for Mao Ying, founding master of the Mao-shan (Mao Mountain) sect of Taoism with his two brothers. He married Dongyue’s daughter.

Everything (well, almost) was labeled with explanations in Chinese and English, although that did not make everything completely clear.

Examples of the departments:

Death and Life determines how long you live based on your good deeds.

Final indictment gives final approval to the judgment of the department of Signing Documents.

Execution

Increasing good fortune and longevity if you have done good deeds.

Evidence collects evidence and investigates wrong-doing to avoid harming innocent people.

Petty officials sees to it that petty officials carry out their duties in a selfless, kind, careful, discrete manner.

Flying birds protects birds.

Incurable diseases

River Gods

Promotion of 15 kinds of decent life style

Wandering Ghosts After death you become a ghost. If you were very bad you become a ghost with no home and wander about doing bad things. This department controls these homeless ghosts.

Wind Gods

Suppressing Schemes *i.e.*, plots to harm people.

Controlling bullying and cheating

Recording merits

Signing Documents

Signature approves documents containing verdicts of other departments of the netherworld.

Determining Individual Destiny

Upholding Loyalty and Filial Piety This is a cornerstone of Taoism.

Abortion or rather discouragement of it.

Measurement merchants should give fair measure.

Rain Gods

Implementing 15 kinds of violent death

Hell All people go to hell where they are fairly judged and unfair judgments in the material world are reversed.

Controlling Theft and Robbery

Earth Gods

Demons and Monsters controls them so that they don't cause harm.

Unjust Death cares for the souls of people dying unjustly (homicide, suicide, accident).

Interrogation gets at the truth in the netherworld.

Preservation of Wilderness

Punishment pay back evil with evil, but justly, unbiased, accurately.

Bestowing Happiness

Insect Birth reincarnates completely evil people as insects.

Egg Birth reincarnates people who are more evil than good as birds.

Urging to do good deeds.

Intoxicants urges against smoking, drinking, opium.

Resuscitation of meritorious people killed in error.

Aquatic Animals

Mountain Gods

Upholding Integrity

Instant Rewards and Retribution

Suffering and Distress as punishment.

Pity and Sympathy rulers should be benevolent; you should help your neighbor.

Judging Intention rewards good intentions.

Timely Retribution *i.e.*, in your lifetime.

Accumulating Justifiable Wealth *i.e.*, to provide against a “rainy day.”

Reducing Longevity by 100 days for a minor fault, 300 for a major fault.

Water Birth reincarnates those who did a lot more evil than good as things like shrimp or fish. This is a level between insect and egg (bird).

Mammal Birth reincarnates those having equal amounts of good and evil as mammals.

Individual Destiny your destiny is influenced by your good and evil works.

Rewarding Good Conduct

Halting Destruction of Living Beings

Opposing Obscene Acts

City and Township Gods

So you see, there is a department for everything; in fact, the jurisdictions of some departments seem to overlap—Heaven (or Hell) as a Chinese bureaucracy.

After the temple I just walked around, accidentally passing the U.S. embassy, which is next to the Bulgarian embassy, in a section of town where almost everything is an embassy.

Marc had said he would like a Mahjong game. I didn’t see one anywhere until I tried the Friendship Store. But the cheapest one was ¥400, which is more expensive than what he said they cost in Nijmegen. But that is probably a feature of the Friendship Store, which originally was only open to foreigners with hard currency. Now anyone can go there. But their prices remain high. Beijing department stores now look almost like those in the West, with most of the same brands. Finally, in the last one I visited I bought a few things—tea, spices—to take home and a cold bottle of Tsing Tao beer to take back to my room. I ate dinner in the IHEP restaurant, which was a mistake (see below), although in the past it has never caused problems.

Sunday, Sept. 9. I woke up before the alarm went off, checked out, and was in the metro by 7:30. To my surprise it was already fairly full, and I had to stand. I got to Xidan just a bit too late for the 8:00 bus to the airport and had to wait for the next one at 8:30. It took about 45 minutes to get to the airport. Then I paid the airport tax, ¥90, changed my last yuan into dollars (only \$3) and am left with ¥1.7 to save for next time. Then I checked in, and was upgraded to business class. This

did not surprise me too much, since this is the end of the season and lots of people are heading back home from vacation.

At security check they were being very careful. Note that it is not the 11th yet. The people ahead me were not allowed to keep a small fruit knife, blade of just a few centimeters. They could either abandon it or go back and check it with their luggage. They chose to abandon it. And they really didn't like the large Chinese meat cleaver I had bought for Marc. So back to check it, and with it my hand baggage, since they didn't want to check the cleaver by itself.

Then finally to the business-class lounge. Even though it was only 10 o'clock, I couldn't resist just trying a little bit of the Dragon Seal cabernet sauvignon—not bad actually. There was a golf putting practice green in the lounge.

The Beijing airport has new terminal buildings—fairly nice, and there are still lots of improvements in the works. I imagine that by the Olympics in 2008 it will be a really modern airport and that there will be a lot more modern buildings in Beijing.

Flying in business class is a definite improvement on “cattle class”. The food and wines are much better, and you have lots of room. Unfortunately, I could not fully enjoy it since by the second half of the flight my stomach was not feeling at all well. Waiting at Schiphol for the flight to Geneva, I started having diarrhea, and by the time I got to CERN I was feeling pretty sick. I spent a large part of the next two days on the toilet.