

China – Fall 2006

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 (CCNU). This year Wolfram Kittel was to visit them, but at the last moment could not go. So, I went instead. The main purpose was to attend a workshop organized by the Wuhan group, Workshop on Correlation and Fluctuation, in Hangzhou, and to discuss some joint research by visitors to Nijmegen from Wuhan using data from the L3 experiment, as well as hearing what some students there are doing and maybe get ideas about continuation of our collaboration.

Of course I extended the trip to include some traveling. Since it was late in the year, I chose for southern destinations and did most of the traveling before the conference.

Thursday, Nov. 9. The train to Schiphol was on time, not a given any more, and KL0897 to Beijing also, leaving promptly at 4:10 p.m., just after midnight in China. The plane was less than half full—I had three seats to myself. Maybe because there were so few passengers, the crew dawdled over dinner, which was pretty awful.

Friday, Nov. 10. And they started serving breakfast ridiculously early. So I got maybe four hours sleep. But the sky was clear, and it was nice looking down on the Gobi desert. We arrived in Beijing at 9:15, 15 minutes early.

At baggage-claim there was a beagle with a green jacket on which it said “SNIFFER DOG at work”—and he was. Customs and police went quickly, though with laughable inefficiencies. Baggage had to go through a scanner for customs, presumably to look for illicit substances. Two meters further was another scanner. I started to walk past it, but a police officer called me back and motioned that I should put my bags through the scanner. I pointed to the previous scanner, and he pointed to the patch on his shoulder that he was police, not customs.

At the transfer desk it was clear that they are not yet used to the code-sharing of China Southern and KLM. So it took a few minutes of searching before the girl found that my KL flight to Guilin was actually a CZ flight. Then she directed me to the other terminal, about a 10 minute walk. Checking in at China Southern was much the same story. The guy had no idea what to do with a ticket for a KLM flight. Fortunately the girl at the next counter did know. Also at security there was some problem. They seemed to want to see the ticket that corresponded to the boarding pass. But the ticket had a KL flight number and the boarding pass was for a CZ flight. Finally they decided it was OK.

But even with all these small problems, I still had two hours to wait for my flight at 12:15. It is amusing that my boarding pass is for a CZ flight, but still there are announcements in English for KL flights.

The plane was more or less on time, and, as usual in China, was completely full. One of the girls at the tourist information desk in Guilin airport, where I stopped to ask for a map, wanted to give me “information”, and sell me a few tours. Her map was smaller

and less detailed than the one in *Lonely Planet*. I convinced her that I didn't need any information, only the bus into town, which I saw standing just outside the door. So she took me to the bus, which cost ¥20 (about €2) and brought me to a hotel on the airport side of Guilin. The girl there who met the bus also wanted to give me information and sell me tours and get me a room in that hotel. She asked which hotel I was staying at, since I said I didn't need a hotel. I told her and she said I should take a taxi. I said I wanted to go first to the train station. She thought I should do that by taxi too. But I set off walking, since it was only a few hundred meters.

Buying my sleeper ticket for next week went very smoothly. If my information is correct you can only reserve sleepers seven days in advance, which meant this was the earliest I could do so, and if I didn't get that train, my schedule would be ruined. At the information desk I showed the Chinese sentence that my Chinese student in Nijmegen, Qin, had written for me (along with some other phrases I expected to be useful) asking the times of night trains to Guangzhou on the 17th. The woman typed something into the computer and on the screen it showed two train numbers with the times, which I wrote down. Then she pointed to the ticket windows. I was trying to decide which line was shortest and whether there was any restriction on which types of tickets or destinations were sold at which windows when a young Chinese guy came up and said to take window number 7 and that he would help me. He was buying a ticket himself. So he helped me, although I don't think it was really necessary, and I got a soft sleeper (first class, but a Communist land can't call it that) ticket for ¥326 (€33).

Of course, in a place as popular with Western tourists as Guilin, he wasn't just doing this for fun. He works for a travel agent and wanted to sell me his tours, which actually sounded OK—cheaper and transportation only—aimed at the budget backpacker. (In addition to my suitcase I had a small rucksack.) But still they were two to three times the price of a public bus, though probably faster. He asked where I was from. Holland. "But," he said, "you have an American accent, not Dutch." I explained that I had grown up in the U.S. It surprised me that he was so good on accents. He offered to drive me to my hotel, but having been cooped up in a plane for so long, I had a good excuse to say no.

Walking to the hotel, I was approached by several guys offering to find me a hotel, but I shook them off, except for the last one who was very persistent—he only left me when I actually entered my hotel. The hotel is quite reasonable for ¥250 per night. It would certainly cost 5 or 6 times as much in Western Europe.

Getting my plane ticket was not so easy. I had reserved a flight on the web with the same outfit I used for the hotels. But there seems to be some restriction on foreign credit cards—they would not accept them for payment. So I was to pick up the ticket at a certain address and pay cash. The address was on one of the major streets; so I thought it would not be difficult. But the Chinese are very strange about putting numbers on buildings—usually they don't. So I knew I was close, but couldn't find the address. Finally I went into a store selling mobile phones and asked them where the building was. A young man there could speak pretty good English, but didn't know. So he called the telephone number I had and they described to him where to go, and he took me there.

It turned out to be about 50 meters down a side street. Of course, they didn't have the ticket ready. They needed to get authorization from the head office—it all took about 20 minutes.

I then walked around a bit. The stores are open late. Many of them are blaring music out onto the street to try to attract attention, although why deafening “music” should make someone want to go in is beyond me. In the supermarket of a department store I bought yogurt and muffins for breakfast and a bottle of beer for later in the evening. Then I went to eat at a sort of food court. You sit down and are given a blank bill. Then you go to the stalls and pick out what you want, your bill is stamped accordingly, and the food is brought to your table when it is ready. At the end you take the bill to the cashier and pay. I had some broccoli (I think), some pieces of pork (with bone) cooked in a red sauce, some dumplings, and a beer for ¥36. It was not great, but not bad either. Back in the hotel I drank the bottle of beer and went to bed about 10:30 (3:30 a.m. back home)—it had been a long day.

Saturday, Nov. 11. Surprise at the bus station: When I showed the woman at the ticket booth the sheet of paper that Qin had written for me asking for a bus to Xing-An, the woman said, “No bus.” Later I thought maybe Qin had written it wrong—her characters looked different from those in *Lonely Planet*. Actually, it was probably not such a bad thing, since otherwise I would not have had sufficient time to see Guilin. As usual, I try to fit too much into a limited amount of time, and sometimes (especially in a foreign land) things go more slowly than expected. So I spent the day visiting Guilin's parks, which are famous.

First, I went to Elephant's Trunk Park (Xianghi Shan), which owes its name to a rock formation—a rock column and an arch connecting it to the hill—which does indeed resemble an elephant's trunk. They have played up this name recently in a typical Chinese, Disneyland-like way with a playground with elephant toys, statues of elephants, *etc.* Also, someone has a photo concession with several young Chinese ladies dressed in various old Chinese costumes. Underneath they're wearing blue jeans and sneakers. For a small fee you can have your picture taken with one or more of them.

From the top of the hill I could look down at the tour boats on the Li River. The water is low and they were scraping bottom.

It was quite hazy in the morning, but cleared as the day wore on. The temperature was very pleasant, particularly if you were in the shade and the breeze was not blocked by a building or hill. I began to worry that I needed a sun blocker, but decided I could get by without it.

The next park was Solitary Beauty Park, which contains Princes' City and Solitary



Elephant's Trunk Park.

Peak, a.k.a. Peak of Unique Beauty. (The Chinese, at least in English translation, are great on superlatives.) On the way there I was approached by a young man who wanted to help me find whatever I was looking for. So he accompanied me as I walked to the park and offered tidbits of information. They were making a film at the entrance to the park, which was obvious. But he could supply the added information that the movie was about Sun Yat-Sen, who for a while had his headquarters here. I got rid of him at the entrance to the park—sometimes it's nice that there is an admission charge.

Princes' City was built as the palace of the nephew of the emperor in the 14th century. Its (restored) walls and gates surround the park. Later, in the Qing dynasty, the grounds were converted to an examination center for the civil service. There is a Confucius temple where the aspiring civil servants could pray for luck on the exam and two long rows of examination cubicles, opening onto a long (open-air) corridor, along which I presume proctors paced. The door of the cubicle folded out into a table at which the examinee sat.



Examination cubicles.

Solitary Peak rises almost vertically some 152 m in the center of the park. Steep steps carved in the rock ascend to the top from which there are nice views out over Guilin. There are a number of caves on the mountain slopes and many inscriptions both inside the caves and on the mountain side itself, dating from the Tang (618–907) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.

On leaving the park, as I was standing debating with myself which way to walk, I was approached by yet another young man who wanted to talk. You have to keep

moving and even that does not always help. After the usual questions he asked where I was going. I said I wanted to see the lakes in the center of town. He walked with me, pointing the way. I knew the way and so knew he wasn't trying to lead me astray. He said he taught English at a primary school and also gave lessons in calligraphy. While walking, I was discovered by four young girls who could have been his pupils but weren't. Each wanted me to write down my name and country in her notebook. They all asked very politely with exactly the same words and thanked me.

He also told me that it was a festival this weekend celebrating the various minorities of the region—Minority Day—and that there was a performance this evening (and the previous evening). “Coincidentally” we were just passing the theater. Was I interested? It sounded perhaps interesting. We went to the box office and I bought a ticket, not the most expensive VIP ticket for the first 3 or 4 rows at ¥250, but one for the central seats at ¥180 about half way back and in the middle, since the tickets for the side sections were not much cheaper (¥150).

Then we went to see the lake and the two pagodas in the middle of it. He started talking about tea: His father grows tea near Yangshuo. He knew a tea room where you could try two teas but only pay for one, ¥5. Would I like some tea? Well, for ¥5 you can't go too wrong. So OK. It turned out to be a tea shop where indeed you were served two kinds of tea, and several cups of each. The first was Osmanthus tea. Not really tea at all, it is made from the flowers of the Osmanthus tree. The harvest was just about over. In town we saw a few trees still in bloom; the flowers are white and very small. It is a rather strange tree in that it blooms in the Fall rather than in the Spring. The second tea was a green tea—local, top quality, one of the best in China, *etc.* Its special property was a slightly sweet aftertaste. Both teas had medicinal benefits—osmanthus tea is good for the eyes, the green tea for circulation, kidneys, liver, *etc.* When I looked rather doubtful about these claims, the tea shop owner said it was true, he knew, he was a professor and studies had shown this. But he didn't seem to know what I was talking about when I asked if the studies were double-blind.

First the tea is put into a small (about the size of your fist) pottery tea pot. A bit of hot water is added. It is allowed to steep a bit, and the tea is poured into a cup and the cup emptied over a couple of stone animal statues. I asked what the significance of the animals was. They are the tea pets. Instead of throwing away the first tea, which is just to get the tea leaves (or blossoms) moistened, it is given to the pets.

Then came the sales pitch. Both teas were pretty expensive, about ¥1 per gram (€10 per 100 g). The amounts offered kept getting smaller—first a box with 200 g, then 100 g, finally 50 g. But thinking of how much tea I have at home from every time my Chinese students come from China, and the likelihood that someone would give me some tea during this trip, as well as how (in)frequently I drink tea, I kept saying no. Then we decided to leave and had to pay. I got out ¥5. “But it is ¥10,” said the guy who brought me to this place. I pointed out that he had invited me for tea. He agreed to pay for himself. (Rita Verdonk, our minister of integration, would be pleased at how well I have integrated into Dutch society.)

Almost across the street from the tea shop was a shop producing and selling callig-

raphy. This is where my self-appointed guide teaches calligraphy. Would I like to visit? No. Then he wanted to point out a good restaurant. When would I like to eat? Sensing that I would soon be hit for a meal, I said I wanted to go back to my hotel and take a shower before eating and going to the performance. He pointed out a nearby restaurant, which I would never go to—lots of English in the windows listing dishes common on menus of Chinese restaurants in the West. Later he pointed out another restaurant closer to my hotel, in fact about half way between my hotel and the theater. We went in so that I could look at the English menu and see the prices. Unlike the first restaurant there were many diners inside. So I reserved a table for $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 hour later. He said he was going home to eat but if I wanted he would come back to meet me at the restaurant about 7:30 and maybe drink a beer with me before I went to the performance. But I didn't want—I thought we had talked enough.

When I came back to the restaurant it appeared to have been a good idea to reserve. The restaurant was almost full, unlike most of the restaurants on the street. My eye fell on the fish on the menu. I ordered one, to the consternation of my waitress, who asked a Chinese sitting with two foreigners at a nearby table to translate—they didn't have that fish tonight. He suggested another fish and pointed out that the prices were per 500 grams. I asked how big the fish were—well they had ordered one of 1.5 kg (for three), but there were smaller ones. I asked for a very small one, which turned out to be 800 g or so. I also ordered some braised bean curd and a beer. The fish looked like a catfish. It was quite good, but too much.

As I was leaving, the Chinese who had translated and the two foreigners with him asked how I had liked the fish and where I was from. Big surprise when it turned out that the two foreigners were also Dutch. They had left their wives at home and come to China for a four-week biking holiday. They had biked from Guangzhou to Guilin and had another ten days to visit the area. They were enthusiastic about the trip so far.

The performance turned out to be a big disappointment: some songs and dances, some acrobatics, but not all that interesting.

Sunday, Nov. 12. I checked out of the hotel, leaving my big suitcase for my return two days later. I got a bus with no problem, direction Longshen. The only problem was that the bus was not very full. So it spent a lot of time cruising the streets in order to find more passengers. It dropped me and a Chinese couple off at Heping, where a guy with a nice new van was happy to drive us to Pingan. It was nice that the Chinese could negotiate with the driver, who spoke only a few words of English. It cost ¥20 per person, which seemed a bit steep at first. But as we climbed the mountain and as the time it took lengthened, the price seemed more reasonable.

The driver had a sack of oranges and offered them to us. I am always suspicious in such situations—perhaps after I have eaten one I will be presented with a big bill. But the Chinese couple each took one, so I did too. It was quite tasty despite the fact that the skin was more green than orange. Near the end of the trip the Chinese woman, who was sitting on the back seat with me, divided the remaining oranges between us, motioning that it was OK to take them.

There is a ¥50 entrance fee to the “Longji Terraces Scenic Area.” It is rather touristy with an army of souvenir sellers at the entrance. Also porters to carry you up the hill if you want, sitting in a chair suspended from poles between two porters. I found my hotel with no problem. Since it was lunch time, the woman asked did I want a drink or lunch. I said I wanted a room. She showed me the room and said it was ¥80 to



Longji Terraces

which I agreed. It had been ¥100 in the e-mail confirming my reservation, which had already been a discount from the ¥160 quoted in the guide book—but then this seems to be off-season. It is, of course, a small room without any plumbing in the room, but there are two nice bathrooms down the hall, which were quite adequate given that there were only two other rooms occupied. And it appears reasonably clean.

Then I set out to hike around the rice terraces, which are very impressive, even though this is not the best season. It is mostly brown; almost everything has been harvested. But the terracing is still amazing, going up the mountainside.

Most recently harvested were the chili peppers. In Pingan there were lots of them lying on the pavement to dry, and the locals were selling them to tourists. The only thing still being harvested were sweet potatoes.

One is constantly being “attacked” by a Yao (one of the local minorities) woman, soon joined by two or three colleagues, selling souvenirs and offering, for a small price, to let down their hair for photos. They are hard to shake off. The souvenirs are mainly small, hand-embroidered things. When you finally do get rid of the women, they immediately sit down at the side of the path to continue with their embroidery. They don’t waste a minute.

Finally I did succumb to one group. Their hair *is* very long, and they make it even longer by attaching an extra length of hair. It nearly reaches the ground. They normally wear it coiffed and covered by a black cloth. They tell, somewhat disparagingly that the Zhuong (another local minority) women in Pingan do not have long hair. The Zhuong head dress looks like a terry-cloth bath towel wrapped around their hair.



Yao women



Yao women

I ate at the hotel—standard fare, not too expensive, though probably overpriced. Also staying, and eating, at the hotel was a couple, in their thirties I would guess, speaking French. But they also spoke good English to the hotel people. So I guessed that they were Canadian, which turned out to be correct. They were treating themselves to a year off, touring around Asia.

Monday, Nov. 13. I had an “omelet” for breakfast (with knife and fork!) and tea—¥16. Then a bus to Langshen (¥7) and a 45 minute wait for a bus to Sanjiang. The road to Sanjiang was under construction. Basically, they were building a new road, which meant tearing up the old one. So it was a jolting ride over non-road, the bus seldom getting above second gear. What should have been a two-hour ride took close to three.

A guy with a motorcycle rickshaw was right there to ask me if I wanted to go to the Chengyang bridge. I kept looking around for competition, but no one else seemed to have seen me. I finally agreed to ¥35. It took half an hour. But he spoke some English and he was of the Dong minority group which lives in the vicinity of the bridge. Here too one had to buy a ticket for the “scenic area,” but it was cheaper than the Longji Terraces, only ¥20 or ¥30 (I can’t remember which). He asked if I had a hotel—his friend ran one, and he showed me the card of the hotel. It was, in fact, the one I had planned on going to. So he brought me there. The room was OK; it even had a private bathroom with a western-style toilet, but no warm water, which was not too bad, since the cold water was not very cold. And it only cost ¥40. The owners were very friendly. They spoke a few words of English and had a *Lonely Planet* phrase book available.

It was about 3, so there was not so much time to see the area. I had to content myself with the small villages close to the bridge, although it would have been nice to have been able to walk an hour or two to some neighboring villages, where the number of tourists would have been less. It is very rustic and tranquil.

Except for a brick foundation, Dong buildings are entirely of wood. Supposedly it is all joined, *i.e.*, no nails. A beautiful example is the Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge over a small river. Well it looked small, but water is low now. Maybe it is much bigger in the rainy season. In any case, this bridge is impressive—a far cry from the covered bridges of central Indiana. The bridge was built in 1916 and is 64.4 m long, 3.6 m wide and 10.6 m high.



Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge

In the villages there are ponds and fields, and people, mostly women, were hard at work, planting, mending fences, *etc.* All houses seemed to have electricity, but sanitation looked like more of a problem. What looked like latrines were built on the side of a bridge—they emptied directly into a pond—but maybe they were no longer in use.

I passed a primary school just as it was letting out. One little girl said very correctly, “Good afternoon, sir.” I said good afternoon in return. Others were a bit confused and said “Good morning.” The distinction is a bit confusing since in Chinese they do not have different greetings for different times of day.



Dong village

Each of the villages has a community center with a pagoda-like roof. They were called drum towers according to one guide book, though there was no drum. Chinese cities used to have drum towers and bell towers, the function being to sound alarm. Outside one a folk dance group was performing. They played traditional local instruments consisting of one pipe to blow into and 6 or 7 vertical bamboo pipes with resonating chambers of various sizes, each with a finger hole. These instruments came in 3 or 4 sizes, the largest a floor model. The dancers were in local costume. Unfortunately, my film was finished, but I could watch and listen. To help finance the community centers, visitors could pay ¥10 and then their names would be carved in stone to be mounted around the outside base of the building. There were a few tablets with maybe a hundred names, both Chinese and foreign, already in place. Most people were very friendly, greeting you with “hello” or “ni hao” or both.

While watching the folk dancing, a young woman came up to me and said “Welcome to China.” She came back a while later to talk some more. She was with a group busily photographing the buildings. They were students of architecture and urban planning in Guangzhou. We exchanged e-mail addresses. Her name was Lu Ye. She was from Hangzhou, where I am going for my conference. She asked me to come eat with their group, but I had agreed to eat at my hotel.



Lu Ye and me (and folk dancers)

Back at my hotel I found that there were other guests: a Chinese couple in their fifties, I would guess, and a group of 2 men and 1 woman, age about 30. Dinner was a communal affair with the owner, his wife cooking and serving, their daughter, about 10, and the grandmother

out of sight, presumably in the kitchen. This was, I guess, Chinese home cooking: a dish of pork and vegetables, a dish of chicken and vegetables, pickled vegetables, boiled sweet potato, soup with mushrooms, scrambled eggs with some chili pepper, and some starchy root vegetable I couldn't identify. Plus beer—I was careful not to drink alone, only when someone toasted. As dessert there was a sweet soup, which I didn't care for that much.

It turned out during the meal that the young woman in the group could speak English, but in the beginning was too shy to try it. Her name was Xiao Guirong, and we too exchanged e-mail addresses. She said this was the first time she spoke English with a foreigner. She did pretty well. The three work for a newspaper in Changsha. One, maybe both, of the men was a reporter—he showed me his press card to explain what he did. I tried to explain what I do, but *physics* was not in the *Lonely Planet* phrase book.

After dinner we watched two videos. The first was of the end of the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) in the village. Most couples in the village wait for that day to be married. So there are many weddings. Pigs are slaughtered, and there are processions and contests. In one contest something is fired into the air and lands somewhere. The first person to find it and bring it back wins. There is a mass stampede in the direction of where it fell with people wading across rivers and ponds, pushing each other out of the way. The second video was about the inauguration of the new (or rebuilt) drum tower in one of the villages. Later we went by flashlight up to it. The villagers were practicing their folk dancing and having lots of fun. We could examine and try out the instruments and join in dancing, not that I did. They were happy to explain the instruments. They were also very happy to engrave our names in stone for ¥10, which the three young Chinese were happy to pay.

Tuesday, Nov. 14. The next morning the three had already left when I came down to breakfast. The older couple was on the balcony eating. I sat inside at a table with the daughter, who was busily finishing her homework. I took a look at her English book. It reminded me of “Dick and Jane” but with more variation. The woman asked what I wanted for breakfast, perhaps a pancake? I said a pancake and a cup of tea would be fine, though a pancake is not the easiest thing to eat with chopsticks.

The older couple came inside and the man brought over his guide book to show me that the Chengyang Wind and Rain Bridge was in it, as well as the Longji Terraces. I tried to tell him that I had just been there, but I'm not sure I succeeded. His guide book looked like a Chinese version of *Lonely Planet* in size and shape, but perhaps more oriented to what to see rather than practical matters.

I paid the woman for the hotel: ¥45, ¥40 for the room and ¥5 for breakfast. So either dinner was included in the room or the reporter had paid for everyone—I saw him pay the woman something after dinner, but I couldn't figure out whether it was for the beer or for the entire dinner. And no one said anything (that I could understand). She also told me to catch a bus up on the road by the bridge (which I knew) and that the fare to Sanjiang was ¥5, which was handy to know—I could just give the driver the

money and not have to negotiate the price.

The first thing to come along was a van which acts as a minibus for three or four passengers plus baggage. It brought me to within 100 m or so of the bus station. As I started to walk to the bus station, guess who shows up with his motorcycle rickshaw. I would just have walked, but he took me to the station. I'm not sure, but my impression was that it was just a favor. So I didn't pay him, and he didn't seem to mind.

I bought a ticket to Guilin (¥27), but had to wait until 11 for the bus, 1½ hours. So I walked briefly around town, but it was pretty depressing—noisy, dirty, everything covered with dust. I went back to the bus station and sat in the open-air waiting room—open-air because the building is not yet finished. I could also say I sat in the middle of a construction site. The bus left promptly at 11. Then I discovered that it went to Guilin via Longshen—so again a slow, jolting ride, but this was a bigger bus and its springs seemed to work better. We got to Guilin at 4, probably a half hour late, since if I read the sign on the bus correctly it was supposed to leave Guilin at 4 to go back to Sanjiang.

I checked back into the hotel, retrieving my big suitcase. Then I went out to walk around the lake I had missed before. I went to a Szechuan restaurant listed in *Lonely Planet* and perhaps in other guide books too, since there were lots of foreigners there, including the Canadian couple who had been at the hotel in Pingan. I had half a “traditional smoked” duck, which I didn't care for all that much, a small cabbage (paksoi) with mushrooms, and eggplant Szechuan style (which is something I often try to imitate myself, but I wanted an update on how it is supposed to taste—one thing is more chili pepper.) The vegetables were both good. Even though I had only eaten two tangerines for lunch, I could not quite finish it—but I came close. For ¥61 it was a bargain.

Wednesday, Nov. 15. I must be used to the time by now. I slept until 9, which was a bit unfortunate. The buses to Yangshuo run very frequently. So I only had to wait 10 minutes or so. The trip took 1½ hours, and I saw lots of the karst rock peaks on the way. It is sort of a strange landscape: quite flat valleys with tall rock domes sticking out.

Getting off the bus, I was immediately swamped by people flogging their hotels or travel bureaus. This place is very touristy. I kept repeating that I had a hotel. One woman insisted on showing me where it was. I showed her the name (in English and Chinese in *Lonely Planet*) and she set off. I had a pretty good idea where it was, and at an intersection I said we should turn right, but she insisted straight ahead. After half a block she said “here it is.” But it wasn't. All it had in common with my hotel was the word “sun” in both names. She was angry. She claimed I had said that hotel. I pointed out that I had not said anything, but had shown her the name. She looked again. Then she blamed it on “sun.” I had already set out in the direction I thought it was. To save face she now had to lead me there.

The hotel is rather nice, built around an interior courtyard. The only thing the room lacks is something besides the floor to put my suitcase on.

Setting out to take a walk I was approached by various guides. One was quite persistent. She had a notebook filled with letters from satisfied customers, in all imaginable

languages. She showed me a Dutch one from a very satisfied lady from Groningen. What she offered were bicycle tours around the countryside including a stop for a home-cooked meal in her village. *Lonely Planet* had mentioned such trips saying that many readers had found them very worthwhile. Of course, it depends on the guide. It could also be terrible. Anyway, I had other plans.

I walked around part of the surrounding area near Baisha, through little villages, fields of various crops, recently picked Sharon fruit (at least that's what it looked like) drying in the sun, a bridge over the Yulong River. People were somewhat less friendly than in the Dong villages, but that was OK. I had gotten rather tired of all the hello's from little kids. Nevertheless, people were quite helpful, pointing the right way when I hesitated at an intersection.

I went to a restaurant next to the hotel, which the woman at the hotel recommended. I had stuffed snails—like French escargots except stuffed with what appeared to be sausage and prepared in oil, garlic, green and red peppers and chili pepper— and a dish of a vegetable that looked something like broccoli but with pencil-sized stalks. Not bad, though it was not always easy to get the snail out of its shell using the toothpicks that were provided.

About half way through eating, a woman came into the restaurant and asked if she could talk English with me. I said OK. She sat down but for a long time she didn't say anything but just read some sheets of paper—looked like computer print-out in Chinese. Maybe she was just waiting for me to finish eating, for when I was nearly done she started talking. We talked quite a while. She had been a political science teacher until two years ago. Then she had tried working in a factory, there being little demand for political science teachers these days. Now she tried to get tourists to take tours. She had some brochures but didn't try to show them to me or get me interested. She said a friend did the guiding and they split the fee. She was 30 with a six-year old son and divorced. She needed money. In the winter it was hard to find tourists to take tours—there were fewer tourists. In the summer it was OK. She had not found anyone for a week. She had tried to find other jobs, in restaurants, stores, hotels, but they only wanted young girls. She had some hare-brained ideas: I should stay in Yangshuo and open an English school. She knew of a building which I could rent for ¥500 per month. Chinese children could pay ¥1500 a month for lessons. She could give me a foot massage—all the rage around Guilin apparently, for I had seen lots of ads for them. Not interested. Could I give her ¥100? No. I repeated what I had said earlier when she first mentioned the tours: She was wasting her time on me and had better try someone else. She would like to show me her son, whom she had left home alone. No. She said she had told me the truth. Could I give her ¥20? I believe you, but no, sorry. I don't feel it is my job to solve Chinese social problems. Finally she left. A sad story, if true, but it all sounded a bit dodgy. Looking back, the sheets she was reading in the beginning seemed almost like a script. At least at the start of the conversation she kept referring to them. Ah well, I'll never know.

Thursday, Nov. 16. At 9, as arranged the previous day, the girl from the hotel took me to the bus station, made sure I got on the right bus and wrote down its number in order to phone someone in Xingping to meet me. That was not really necessary since there were three people meeting the bus to lead tourists to the boats, which were some distance, a kilometer or so, away.

So a Chinese couple and I took a rickshaw, powered not by a motorcycle this time, but by a sort of motor with two wheels attached—sort of like the kind of thing Westerners might have to plow their gardens. It pattered and bounced along over a road with pot holes the thing could almost get lost in. On more than one occasion I was lifted from my seat as it dropped away beneath me.

The boat trip on the Li River was disappointing. First, the weather was not so good—very hazy. While a little haze probably makes the karst peaks along the river more romantic, this was way too much. Second, the boat turned around without going as far up-stream as I had expected. One nice sight on the trip was a water buffalo in mid-stream. At first only the top of his back was visible. Then he raised his head with a huge mouthful of green vegetation which he proceeded to chew on. He looked like he was really enjoying it. There were several small fishing boats with a pair of cormorants each. But none were fishing. For a small fee the fisherman would stand up with the pole with one bird on each end and turn the pole so that the cormorants had to use their wings to regain balance. I was glad I had chosen for this short boat trip rather than the long trip from Guilin to Yangshuo.

After the boat trip was over, I walked along the cliff above the river and sat on a rock to watch the big boats coming down from Guilin. On most of them people were busy eating, too busy I am sure to



Li River near Xingping

enjoy the scenery. But maybe not, as many of them waved to me.

I walked back to Xingping, not much of a town, and then explored the countryside on the other side of town: many gardens with many types of vegetables and citrus trees. Then I took the bus back toward Yangshuo. I got off at Fuli and walked around the countryside there. I happened across a small temple with a gate and a few buildings. As I walked up to it an old woman showed me a paper with English and Chinese saying that this was a scenic area maintained by the local Senior Citizens Association and that one must pay ¥3 to enter. Well, OK. There were indeed lots of seniors playing cards in one of the buildings. The roof beams of the temple were nicely carved. The old woman made sure I didn't miss them.

The surrounding area next to the Li River contained large gardens and, along the river bank, grazing water buffalo, "tended" by men sleeping under trees.

Back at the hotel I ran into the two Dutch cyclists I had met at the restaurant in Guilin. They are also staying at my hotel. They are still enthusiastic about their trip, as am I about mine.

Tonight I ate a local specialty, or so at least half the restaurants in town claimed, Li River beer fish—a local fish with a seasoned coating, braised in beer with ginger, scallions, tomatoes, green pepper. Together with aubergine and beer and rice it cost ¥80, considerably cheaper than my fish in Guilin.

Friday, Nov. 17. I spent the morning hiking in the area between Yangshuo and the Yulong River. I walked through several villages, which looked somewhat more prosperous than those of previous days. It was very hazy; so I took no pictures. Even more so than in previous villages, there were many new houses under construction. There were boat docks at several places on the river where you could take a bamboo boat downstream. These are basically rafts made of bamboo with a superstructure consisting of a roof with two or four chairs under it. People along the road kept asking "Bamboo?" and I kept replying "no bamboo."

I turned around to walk back to town somewhat sooner than was really necessary. I was uncertain how long it would take by the direct road since I had come by a somewhat random route. So I played safe and then had plenty of time to eat lunch and walk around Yangshuo's many streets of souvenir shops.

The bus to Guilin only took slightly over one hour, a half hour less than coming. I guess this was the express bus, although the bus coming to Yangshuo also made no stops. So I had plenty of time to wait in the most-of-the-time deserted soft-class waiting room for my train at 18.04 to Guangzhou. When I entered, I was greeted by a young woman, who noted my desti-



On the streets of Yangshuo)

nation and passport number. My suitcases went through the scanner. A few minutes before departure the young woman escorted me to the right platform. The train left only a few minutes late.

Saturday, Nov. 18. I slept reasonably well. We arrived in Guangzhou just before 9, about a half hour late. From the train station there is an entrance to the metro, which is super modern. Tickets are sold in vending machines with touch screens showing the metro map with station names in English as well as Chinese. You can select English or Chinese instructions. You touch the station you want to go to, the price appears, you pay with coins or bills—it even gives change. Then it gives you a plastic disk (with an embedded chip). At the gate you put the disk (or monthly or yearly pass) against a reader and the gate opens. At the exit you drop the disk into a slot, and if the fare you paid agrees with the entrance and exit stations, the gate opens.

The tracks are completely shut off from the platform by a glass wall. When the train comes it stops with its doors aligned with doors in the wall, and both open.

I took the metro to the stop closest to my hotel but still had about 1½ km to walk, which was a bit far since it is hot and muggy. I don't see thermometers anywhere, but it seemed in the high 20's. I was, of course, too early, but luckily I could have my room right away, and a maid was sent to get it ready—and a very thorough job she did.

I washed up and shaved. By then it was nearly 11. I decided to walk in the area south of the Pearl River. I was looking for some buildings of classical Ming architecture, of which a few are supposed to still be left. I didn't find them, but the area was still interesting. Some of it is still low-rise, though large apartment blocks are rapidly encroaching. I took some pictures in a couple of market streets: vegetables, fish, turtles, snakes, poultry, meat. Most of the people did not mind, or even found it amusing, that I was taking a picture of their shop. However, one woman selling meat ducked back into her shop when she saw I was taking a picture of her display of meat.



Guangzhou

Then I took the metro north. I sat a while in the People's Park watching old men playing Chinese checkers or chess surrounded by rings of kibitzers. Chinese English (Chinglish) is sometimes amusing. On a sign in the grass: "It is everybody's duty to take care of trees and grass" is OK, and probably a good translation of the Chinese. But "For your health please take care of trees and grass," perhaps also a good translation, sounds rather ominous, like the infamous offer you can't refuse.



People's Park, Guangzhou

Next I went to Liurong Temple, a.k.a. Temple of the Six Banyan Trees, of which only two are left. The two banyan trees (*Ficus microcarpa*) are nice, the other types of tree which have replaced the other four banyans also. There are several temple pavilions, one with three large golden Buddhas, others with only one. As usual, before the Buddhas are neatly stacked piles of fruit, bottles or cans of fruit juice or cola, *etc.* One also

had artificial Christmas trees complete with flashing multi-colored lights—at least they looked to me like Christmas trees and not like the conical pyramids which often decorate the altars.

In one rather plain brick hall there were rows of cushions, many already had plastic or cloth bags on them, claiming them for the subsequent “service.” After a while “ordinary” people gathered, put on robes and went in. Most had simple black robes, but some also had a brown one put on over the black one and held together with a brown or a yellow clasp. There were also some people without a robe. At the front of the room was a long table with a Buddha at the center and the usual stock of fruit, *etc.*, along the table. Monks occupied the first couple of rows. A priest started the chanting and one monk kept time on a small wooden “drum”, which looked rather like a wooden ball with a slit carved in it—a solid, three-dimensional, block-letter C. The entire congregation chanted along, reading the words from a book. There was an intermission and then a second session of chanting. It all sounded rather pleasant and monotonous—would be good to cure insomnia.

The temple has a nice pagoda, 8 stories, which I climbed (for ¥10 extra on the ¥5 admission to the temple). There were nice views of the surrounding city and down on the rest of the temple.

I headed back to the hotel to take a shower. It was beginning to cool off outside, which seemed nice. On the way back I walked through a few blocks where every shop sold electronics parts, then a few blocks where every store sold hardware. Guangzhou really seems organized in specialized districts.

The nice cooling of the weather turned into disaster when I went out to eat. I had walked about a block when the first drops hit. After another block it started to pour. It was a real thunder storm. Fortunately I was under the arcade of a building along the river. I had chosen a restaurant from *Lonely Planet*, which was supposed to be there. But it wasn't. In its place was a travel office.

So I waited out the rain—40 minutes or so. I was not the only one sheltering under the arcade: clochards and beggars as well as a few other ordinary people like me. One of the beggars asked me three times for a handout (all Westerners look alike).

I then looked for another *Lonely Planet* restaurant, about a kilometer away, which was supposed to be very good. I couldn't find it. About where it should have been was a group of pedestrian streets, none of which had the right name. There were lots of stores with loud music and flashing lights and lots of young Chinese who prefer street food and McDonalds or KFC, both of which were present. It was getting late, 8:30, and some little restaurants were starting to close. So I went into one and had some slices of honey-roasted duck, a green vegetable stir-fried in garlic and oil, rice, and, of course, a beer. It was edible, but nothing great. Prices here are higher than in Guilin, which was higher than the other places I have been. The meal ended up costing ¥39. The local beer here is not as good as in Guilin: less flavor, 10°P instead of 11 and 3.6% alcohol instead of 4.5.

The hotel is apparently not in the best of neighborhoods—I was approached so often I lost count by young women wanting to massage me for a low price, say ¥60. Some

were even in pairs offering 2 for the price of 1.

Sunday, Nov. 19. First I went to a museum. When leveling a hill for apartments back in the eighties, they discovered a tomb in the middle of it, the tomb of the local king around 150 B.C. Entombed with the king were four concubines plus a number of servants. The custom of sacrificing servants and wives with a king had died out by that time in most of China, but this king was apparently old-fashioned. The tomb was in poor state in that water had gotten in and almost nothing was left of the bodies or of wood or cloth. But the tomb had never been robbed so there was lots to be displayed—and quite nicely too with explanations in English as well as Chinese. The museum was built around the tomb. So you could enter the tomb as well as view the objects in the surrounding buildings. The tomb was not too large, consisting of the main chamber and two side chambers, an entrance hall and off it two more, smaller, side chambers.

The museum also had a large collection of porcelain pillows—perhaps the largest and finest in the world—donated by a multi-millionaire Hong Kong businessman.

Next I went to the Guangxiao (Bright Filial Piety) Temple. It is quite different from yesterday's Temple of the Six Banyan Trees. It was less busy. It is also larger with more pavilions and larger Buddhas. The largest pavilion has three large golden Buddhas; another pavillion has a reclining white one. At the entrance gate two huge guardians on each side protect the entrance.

I walked past, but did not try to go into, the mosque. I'm not sure it was open to non-Muslims—I didn't see a ticket booth. The minaret was bare concrete. It reminded me of a water tower. The wall around the mosque was crumbling and propped up by large timbers.

Close by was the Temple of the Five Immortals a.k.a. the Five Celestials Shrine, a Daoist (Taoist) temple, supposedly where the five celestials riding five goats, each goat with a sheave of rice in its mouth, descended and brought perpetual food to the population: the founding of the city of Guangzhou.

Finally, I took a walk around Shamian Island, which was awarded to the British and French after the Opium Wars. So there is a preponderance of European style architecture. With essentially no traffic, it is quite quiet and peaceful compared to the rest of the city.

Tonight I did find the *Lonely Planet* restaurant I was looking for, according to *Lonely Planet* a very good restaurant though not inexpensive. It was full, despite being huge—it covered at least three floors. I had to wait about 10 minutes before being conducted to the third floor. The Chinese expect you to order about 1 minute after they have given you the menu. In that time I wasn't even through reading the first page (of 10 or more). Finally I ordered four dishes, but it turned out they were out of scallops as well as one of the other dishes. I agreed, rather too quickly, to have the sea cucumbers with some vegetables instead. This was a mistake. Sea cucumbers do not have much taste and their consistency is rather gelatinous. Oh well, you won't know if you don't try. I also had a chicken and eggplant dish and six dumplings. And, of course, a beer—same brand as last night, but the 12°P variety, much better. Total cost: ¥124.50. Fortunately

I had gotten my food before the power failure—tables that hadn't were out of luck. So I ate half of the meal in the dark except for the emergency lighting, a few candles, and people's mobile phones with built-in flashlights. The lights came back on as I stepped out the door leaving the restaurant. It was not just the restaurant, but the whole area that was affected.

Monday, Nov. 20. I walked around a bit looking at shops and markets, but grew tired of the crowded streets. So I was back at the hotel a bit earlier than planned. I checked out, walked to the place where I could get a bus to the airport, and arrived at the airport a ridiculous three hours before the flight. And you can't check in until two hours before!



Guangzhou

On the way to the bus I passed a large building which must be some kind of wholesale clothing exchange. Lots of people were pushing carts around loaded with huge sacks containing, I suppose, clothing. Entrances to the building were marked with such signs as “Cowboy and casual clothing entrance.”

I also walked through a district specializing in decorations. A couple of dozen stores sold mostly Christmas decorations: artificial trees, lights, *etc.*—all the chintzy items Americans will soon be buying.

Also perhaps of interest: Price of rice sold in bulk out of huge sacks at small hole-in-the-wall stores ranged from ¥1.50 to ¥3.00 per 500 g or per kg, I'm not sure which.

Guangzhou airport is huge and new—seems like a lot of empty space. They could use some of it to add chairs to wait in.

The plane was more or less on time. I took the bus from the Hangzhou airport to the center of town and then got a taxi to the hotel where the conference is being held, by which time it was dark.

I am sharing a room with Igor Dremin from Moscow. I've known Igor for a long time. Igor is also going to Wuhan for the week after the conference. Normally, I would have asked for a room to myself, but since Wuhan is paying for both Igor and me, we have to take what they provide. Who, 50 years ago, would have thought things would turn out like this? Here I am, an American, in China, sharing a room with a Russian.

Tuesday and Wednesday, Nov. 21–22. Conference. It is raining. The food is good. The hotel is actually a complex of three buildings and calls itself a resort. There is a small lake, or maybe I should say pond, with a row-boat chained to a dock. Nice trees make it all quite attractive. It is situated on a hill overlooking the famous West Lake. The trees block the view though, except, we were told, from the windows on the top floor of one of the buildings. Guess which rooms are most expensive.

Thursday, Nov. 23. Conference in the morning; excursion in the afternoon. The rain stopped just in time. A bus took us first to West Lake for a boat ride. Although the rain had stopped it was still very cloudy and rather cool, not ideal for a boat trip. The lake, the gardens on its shores, the islands and surrounding hills were, nevertheless, pretty.

The next stop was Lingyin Temple, which I had visited on my previous trip to Hangzhou. We had spent too much time at the lake, which, combined with a late start, meant not very much time for the temple before it closed at 5. Also, our guide was not very good. I'm glad I had seen it before at my leisure.

Then we headed for a tea factory in a village outside of Hangzhou. We got there just before closing. There was a large souvenir store where many dawdled, but finally we all got into a large tasting room. There we were shown various categories of green tea and told about it. We could sample their third-best tea. A single mug of their second-best tea was passed around so that we could smell it. The first-best tea was all sold out; most of it goes to Beijing.

We were told that good green tea should not be made with boiling water, but water at 80°C. Also that if using a Chinese-style tea mug with a lid, you should leave the lid off while the tea is brewing; otherwise the tea leaves wilt too much and the tea is not as good. The tea leaves are put loose into the cup—no tea bags or tea balls. If you think this is unhandy because then you will get tea leaves in your mouth, you miss the point: the tea leaves can (and should) be eaten.

We could, of course, buy some tea. Normally it was sold in cylindrical canisters which contained about 100 g. However, the woman demonstrating all this, besides speaking excellent English, was an accomplished tea packer. She could get about 150 g into a box without damaging the tea leaves. She would pack the boxes for us, effectively giving us 150 g for the price of 100 g. The price was ¥160 for the third-best and ¥220 for the second-best tea.

Friday, Nov. 24. The last day of the conference.

Saturday, Nov. 25. Stomach troubles caught up to me at last. Maybe half of the non-Chinese at the conference had been having trouble. Tonight both Igor and I got it. Also I have a sore throat and a cough, which has gotten better and then worse during the past few days. At first I attributed it to the air pollution in Guangzhou, but maybe it is a real cold. We both skipped breakfast. I ate just a little lunch, a bit of soup. Then Igor, I, and the Chinese faculty members from Wuhan headed to the airport for the flight to Wuhan. The graduate students from Wuhan had to take the train.

In Wuhan, Igor and I were taken to the hotel on the campus of the Central China Normal University. Prof. Lianshou Liu was there to welcome us. Lianshou was the head of the group until he finally gave it up at age 70. Now he is 75 and still active, though noticeably less so than previously.

The hotel is new since my last visit and a great improvement on the old Foreign Visitors Guest House. It is a normal hotel. But although only a few years old, it is already showing signs of age with paint peeling in some places. This is far from the first

such case I have seen. The idea of maintenance seems lacking. It is as though in the rush to build new things there is no time to maintain what they already have.

Then it was time for dinner. Igor and I were both feeling pretty good by this time and ate more or less normally.

Actually it seems that everyone at our table last night had stomach problems, including Yuanfang (Fang) Wu, the organizer of the conference, and other Chinese. Fang felt very embarrassed that this could happen at her conference. Those at other tables were not affected. So it must have been one of the dishes at our table. Some suspected the eel, which, however, had tasted very good.

Sunday, Nov. 26. Stomach problem is definitely over. The breakfast here in the hotel is not as good as at the “resort” in Hangzhou—less selection in the buffet and no fruit. In Hangzhou there was always at least water melon.

I spent the morning discussing a paper with Lianshou and Gang Chen. Gang is 48. He has visited Nijmegen twice for three months each time. He grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and consequently never learned English well, which makes communication rather difficult. We have been trying to write this paper since about three years, but problems keep coming up with the analysis that prevent us from making any definite conclusions. I suggested one last thing we can try, though I don’t really have much hope in it. If that fails, we will give up.

I went to lunch with Gang and ate more or less normally.

I spent the afternoon getting caught up on reading my e-mail. At 6 I met Igor and we went to dinner at the hotel with Shusu Shi, the student who has been assigned to look after us. Tomorrow he will take us sightseeing, to sights I have already seen in better weather. It has been cold with intermittent rain all day, and tomorrow is not expected to be much better.

Monday, Nov. 27. We first went to the Provincial Museum. Besides the results of excavating the tomb of Marquis Yi, dating from 433 B.C., including its magnificent set of bells,* there is a new building with stuff found in other tombs. The most spectacular is a number of chariots found buried in the ground around a tomb—much like the terracotta armies near Xian. But being wood instead of terracotta, most were in pretty bad state. Only a few were nearly whole. They were displayed arranged as they were found, with good lighting and explanation. So this was quite interesting. There is a third building near completion—something for my next visit (if ever).

Then we went to the Guiyuan Temple. But since it was lunch time, we first ate at a small, simple restaurant, where the food nevertheless was pretty good. The temple did not seem to have changed a bit since my first visit in 1999; I would have gladly skipped it.

In the evening we went with Shusu to a restaurant off-campus, a no-frills place apparently frequented by students. Unfortunately, there was a certain spice in all the dishes which I didn’t care for. But it was cheap: ¥67 for the three of us. Nevertheless,

*See my 2002 trip and Sinyan Shen, *Scientific American*, **256**, No. 4 (April 1987) 94–102.

that would not be something a student could afford every day. Shusu said he could live on about ¥600 a month, and that he needed to work, *e.g.*, giving extra lessons to high school students. Shusu is, apparently, one of the better students. I could already have guessed that since he is studying in the particle physics group. As such, his tuition is waived, as is the case for about 20% of the students. It was not clear to me whether other criteria besides academic excellence play a role in deciding which students get their tuition waived.

Tuesday, Nov. 28. This morning I went to visit Gang at his university, the China University of Geosciences (CUG). This university used to be in Beijing, having been established in 1952 from the geology departments of several other universities. During the Cultural Revolution it was moved to Wuhan. In 1978 it was moved back to Beijing, but later they decided to keep the Wuhan location too. So now there are two CUG's: CUG (Beijing) and CUG(Wuhan).

The university has a museum—lots of rocks, but also some displays on volcanoes, evolution, *etc.*, and on the economic benefits of geology. Unfortunately, the explanations are for the most part only in Chinese. The highlight is the collection of dinosaur skeletons, a couple of large ones and a few smaller ones. On the campus there is also a small park with petrified trees from various places in China.



Gang Chen



Shusu Shi

Petrified trees at CUG

We ate lunch at a restaurant in Cultural Revolution Red Guard motif. All the personnel were in green army clothes, and there were pictures of Mao on the wall. The food was excellent. Back at CCNU I learned from Igor that everyone had been looking for me around lunch time. They planned on taking Igor and me to a big, fancy lunch. Not being able to find me, they just took Igor. He said it was very good. Typical Chinese planning!

Wednesday, Nov. 29. I gave a lecture on statistics to the graduate students this morning, and prepared my lecture for Gang's students. In another example of Chinese planning, I had only heard in Hangzhou that Gang wanted me to give a lecture to his

undergraduates. He said they were interested in cosmology. When I said I didn't really know much about cosmology, he said I could talk about anything I wanted. He wasn't very specific about what students these would be, but it seemed it would be open to everyone. So I could not expect them to know much physics, nor be experienced in listening to English.

Fang had also been late in asking me to give a statistics lecture. But there I at least had old lectures on the computer that I could use.

Thursday, Nov. 30. I had a meeting with Lianshou, Gang, and Meiling Yu to discuss some work they are doing. It is an extension of the paper we are trying to write and therefore suffers from some of the same problems. Anyway, there were some interesting ideas. As Lianshou said, their main problem is finding someone to discuss with. It was nice to see Meiling again. She had visited Nijmegen and CERN when she was a Masters student and had worked with me on some LEP analysis.

Then in the afternoon I went to give my lecture to Gang's students. Chinese university etiquette seems designed to keep students in their place. First we sat in Gang's office and drank tea prepared by one of his students. I had met her when I had visited Gang on Tuesday. This time there was also another student present, but his English was almost non-existent. The head of the physics department stopped in to meet me.



Gang's students

About 15 minutes after my lecture was supposed to start, we wandered over to the lecture hall. As we entered all of the students applauded. Whether that was to greet me or to say they were glad the waiting was over, I'm not sure, but I think the first, since the Chinese are very polite.

It was a large lecture hall, seating about 300, and all the seats were occupied with another 20 or 30 students standing at the back. There were some problems with the computer. They only had standard Windows stuff installed, and my talk was in pdf. So they had to install Acrobat Reader. That took a while. But the students waited patiently. Finally I could start. It went pretty well, I guess. Meiling gave a summary afterwards in Chinese. Then there were a number of questions, so many that Gang had to cut it short. Otherwise we



My lecture at CUG

would be late for the banquet with four other physics professors. Like all Chinese banquets, it was great.

Friday, Dec. 1. The university car arrived promptly at 7:30 to take me to the airport. Jinghua Fu (Hua) was there to see me off, as was Shusu. That was nice of Hua, who was my main guide when I visited Wuhan in 1999. Later, she visited Nijmegen twice, working with me on L3 analysis

Traffic was heavy. So I was glad we had allowed 1½ hours. It actually took 1 hour and 20 minutes. The plane to Chengdu was on time. I got the bus into town. For some reason it didn't stop at the place in town where it leaves from, but drove right by and stopped a couple of blocks further, an extra distance I had to walk to get to my hotel. I had chosen the hotel to be within a couple of blocks of where the airport bus leaves from, but it was on the opposite side from where this bus stopped.

I went to the tomb of Wang Jian, who died in 918. It is the only tomb excavated so far in China which has the burial chambers above ground. The five wooden caskets, one inside the other, were all rotted away, as was the body, but the dust remaining on the stone platform on which they laid showed that there were five. This platform was a meter or so high and had bas-relief statues on all sides depicting 24 musicians playing 25 different instruments. The platform was “supported” at each corner and in the middle of the long sides by six warriors holding up the platform. They were only visible from the waist up, the lower half of their bodies buried in the ground, which of course is what actually held up the platform. From the expressions on their faces, it was clearly hard work holding up such a heavy stone platform. There was also a statue of Wang Jian at the end of the room. It is thought to be the only life-like statue of an ancient Chinese ruler. In another building, replicas were on display of the types of instruments shown in the bas reliefs.

Then I went to the Green Ram Temple, which I had visited before, in 1999. On the way there I walked along one of the new “tourist streets,” streets rebuilt in olden style. It was rather nice, but I have no idea how authentic it really is. The buildings are occupied by tourist shops, restaurants, and a couple of hotels.

According to *Lonely Planet*, there was a good restaurant across the street from the temple. But that building had been demolished. So I tried a more or less randomly chosen restaurant. The menu was only in Chinese, but with color photos of the dishes. The photos help, but you still can't really tell what it is. So my phrase book proved handy. A couple of waitresses took great delight in helping me with it. Finally I took a dish of mushrooms with chili peppers and a dish of mutton with lots of garlic, bamboo shoots, and some red things that looked much like cherry tomatoes. They weren't cherry tomatoes, but very hot peppers—like chili peppers in a different shape—as I discovered when I tried one and my mouth sort of exploded. My eyes watered so much that I could hardly see for about five minutes. The rest of the dish tasted very good, and the pieces of garlic calmed the effects of the peppers. The only thing wrong with the dish was a lack of mutton—and most of the pieces there were consisted mainly of fat. The mushroom dish was of some mushroom with a small head and a long stem. The head was good,

but the stem was very tough. Not the best of meals, but I've had considerably worse.

Saturday, Dec. 2. The old bus station a few blocks from the hotel has been completely renovated since my previous visit and now specializes in buses to the main tourist destinations around Chengdu. Although the weather was none too good, very cloudy and threatening rain, I took the bus to Leshan, hoping that it would clear up.

A young student sat next to me. She is in her first year at a university in Chengdu and was going home for the weekend. I asked what she was studying, but she avoided the question. We talked most of the trip with the help of her translation computer. I asked again what she was studying, and now that she had her translation computer out, she tried to look it up. Turns out it has something to do with estimating time and cost of construction projects.

The bus stopped first at a bus station in Leshan, but the windows were so steamed up that I could not see very well where we were. Most people got off there, as did the student. But she told me to stay on. The bus then went further to a place where we could change to a local bus which brought us to the ticket office. You have to buy a combination ticket (¥105) covering not only the giant Buddha and the Wuyu Temple, but also the new Buddha Park. This park is not all that great. It contains lots of reproductions of Buddhas from all over China, some of which I have seen.

But the giant Buddha is really impressive. It is 71 m high, the largest Buddha in the world. It was started in 713 and took a hundred years or so to carve out of the cliff face next to the river. Excursion boats from Leshan bring you past it if you don't want to hike to it by land through the park. I descended the stairs in the rock next to it, passed its base and climbed back up the other side. Fortunately, it is a bit out of season so that the traffic on the narrow stairs was not too bad.



The giant Buddha in Leshan.

Elsewhere in the park, on the way to Wuyu Temple was a site with cave tombs. A sign said that it was on the World Heritage Cultural list. In the Han dynasty they dug caves in the cliff in which they put the coffins (wood, stone, or pottery). Various small statues of dogs, horses, *etc.*, and utensils were put there too to make one's existence easier in the afterlife.

After seeing the temple, which was somewhat interesting, I left the park by a different entrance to avoid having to walk back through the big park. I got a local bus back to Leshan. But then I couldn't find the bus station. It wasn't where *Lonely Planet* said it was, which didn't surprise me since I didn't think the bus had stopped there that morning. I asked someone, and he pointed in the direction I thought it should be, but couldn't give me explicit instructions. Walking around that area, a man in a car asked me if he could help. He couldn't speak English well enough to tell me anything but called over three school-girls who were passing. After some giggling, they said ahead and to the right. So I started walking, with them following. At a certain point they called and pointed to the right. It certainly didn't look like a bus station, but more like the campus of a school. They motioned that I should follow the road. So I did and came to some sport fields where the road split. I randomly took one, and after a while when I was pretty sure it wasn't right I asked three young people, perhaps students, two girls and a boy. The girls said the boy should answer—his English was best. He said he knew where the bus station was and he would show me. His name was Jiwei. So I set off with him. We met another young man, who spoke better English. He said it was too late (nearly 6) for buses from that station, that I would have to go to the main bus station, and he told which bus I should take. The first guy said he would go with me. We found the bus stop, and soon the bus came. On the bus we met yet another young man who wanted to practice his English, which was better—he said he taught English. After about half an hour, he got off the bus telling us that I should get off at the next stop. Jiwei got off with me and we found the bus station, a couple of blocks away. It was completely dark. But it was not yet closed. I bought a ticket asking for a bus which would go to the bus station in Chengdu near my hotel. I then had nearly an hour to wait. Jiwei wanted to leave but was afraid to leave me alone. So he arranged that I could sit next to the guard at the door rather than in the waiting room. When the bus arrived, the guard tapped my shoulder and pointed to the bus. In all this *Lonely Planet* was worthless—both the bus stations had been moved.

It was 9:30 before I was back in Chengdu. Fortunately a few restaurants were still open, but it was too late to spend a lot of time looking. I simply ate in the restaurant of my hotel. It was actually not bad.

Sunday, Dec. 3. In the morning I went to the Sichuan University Museum. It was rather nice. There were some nice exhibits of Sichuan 100–300 years ago: ornamental wooden shutters in nice geometrical patterns often carved with figures, a heavily ornamented sedan chair, cloth, paintings, writing instruments, *etc.* There was also a collection of shadow puppets. I always thought they were Indonesian, but apparently the Chinese had them first.

One floor was devoted to ethnic minorities—clothing, way of living—and to Tibet. I had not realized that large numbers of Tibetans live in Sichuan Province. There were also exhibits of various excavations carried out by the Sichuan University archeology department, until recently the only Chinese university offering a Ph.D. in archeology.

In the afternoon I went shopping. What a madhouse! You would have thought it was a week before Christmas. It was not the chic, expensive stores selling the western brand names at almost western prices, but the stores selling less expensive clothing that were so full you could barely move. It is hard to judge the prices, but they didn't seem all that cheap to me. But maybe I wasn't in the cheapest store.

I bought some stuff in the food section of a department store. When you buy fresh fruit, *e.g.*, a pomello or a pineapple, they will peel it for you. At the checkout counter the cashier bowed to each customer at the start of checkout and again after giving you your change. I had not seen that before. Maybe the store is Japanese owned. But then again, on one of the internal flights, the cabin crew lined up in the corridor and bowed just before take-off. I had never noticed that before either.

Again tonight, I couldn't find the restaurant I was looking for. I did find one listed in a book in the hotel room as famous for its Sichuan cooking. But it was empty—not a single diner. So I went down the street a bit and found one that was pretty full. It had lots of Christmas decorations out front, which made me suspicious. But after looking carefully at how full it was with apparently normal Chinese, I decided it couldn't be too bad or too expensive. I had a bean curd dish with a bit of seafood and a few peas in it—delicious, and surprisingly mild—and a dish of some thinly sliced meat and red and green peppers, which were not too hot, and a beer. It turned out to be only a bit on the expensive side, ¥88.

Walking back to the hotel I passed a street which has been made over as a typical street of 150 years ago—a narrow street with souvenir shops and restaurants and bars and a Starbucks. Actually, it was not as bad as it sounds.

Monday, Dec. 4. I went shopping again this morning—at the Carrefour, which was marked on the map in the hotel room, though not very clearly. Nevertheless, just at the point where I thought I should start looking for a sign, lo and behold there it was across the street. Carrefour seems to be doing well in China. In Chengdu there was a sign on one of the many new buildings under construction: Carrefour opening soon.

I just managed to get all the shopping into my suitcase and backpack. I hope KLM is not too strict on weight, although with my frequent flyer status I am supposed to get an extra allowance. Despite the extra weight I managed to haul my stuff to the bus. Fortunately, I got to the airport well ahead of time, since I had trouble changing money. There was only one bank in the airport. They wanted the exchange certificate from when I had changed money to RMB. They would not accept the one I had from changing at Beijing, since it was from a different bank. Nor would they accept the one from Yangshuo, which was their bank, because I had not signed it. Luckily an Italian happened along who just wanted to exchange a small amount and had an exchange certificate from this bank for a large enough amount that he could change my money

for me. It is just recently that international flights have started using Chengdu, and I think the bank is not yet used to it. I never had a problem like this in Beijing.

On the way to the airport, the bus passed a police car. I noticed that on the license plate holder on the back of the car where the name of the dealer might be expected: Good Luck. Maybe it was the name of the dealer. But imagine reading that as the cop pulls you over for speeding. On this trip I saw, for the first time in China, cops actually writing out tickets—probably because there are now so many more privately owned cars. There are also many more stop lights, and even more surprising, cars and pedestrians observing them.

There is also progress on noise and pollution. In Guilin, and, though less so, in Guangzhou and Chengdu there were people on motor scooters that made almost no noise. I was amazed at how quiet they were until I saw one plugged into a wall outlet being recharged. Actually, they were a bit disconcerting at first because you don't hear them coming—and they frequently ride motor scooters and cycles on the sidewalk.

The KLM flight was on time, leaving at 15.00 in very hazy weather. It was nice flying over the mountains shortly after take-off, The mountain tops with a light dusting of snow stuck up out of the clouds below. Later there were some terraced mountains below, the terraces standing out very nicely thanks to the light snow. Darkness caught up with us after a few hours and there was nothing more to see until the lights of Amsterdam. The plane was only about half full, which gave me three seats to myself. But still, it was a long flight—nearly 11 hours.