

Notes From the Zhuhai Trip

On Saturday, November 13, 2004, we awoke in Colebrook, Connecticut to find four inches of new snow covering the ground. After cleaning off the car, we drove to the Bonanza bus terminal in Farmington for the van that took me to the Newark, NJ airport. The trip took three hours.

Upon arrival at Liberty Airport, everything appeared fine except for information from the clerk at the Continental Airways desk that I will need a visa to leave Hong Kong and travel in China. I will have to wait until I get to Hong Kong to see how this works out. When I asked where I could get such a visa, she said "Most passengers fly to Shanghai, where the US embassy issues visas" This doesn't sound right, I will call Shen Li if need be. (Shen Li is the coordinator of the conference, and the government official who invited me.

Lift off at 4:22. They estimate 15 hours, 30 minutes to Hong Kong. Our initial course was up the west side of the Hudson River Valley. We have an on-board flight plan simulator, which currently is aiming us at James Bay.

5:05 pm passed directly over Montreal. We are heading straight up the Ungava Peninsula, over the islands and out over the Arctic Ocean.

Passed over Chibougamau at an altitude of 33,000 feet; outside temp. -62° F.

7:20 pm started across Hudson Strait near the New Quebec Crater. Same temp.

7:45 pm flying over southwest Baffin Island. This is the political district of Nunavut, created on April 1, 1999. Passed directly over Prince Charles Island, the last large island to be discovered on Earth in 1947 and named for the newly born Prince Charles of Great Britain. Passed over the Elizabeth Islands and out over the Arctic Ocean.

At 11:45 pm (Eastern Standard Time) we were still crossing the Arctic Ocean heading for the New Siberian Islands, flying at 38,000 feet. We are actually quite close to the North Pole. There are 8 hours, 18 minutes left to go. Outside temperature -68° F.

Midnight (EST) and it is getting light ahead, can see the horizon. We are passing over the Laptev Sea.

12:20 am (EST) looking down at vast cracks in the ocean ice. This is a very smooth ride. A band of clouds can be seen ahead as we approach Siberia.

12:35 am – a thin layer of clouds below, but I can still make out cracks in the ice.

It is now 1:42 in Hong Kong. The sky ahead is blue, but not very light yet.

At 1:10 am crossed into Siberia. We have solid cloud cover with an undulating surface. The cloud cover is vanishing as I write this. We are passing down the western side of the Verkhoyansk Mountains and directly over the Lena River, which, having a length of 2,653 miles, and a width of 20 miles at its mouth where it enters its 250-mile wide delta, makes her one of the great rivers of the Earth.

1:15 am and we are following along the Lena, which is ice-covered, braided and full of large ox bows. We should be crossing the Arctic Circle about now.

At 1:48 am the first ray of sunlight bathed the aircraft. Hong Kong's time zone is 13 hours ahead of New York. It is now 2:48 pm in Hong Kong.

Flat country under us, all the rivers, large and small, meander about. We are due west of the western point of the Sea of Okhotsk. Saw the first signs of human activity – rectangular layouts. There are countless lakes possessing smooth shores and few islands.

2:25 am (EST) The topography is turning to dendritic, this is the Yablonovy Mountain Range, east of Lake Baikal. There are extensive areas of strip mining. The surface appears to be composed of gravels.

2:40 am Even though we are going basically south, the sun is about to set. I don't think the sun's rays ever hit the surface here, only us at 38,000 feet. We are about to enter northeastern Mongolia.

5:20 pm (local time) – the blood-red sun hangs on the horizon, prolonged by our 600 mph pace southward. There are snowdrifts below indicating fierce northwest winds at the surface.

5:35 pm (local) We are now over China, and are now observing the first signs of lighted objects below. This is the first sign of human habitation since we passed over southern Quebec. We are scheduled to land at 9:00 pm in Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport.

And arrive we did, and five minutes early, at that. How Hong Kong has changed! Continental did not lose my luggage, as did the last airline.

Qian Gang met me in area "B", where he was supposed to, and already had two tickets on the metro to take us into downtown Victoria. A short taxi ride brought us to Hong Kong University, where I have been given a room in the building reserved for faculty and grad students. It is literally around the corner from professor Qian's room. No sooner had we entered the room when he threw open a door leading out onto my own private balcony, where, if you look straight ahead, you see a wall of foliage, even though I am on the eighth floor. By stepping out onto the balcony and raising your eyes, you find yourself looking up at the summit of Mount Victoria, which, at 552 meters (1,805 feet), is the highest elevation on the island.

The second thing Qian did was to dial Ann on his cell phone and I relieved her mind that I hadn't flown off the edge of the world!

Next, the problem of the visa was solved by Jingcao, who made a phone call (even though it was by now 11:00 pm) to Shen Li in Zhuhai. All I have to do is stop in at an office there when I go over for the convention. Visas are documents required of US citizens visiting China, North Korea and Cuba.

Hong Kong University has some 10,000 students, and has the finest medical school in Asia, I'm told.

My room has a device that ought to be in wider use. Mounted on the wall in the bathroom is a unit about the size of a small medicine cabinet (16x30x6 inches). It is a gas operated hot water heater. Outside the bathroom door are two switches; one for lights, the other for hot water, if you want any. By throwing the switch, you have instant access to as much hot water as you need. During the first shower that I took, I have to admit that I fully expected the hot water to turn cold about mid-point, but I was pleasantly surprised; as long as the heater is in operation, there is as much water available as required. As soon as it is turned off, nothing except cold water comes from the tap. In other words, no reservoir of water to be kept hot, thus saving a significant amount of energy, not to mention the space taken up by a hot water heater.

Qian's apartment is larger than mine, but as head of the International Journalism Department, he certainly rates roomier quarters. His view looks down onto a patio, which is the outdoor part of the university dining room. There is a chapel on one side, and a picturesque garden containing a huge palm tree on the other.

The evening temperature is 80° F, with a five-mile breeze blowing in off the South China Sea. I told Ann not to pack the long sleeve wool sweater, but she didn't believe me!

The next day, Monday, I awoke at 5:00 am, and after a shower, went out on the porch to look at Hong Kong and listen to the sounds. There is a bird somewhere among the trees that sounds very much like a mockingbird. His song was greatly appreciated.

After breakfast at the university dining hall, we met with Qian's assistant, Angela Yung, who shepherded me around for the rest of the day. Angela is a third year law student, although she already has a degree in another field. Her family owns the largest steel mills in China, and has an extensive operation in Korea, where her services as an attorney are required. Upon completion of her education at Hong Kong University, she will be off to her new job.

First we went to the Po Lin Buddhist monastery on Lantau Island. This is the same island that the airport is located on. It is the largest of the many islands that comprise what used to be called The New Territories, when this area was the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. The monastery is one of several Buddhist sites on the island. It contains a bronze Buddha that I would guess to be thirty to forty feet high. It rests upon a base consisting of a huge open lotus blossom. The statue sits atop a steep hill some two hundred feet high. It is a very impressive site, and the grounds, with its several temple buildings, are a sight never to be forgotten.

We had arrived at Lantau Island via the airport tram, and returned to Hong Kong by ferry from the village of Mui Wo. The ferry rides around this section of China are something that shouldn't be missed. Even if you don't have a specific destination, any ferry ride is a sightseer's delight.

Angela then took me shopping in downtown Victoria, after which we took the train through the tunnel to Kowloon, where we met professor Qian and some of his friends. We had an elegant Cantonese dinner, followed by a walk along the waterfront where we looked across the harbor to Victoria. Any city presents a colorful face at night, but Hong Kong is exceptionally beautiful, nestled at the base of three mountains with the shimmering waters of one of the World's great seaports reflecting its glory. Two buildings in Victoria had arrays of laser lights that sent bursts of various-colored lights over the harbor and across Kowloon. I have never seen anything like it, and the others, who were familiar with these lights, say it is something you never tire of.

We returned to Victoria, and I was back in my room by 9:30.

The mattress on my bed is literally as hard as the floor. Actually, it was not uncomfortable, but it takes getting used to.

Tuesday morning found Qian and me back at the cafeteria, then via city bus to the south side of the island to Stanley Beech, a popular resort east of Repulse Bay. I bought two soapstone Chinese zodiac carvings for Ann and myself and two calligraphy bookmarks with our names on them in both English and Chinese. We came back to the university by noon, had lunch at the dining hall, and then went down to the ferry terminal to catch the Zhuhai ferry. This trip took from 2:30 until 3:32. We passed under the new suspension bridge connecting the airport with Kowloon and Hong Kong.

No sooner did I get to immigration than I hit a snag. Apparently the US government has, in the past 48 hours or so, denied entry to a Chinese national, and as a consequence, China won't allow US citizens without their papers being in perfect order

to enter China. Of course Qian was with me, but there was really nothing that he could do except call Jingcao, who had just arrived from Beijing, and also Shen Li, to see what could be done. Jingcao came down to the immigration office at the ferry terminal and we gave each other a hug with me on one side of a line on the floor, and her on the other.

Conferences were held between the various officials there and both Jingcao and Qian Gang about what course of action could be taken. Apparently this ruling from Beijing had taken them by surprise, and now they had me as a problem that had to be solved. Finally a plan of action was arrived at; I would give my passport to Chinese immigration, (I know, you are told never to surrender your passport, but this seemed to be a unique situation, one that called for a novel plan of action.) and they would take it to the former colony of Macao (which, like Hong Kong, has a separate immigration law). Macao, now renamed Aomen, is for all intents, a part of the city of Zhuhai, and from the ferry terminal where I was, to immigration there was only a matter of twenty minutes.

A courier was given my passport and left for Aomen. There being nothing any of us could do in the mean time, the immigration officials invited Jingcao, Gang and me to relax in their private lounge. There we talked and drank tea. It was good tea, and we all drank several cups. Finally at 7:50 pm, the courier returned with my passport and a document the same size as a page in that book pasted inside. The fee was \$500.00 Hong Kong (approximately \$65.00). I was free to wander about China for the next ten days.

By this time, we had missed the welcoming banquet. Qian Gang had left to attend a television interview, and I had pleaded with Jingcao to go; I knew that I would be well taken care of, but she insisted upon staying. Finally set free, we took a cab to my hotel and had dinner. When we finished, it was 10:30 pm, and I ended up going to my room, partially unpacking, and going to bed.

All of this could have been avoided if I had done my homework and obtained a visa to enter China. To tell the truth, I had heard of visas, although I had never seen one. I thought that because the government had invited me, I wouldn't need anything more than my passport. The list of things to do prior to the trip such as immunization shots, passport, health documents, driver's license (as another source of an official photo) and visa, I thought were all in order. And what about the lack of a visa? I am truly embarrassed to admit that I interpreted that to mean I should take my Visa card with me in case I needed additional funds! All credit cards are not accepted everywhere, and I assumed that in China they welcomed Visa in preference to others. Enough of that, let's just say I'm embarrassed at my stupidity. Until the agent at Newark explained what a visa was, I was blissfully unaware, and by then of course, it was too late.

On Wednesday, I awoke at 4:30 am local time, which would have made it 3:30 pm Eastern Standard Time. I was fully awake, and made preparations for the busy day ahead. All the while hoping I had finished making blunders.

The resort hotel that all the 150 some-odd delegates were assigned to had set aside a large dining room exclusively for us. After breakfast, which, except for fruit, consisted of a smorgasbord of many choices unfamiliar to westerners. All of it was tastefully arranged on three large tables. The difficulty was in deciding what not to try!

After breakfast, we were taken by bus to a park where our group picture was taken. Directly across from the park is located "The Jade Palace", containing a lavishly decorated meeting hall featuring a large backdrop proclaiming the celebration of Yung Wing's graduation from Yale University in 1854 and the gathering of the descendents of

the 120 boy students. Media personnel abounded. It appeared that there were as many people with either cameras or note pads as there were delegates. It is somewhat disconcerting to be followed by a TV cameraman constantly filming you from a distance of no more than two feet, but you soon forget them and go about your business. Many of us were extensively interviewed, and speaking for myself, I have nothing but respect for their professionalism. There was none of the “media blitz” seen by reporters on our TV when an event such as our meeting in Zhuhai. They were polite and orderly, from the national level down to the student correspondents from the Yung Wing School.

Mr. Huang Xiaodong, the head of the publicity department of the Zhuhai Municipal Committee acted as MC, and the mayor of Zhuhai made the welcoming speech. Most of the speeches were given in Chinese, which is to be expected, but it leaves those of us without the knowledge of the language feeling “out of the loop”.

The group was divided into two sections for the afternoon speeches. Had all the speeches been given at one location, the proceedings would have taken all day and all night. As it was, they took up the entire afternoon. I believe that all these speeches will be published after the conference is completed.

After dinner at the hotel, members of the families were called upon to introduce themselves and say a few words to the group. I was one of the few who spoke only English, and therefore was supplied with a translator. Following this social hour, I intended to go up to my room for the night, but was approached by the curator of the Zhuhai Museum, Mr. Zhang Jianjun, who invited me to bring the Carrington Diaries to the museum so that they could be scanned into their computer. As I realize the importance placed upon these documents by Chinese historians, I had brought these two small booklets with me, knowing that they would be objects of interest among the descendents, but I hadn't expected the Zhuhai Museum to request permission to reproduce every page, including the front and back covers. I was happy to be able to grant their wish. Reed Tang, of the museum staff, was given this monumental task, which eventually took two and one-half days to complete. The assistant curator, who is an archeologist specializing in the pottery of Guangdong Province, presented me with two beautiful volumes; “Baojingwan Site in Zhuhai”, an archaeological report of island-type prehistoric cultural site, and “The Genius of Zhuhai”, notes on Zhuhai archaeology. These two volumes, consisting of some 720 pages, have enough English notations to be valuable to a person who is non-literate in Chinese.

Thursday began much the same as Wednesday, but in the afternoon we were loaded into buses for a tour of important sites in the Zhuhai area. The first stop was at the Zhuhai Museum. When I mentioned to Jingcao that I had been here last night until after 11:00, she thought her ears had deceived her. I had to explain about the diaries and the fact that they were being photocopied inside as we spoke. The museum staff has an extensive display on the first floor dealing with Yung Wing and the contributions he and the Chinese Educational Mission students had made to China. The front of this museum was decorated with a long banner proclaiming the 150th anniversary of Yung Wing's graduation from Yale and extending a warm welcome to the descendents of the boy students. The entire assembly was lined up for a group portrait in front of the building. We continued to have the same amount of media coverage as in the previous days.

Inside the main museum a ceremony took place whereby each descendent signed his name with a brush pen on a large scroll. It was fascinating to watch and beautiful to

see upon completion. It truly is a work of art, and I felt honored to have been there and watched it being created.

Our next stop was at the Zhen Xian School, established by Yung Wing in 1871. This was the school originally chosen to be the contact school for the Colebrook Consolidated School, but when the brand new Yung Wing School was completed last year, the authorities thought it a better choice. I have mixed feelings about this, as the Zhen Xian School, while being less showy than the new school, never the less consists of students from the immediate neighborhood and as such represents a true cross section of Chinese youth, whereas the Yung Wing School is a state of the art facility with a chosen student body from all over Zhuhai. The paramount objective however, is to establish an ongoing relationship between our two cultures, and in this respect, we are off to a healthy beginning.

When we arrived, the students at this school were reading in unison, a task they performed at the top of their lungs. This can be described only by one word: deafening! To make matters worse, there were many rooms containing twenty or so pupils each, all reading something different, and all at the highest decibel output. This is a sub-tropical climate, don't forget, and consequently all doors and windows are wide open. Standing in the courtyard just outside, I watched one of our group standing alone, shaking his head and laughing to himself. He turned to me and said, "My grandfather wrote a book entitled 'My Life in China as a Boy', and in it he describes reading aloud like this. Nothing has changed!"

From this school we proceeded to the new Yung Wing School. This school boasts a campus and physical plant rivaling in opulence any in the western world. It is obvious that the government has spared nothing to create a showcase school epitomizing what they want the world to see as the Chinese educational system of the future. We were enthusiastically welcomed by a cadre of 10 young girls, five on each side of the entrance, and adorned with bright red banners proclaiming that the Zhuhai Yung Wing School welcomes their honored guests.

Following this, we resumed our bus trip and drove past (but did not visit) two universities, one of which, Zhongshan University, can only be described as enormous. When completed, it will have an enrollment of many thousands.

We next visited the home of Chen Fang in the village of Meixi. Chen Fang left his village and eventually went to Hawaii in 1849, where he made a fortune in the sugar cane business. He married a member of the Hawaiian royal family, and was made China's first ambassador to the Hawaiian Islands. Returning to his home community in 1890, he built houses for his three sons. Next to this complex stands three elegant stone archways, a gift of Emperor Guangxu, which have been designated as a heritage site by the provincial authorities.

Our final destination of the day was a park established by Tong Shao-yi, one of the boy students who became governor of this district in the 1920s and 30s. This beautiful park houses, among many other things, an exhibit of prominent figures in the Zhuhai region. It is remarkable that this small corner of China should have produced as many men having the caliber of these. I see a parallel between the men of this geographical section in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and those from eastern Virginia during our late Colonial period. The abilities of both groups defined the direction their respective nations would follow.

Friday morning, after breakfast, the group began saying their goodbyes and leaving for the four corners of the world from whence they had come. All except me; arrangements had been made for me to spend the greater part of the day at the Yung Wing School, so Jingcao and I took a taxi there after saying farewells to our newly found friends. The rest of the morning was spent with the staff of the school, Carol Han, the Foreign Studies Director in particular. In the media room, which had every piece of equipment that could be hoped for, a group of some twenty students was assembled to interview me while the TV cameras rolled. I had brought with me photos and some small items from the Colebrook students, which were well received. We exchanged e-mail addresses and samples of handwriting before they returned to their classrooms.

Jingcao and I had two of the most beautiful girl guides imaginable who now indicated that we should go to the athletic field to observe what we were told was the very first athletic event in the young school's history; a three team relay competition. It really was exciting and I came away with some very good action shots.

Our next stop was one of the two computer rooms where we were given a demonstration of their skills. These children are just as much at home with computers as are children in Colebrook, and they took great delight in showing us their abilities.

Apparently these students are exposed to the English language at a very young age; several of the younger ones asked me the same question: "How old are you"? The teacher felt it necessary to tell me that it was just as impolite for them to ask this question as it would be for an American child to ask it. "The only thing is", she said, "It's one of the first phrases they learn, and so they use it".

The beautifully manicured grounds give you a feeling of being in a botanical garden; a sign written in Chinese, Latin and English identifies each specie of plant life.

Between the main buildings there is a garden surrounding a large gazebo-style building. A sixteen-inch deep pool of water containing aquatic flowers and lots of gold fish surrounds this building. The area is divided into thirds by walkways leading to the gazebo. The principal explained that the reason for the shallow depth was to allow the young students who fall in to extricate themselves after they fell in. I told her that in all likelihood, if it were in America, there would be a fence along the walks. "Then they wouldn't learn to be careful", she replied.

Carol Han mentioned as we were leaving that by the end of next year, their graduating ninth grade would be eligible to enter middle schools, and it was their hope that prep schools in the U.S. could be found that would enroll them. They had sent out inquires, but they felt that the replies did not meet with their standards or expectations. I explained that I am the alumni of a school having very high academic standards, and that I would contact this school upon my return to see whether or not we could lay the groundwork for the next stage of their educational development. At the outset, it appears that the main hurdle will be the U.S. Government's policy of granting visas to foreign students. Once this is resolved, the United States and China will be able to embark upon another era of educational cooperation not unlike that which took place in the 1870s.

After a wonderful meal that included shark fin soup, in what is alleged to be the finest seafood restaurant in Zhuhai, we parted company with the teachers from the Yung Wing School, with promises to keep in touch via e-mail.

This wonderful convention was made possible by the planning and resourcefulness of the Zhuhai Municipal Government. They provided us with a warm

welcome and generous hospitality that made possible this historic meeting of the descendents of the 120 Chinese students who were to prove so vital in the creation of modern China.

That evening, Jingcao and I were joined by her sister and niece for dinner. It was an enjoyable meal, as one would expect from a resort hotel such as this, but tempered by the knowledge that this would be my last meal in China.

On Saturday morning, the first ferry leaving Zhuhai for Kowloon was at 8:00 am, and I arrived at the lobby by 7:15 to find my two guardian angels, Jingcao and Shen Li awaiting me. Shen Li presented me with an inscribed wristwatch to commemorate the conference, then they accompanied me to the ferry slip, where I purchased a one-way ticket for 150 Chinese dollars and breezed through customs much smoother than the last time I attempted it!

Jingcao had given me a note to be presented to the taxi driver in Kowloon telling him to take me to the tram for the airport. You have to be careful about this transaction, because it sometimes happens that the driver will claim to misunderstand your instructions and take you all the way to the airport for an inordinate fee. Her message worked perfectly, and in a few minutes I was at the tram station. The fare for the taxi was HK15.00, and the tram to Chek Lap Kok was HK90.00 (\$13.63 US).

After arriving at the airport and checking in with Continental, I wandered about the shops. The only problem was that I couldn't buy anything if I wanted to, the only empty room was in my pants pockets, and even there, there was no room for anything larger than loose change. Boarding the plane presented none of the problems encountered in the States, and soon we were safely aboard our 777. Liftoff came at 12:38 pm local time. By 1:30 we began traversing Taiwan from southwest to northeast. We are directly over the crest of their north-south mountain range, so I can't see the actual mountains, only the western slopes and the short coastal plain. It appears that they must have over cut their forests, as the rivers are severely clogged with gravels. As I wrote this, the cause of the choked streambeds became more apparent; there are dams (plural) on every river, there isn't enough water flowing downstream to keep the channels free of burden. These are substantial mountains; the tallest is 13,113 feet.

At 1:42 we passed over the extreme northern tip of Taiwan and are now over the East China Sea. I'm thankful that I am at the back of this plane; there is a very young child in the center section that has been screaming at the top of its lungs ever since we have been airborne.

We have been able to pick up the jet stream and at present are cruising at 33,000 feet doing 707 knots. This brought us in a short time over the southern end of Kyushu Island, not far from Sasebo, which served as my "home port" during the Korean Conflict. 3:15 pm found us passing just east of Shikoku Island in central Japan, and by now our air speed was 730 knots. At 3:35 (Hong Kong time), the aircraft passed just east of Tokyo Bay and the sun has set on the Earth's surface, but not quite yet here at 33,000 feet.

At 7:45 (Hong Kong time), we were south of Cold Bay in the Aleutians. Our speed has decreased to 640 knots, altitude 35,000 feet our flight indicator tells us that there are 7 hours, 20 minutes left in the flight. I'm going to attempt to get some sleep while we traverse the North Pacific.

I awoke as we were passing from northeastern Washington State into Idaho. The highest peaks of the Rocky Mountains are bathed in sunshine. There is a considerable

amount of snow down there. From our 37,000 foot-high perch large areas of clear-cut mountainsides pay silent testimony to the timbering policies in this country.

Our flight path took us directly over Kalispell, Montana. This takes us almost directly over the route taken by Lewis and Clark in 1807. If they could have seen from 37,000 feet what awaited them, I wonder if they would have forged ahead to the shore of the Pacific. It doesn't seem that it would have been humanly possible for a group such as theirs to successfully traverse that seemingly endless expanse of trackless mountains.

The sun is still low in the east, and the ranch buildings and their associated trees cast long shadows. Ox bow rivers fill the narrow valleys. We are following along just south of Interstate 90. The vast majority of the agricultural land below is oriented north-south. As we progress eastward, the nature of the tributary streams to the Missouri River have taken on a dendritic pattern. We are still directly over Lewis and Clark's route, but they would have been in their keelboats at this point.

After passing over the prairie lands of eastern Montana, we briefly crossed over South Dakota. If Minnesota is the Land of 10,000 Lakes, then South Dakota isn't far behind! As we approached the western border of Minnesota, we began picking up scattered clouds below, and shortly the ground below was totally obscured. It remained that way the rest of the journey. As we made our landing at Newark, NJ at 2:30 pm, a steady rain greeted us.

Connecticut Limousine Service took exactly 3 hours to deposit me at the bus terminal at Farmington, where my wife Ann greeted me. We walked through the door of our home in Colebrook at 7:55 pm, November 20, 2004.

Bob Grigg