

First Day at Work

Here we go, it has been a year and a week since I came to China. 372 days so far, not being on Gallic territory, on gallo-roman land, amidst proud French. Living in a completely different country, in a surrealist atmosphere which once appeared as completely alien and is now some part of my self, somehow.

And here I go again, trying to be a good employee, a career-oriented man, dealing with job, bosses and colleagues, real ones. For learning a bit of a language, understanding it moderately, practicing it a little, is no work, no ma'am, no sweat really, even when you find yourself copying endless lines of smeary characters, wrist slowly aching from exhaustion.

So today was my big come-back in the salary world. Arrived at 9am, gone at 8pm, with the strange mixed feeling of not having achieved much but never really been bored. I am not really proud of having stayed that long behind my desk. Most of the readers of these chronicles know for sure that it is highly unusual for me to stay that late. And maybe, really maybe, it means something. We'll see, wait and see, please just wait and see.

Well, I spent most of my time dealing for first day's inconveniences : lots of forms to fill, lots of hands to shake, lots of names to remember... I remember quite clearly the first day of my other job. I was told I would have lots to do, many tasks to accomplish, and then I was left to rot during three weeks in front sappy documents. Today, I have been told that there is a lot to do, but not for me since I'm a beginner. But I eventually got some little things to do. No breathtaking stuff, no epiphany either, but at least something.

We'll see, but the start is better than usual.

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26/09/05

Beijing Military Museum

I finally saw it. After months of postponed occasions, missed opportunities and « maybe next time », this lovely Saturday 24th, at 8 o'clock, I joyfully went to the Beijing Military Museum. And was it worth it!

It is a very complete museum, and a particularly self-explanatory one : various maps, complete descriptions, large spectrum of antiques, models, replicas, dioramas. It is interesting on two levels: first its content is very rich, and then the political treatment is worthy of analysis. What's more, the respective space granted to each period is explicit: one aisle for the Antiquity and Empire (-2000 to 1670), one aisle for the cursed Qing Dynasty (until 1912), and six aisles for the People's Army (since 1919).

Wargame fans may admire most interesting genuine items in the « big guns » courts: Howitzers from every country, a Pershing, a Sherman, a T34, Anti-Aircraft batteries, even the most famous italian scout car and a wreckage of a U-2 spy plane! Try to end to visit with the military gifts hall, dating back to the great era of communists countries.

A must-see for amateurs, a very interesting place for others; moreover, the place is quite empty, with the sole exception of youngsters from 6 to 8, standing in line to climb in armours.

ChinaScope 21

28/09/05

Please Teach Me English!

My DVD dealer now knows where it's at: he starts giving me movies for free! In fact, he insisted on giving me personal advice concerning new arrivals. He quickly got that « sex DVDs » were not a good choice, and that I really could not stand not choosing personally action movies. So he started hitting for the brainy or the weird. And sometimes, when I hesitate, he offers me some.



Yep, so he literally begs me to take « Please teach me English », a 2003 Korean movie. The storyline? In Korea, a bunch of individuals hit the wall of reality when their respective boss forces them to learn English by the end of the movie. And the weird begins. For those who have witnessed Koreans learning foreign language (and the Chinese counterpart is not that far), one finds the gimmicks, all the expressions and the aaaaouuu dignified yells from our friends from the other side of the Sea of China.

Tasty stupidity, even though completely insignificant, it is a shot of non-sensical, fun and over-reacting Korea. Like a night in karaoke.

ChinaScope 22

30/09/05

You really should take evening courses...

Well, everybody has to deal with this issue sooner or later, so today is my treat. I am compelled to make fun of mistranlations from chinese placards, ads and arrows into much-broken English. It is a catastrophe.

The little illustration right above can be found at the international airport of the capital city of China, who supposedly has global perspectives. And it is far from being the worst. A « gentleman » became a « genital man » on bathrooms' door, some sentences are taken right out of a digital translator (falling stairs is a crime). Most of the time, it is just funny. When it is a million+ contract in dollars, fun is not enough. I just wonder if some guy on the web is making a collection of those mistakes.

Some ten years earlier, in Korea, just before Seoul olympic games, the city dealt with the same issue with an interesting initiative: a free phone number to collect mistakes from all over the city and a \$50 reward for each correction. Some clever expatriates had a list running for Beijing, just to make sure to squeeze the juice out of this big apple. But the Beijinger is cunning: he paid (well, forced out of friendship) some round-around trips for a dozen american students, to chase away mistakes on the biggest OG spots last May. Too bad...



Well, as the above photo proves, the chase has not been exhaustive.

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03/10/05

They said, and they shouldn't have
I like you all the more for those tongue slippings, more funny than offensive.

Candy : I spent fifteen years as civil servant, I know blunt hypocrisy when I witness some

John-Wolf : What version of CATIA do you use?

To a 45 people gathering : Can you present yourselves individually?

Spinetto : We have a turnover of \$1Md of turnover

Champrousse : Synthesis hence multidisciplinary. *At that point, the interpreter started crying*

Pumpkin : There are two main issues. We can resolve 2/3 of them.

Someone who does not agree with the current issue : I am going to write a report

After discovering a gap in the agenda : We will arrange a meeting

ChinaScope 24

05/10/05

Milk

In order to produce milk, one needs herds, which notably demands space and pasture lands. It is therefore quite obvious that the pasturing tradition was not well developed in China: available space rather small, intensive crops opposing free herds; much unlike its Mongol neighbor from northern steppelands, where herding was a natural ally of nomadic lifestyle. As a result, milk presence in China was far less patent than in Northern Europe, land of butter and cheese.



Milk is a recent consumption product, vastly imported from Australia and sold in little plastic pockets. Its consumption is essentially fashion-based : mostly young women drink milk, in order to have good teeth and slender silhouette (does someone here might be able to confirm this belief?), and hope to be « as in the magazines » and not at all « as in the family pattern ».

Through the influence of Hong Kong, one of the way to drink milk is hot milk, mixed with tea and sometimes drowning a few flavored sweets. The true traditionnal HK way mixes tea, milk and coffee... But the most widespread way of drinking milk is the « leech way »: the young woman tears a corner of the said pocket, and sucks gently the content, continuing her conversation, taking notes or phone call. That's sexy. I have to take a picture of it.

Chinese Fags

Here comes the burning issue. First of all, please know that if you want to quit smoking, you should not come to China. Here, everyboy smokes, everywhere, everywhen. Price of fags ain't not brake for the consumption, since a 20 killer tubes box is worth little more than 50 cents, which not even close to expensive enough to stop anybody. Moreover, they are heavy lifters, tarmac filled. They really make your head hurt, much more than the hygienic civilised smokes. You are warned : do not come here to quit smoking.

Well, cigarettes found their way into public sales and private customs. It is the most normal thing to offer cigarettes to someone you just dined with, just as it is normal to offer that sorgho-based strong alcohol of theirs. It just is being polite, really. Very subtly, there exists a whole spectrum of cigarettes, with a range of prices and targeted consumers : more and more expensive to honor a guest or well respected client; with funny little pandas for youg women, etc. Yes, of course, smoking becomes more and more feminine! Smokes too are the opium of the people : ou of the global population of smokers, on third lives in China !

Bonus time: I add the fascinating content that the fag industry has recently produced : ads. Yep, now in cigarettes packs, geniuses of communication skills have had the idée to add advertisement. Enjoy. I hope you will like the deep blue filter, distinguishing the noble smoker from the base fog-breather.



GoldFish

Friends of beasts, please do not read. Today, we will talk of everyday business of casual facts of life. And of cleaning things.

One of these days, I rented an appartement, and, of course, it was the ugliest hip of crap I have ever seen in a long time. So, time to clean, Robin! With a quick step, I go down a few blocks, buying some cleaning vials, plastic gloves and stuff. You have something to clean the floor? No? All right, and something that cleans everything? Yes? The GoldFish? Sweet, I Take That.

In its yellow cylinder, the GoldFish awaits the crap. So, I took it and it eventually cleaned everything. Dishes, floor, furniture, CD, everything. It is written on it. What is not written on is wether or not there actually are real parts of goldfishes in it. I suppose so, or else it would not be named that way.



Did you know goldfishes have a natural capability to change their skin colour? According to given environmental conditions, they may mute and change their skin colour. Sometimes, some of them may even become yellow and glittery like gold, hence the name (well not in French, since it is called "Red Fish"). My goldfish, which started out to be black, became goldish (not entirely, since the bowl had to be cleaned and the special conditions never reappered). Funny. But I don not clean anything the bowl's water. Promised.

Marketing Logics

A little game today. First of all, take a good look at this picture :



Well seen? I am gonna ask you for some concentration here, please.

The Prince of Machiavelli: 143 pages

Republic of Plato: 373 pages

5 historic plays by Shakespeare: 503 pages

Histories of Herodotus: 734 pages

The Iliad and the Odyssey of Homer: 884 pages

Some of you might wonder why there are 5€ on the cover of The Prince. Why, it is its cost. Now try to guess the price of each book, knowing that all of them have been bought in China.

Well, the price is the same for all of them... Yeah, try to fathom a logic there, Luke.

ChinaScope 2828/10/05

Road Security

Audacity, Municipality of Beijing is thy name. The capital police forces have decided to help the car drivers. And it was high time they did : complaints piled up against this perturbation of streets and avenues of Beijing, drivers did petitionned, growled and scolded. And the town answered the angry popular call for better security. And now it has been outlawed.

The Municipality of Beijing did forbid the use of bicycle lights in the capital city. Because it distracts the drivers.

I know, you don't believe a word of it. Though I have been sermonned yesterday because I still had a reflector on my bike...

ChinaScope 2931/10/05

Childhood and Children

There is quite a talk about them, well, about him, the only child, the Son. And actually we do not see lots of children in China : small part of the demographic charts, the hactic rythm of schools keeps him away from the outside. Here follows some facts concerning those little wonders.

- In the last ten years, the student's population grew of 3.5 millions (Armenia's total population).
- Every week, an European aircraft lands in Beijing, with roughly twenty childless families. They fly back with a Chinese adopted girl (see following point).
- In 2020, 40 millions of Chinese men will not find a wife, since tradition favors sons and modernity imposes one-child policy.
- Infancy obesity rate doubled from 1992 to 2002 (now: 10% of all Chinese children are obese). This rate is expected to grow 8% each year. China is expected to outgrow the USA in terms of children obesity before 2010.
- 88% of Internet users are children (under 21).
- One child out of 6 aged 5 to 15 owns his/her on mobile phone.

I gather that was not exactly what you would have expected from the country of Confucius and eternal ricefields.



Two Pictures of Hutong

What's a hutong like nowadays? Being simplistic, it is a small village of short and humble houses, surrounded by modernity. Here is a typical Beijing traditional street : have a good look at the invasion of cables, putting some pressure on a calm and secular environment. Picture common bathrooms a little further (most hutong do not have access to commodities). Streets are calm, often enough shadowy and rarely see a car honking its way through.



A somewhat higher point of view: a traditional hutong that tries to resist the surrounding modernity of thousand-storey high buildings, large and dangerous streets, luxurious hotels. Trees on parole, social life on trial.



