

Pekinese Smog

I take the opportunity of the prior theme to make the exact same photo on a smoggy day.



Smog is that silvery mist which springs both from climatic tranquility and urban pollution. It forms a whitish coughing cloud over the city. It usually lasts only a day or two and the respiratory system is literally slaughtered.

Some expatriates do not take notice of it at first, go jogging as usual, think that the faint pain in the lungs they feel is due to bad habits concerning food or tobacco and spit their lungs for several days. The time for pollution to crawl out of their body.

I spent a year in Tianjin, one of the three most polluted city in the whole world. After that I had my lungs X-rayed. The pratician quietly asked me if I smoked a lot and since when. Hell,

I said I don't smoke. He showed me a huge white stain of dirt that settled in my lungs and asked what it was.

More informations concerning the Kyoto Protocol.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyoto_Protocol

The Fax from the sect

Well, you are quite aware of a given counter-revolutionary sect that is ferociously fought by China. It is none of our business. Untill the day I tried to fax a letter to a Chinese ministry after 16:30. From that time on, fax machines are unplugged. Why?

The CCP representative is no longer here to check information and to filter subversive messages. Hence, there is a possibility that a Chinese spirit might be tainted by a naughty non-filtered fax. Therefore, it has been decided that fax machines should be unplugged when the Party representative is not in his office.

Yep. No comment, just to say.

Guard's Conversation

MrSel is in need for cash, he needs to go to the bank. But he fumbled, he created an account in the bank nearest to his place, not to his office. So, he has to get up really early before crack o' dawn to deal with the deals, instead of taking huge advantage of an extensive lunch break to do it, like all his nice jobfriends.

Well, he arrives at 8:12 o'clock at the bank. Door's open, a guard closes in.

Guard (waving hand style) : No! No! No!

MrSel (in Chinese) : Is it closed today?

Guard (forehead contracted by the effort) : mmm Yes!

MrSel (in Chinese) : Today? The whole day?

Guard (sweat coming in) : mmm Yes!

Right there, I am close to total despair, I fear I won't have enough money to keep on my fancy lifestyle. Guard is talking to another Chinese lad, and then another mate. I sneak behind him, and inarticulate something in his back : What time is it opening?

Guard (caught unaware and unsuspecting) : Oh, 9 sharp, mate.

Well, at least, I did not have to go back to my place without the hips of money I wanted. Needed. I swear, some of them are so convinced foreigners cannot talk Chinese that they do not make the effort of listening...

Mimetic Romanticism

Funny little Chinese fashion (which will probably never settle in the States): mimetic romanticism. In fact, it is a very simple habit of young lovers. They dress exactly the same way when they go out during the week-end.

It is quite surprising the first time, and very cute after that to see two people with the same sneakers, trousers, Tshirts going out shopping.

And no, I will never wear a cutey little « Hello Kitty » Tshirt. Don't even think about it.

A friendly cab

Once, I took a cab with a Chinese colleague. He explained to me that, as soon as you get in the cab, you acquire the right to lead it wherever you want. It is up to the client to judge where to go and what road to take, to choose the direction on each crossroad and so on. I think I know why : cab drivers thus let their clients decide themselves which route is thought the best and be responsible for any wait in a jammed street. That time spent in traffic jams is the prime source of bargaining occasions for the average Pekinese client.

Most of my cab journey are left to the decision of the cab driver. But since they are used to listen to another person's decisions as to choose the route, some of them develop the capability of not knowing where the major buildings actually are. For 80% of the cab drivers, when told any destination, they know, more or less perfectly, where and how to go. Which is normal, I think. For the 20% remainder, the client has to stay focused, tell where to go, when to switch lanes, where going on the left, where to stop...

My Chinese colleague never gets bored in a cab: it is just like he is having fun with a remote controlled miniature car. Me neither, I never get bored in a cab: I read a journal or a play, and my driver has no bickering client in the back of his neck.



Yin and Yang

Today, we are making a little intellectual digression. I know, I will get a drop in the frequentation rating, doesn't matter, I will post naughty photographs next week to make it back to normal.

The primitive Chinese society was of course rural and followed the rhythm of seasons. Seasons that were very accentuated, with a rough winter, that prevented any outdoors activities, and a scorching summer, dedicated to crops. It indeed seems that the transition towards a sedentary society that made its food grow was quite early. This can be explained by the lack of pasturelands and the numerous rivers that made the countryside very divided. Life was thus rhythmized by two seasons. Summer was dedicated to raising crops, from ploughshare to fall: a task undertaken by men. During the winter, families stay at home, and prepared fabric: a task undertaken by women.

Hence a deep feeling of alternation branded the Chinese civilisation: a hot, dry season, which was marked by outdoors activities, expansion and the male principle and a cold, wet season, marked by interiors, retraction and the female principle. From thus came, we come to think, the concept of Yin and Yang, eternal renewal of complementary and unshakable opposites.



Many centuries later came the concept of Tao that completed this primal duality: the Way that gathers and transcends.

A Dog's Life

In Damin in the Liaoning province, Gou Xuwei demanded and obtained to change his family name, hence becoming Jing Xuwei. Indeed, Gou means "dog", which is a very disgraceful name. It is easily understandable why Xuwei would like to change his family name. But, if this name really is that disgraceful, why his father, or his grand-father, or any of his ancestors, had not had his name changed earlier?

In the Five Dynasties period (907-960), General Jing dared to slander the Emperor's favorite courtier. It happened that this courtier and him shared the same family name, Jing. The Emperor then wanted to punish the general, and left him decide between death and disgrace. The general choose disgrace and the Emperor gave him a new family name, Gou, "The Dog", nailing his curse for a thousand years.

Since that day, all Chinese Gou come from the same forebear, the fallen general and are an easy target to insults cheap jokes from all other Chinese people. Gou Xuwei, when demanding a name change, respected the Emperor's curse to bear a family shame for a thousand years...
From Eric Meyer



First Snow

Saturday, it snowed on Beijing. Not much really, just enough to whiten the landscape when I woke up.



Sunday, it reached a 23°F, but the wind made it feel like a 5°F. Every step outside was painful.

It has really started for 3-4 months of polar cold.

Beijing's Pigeons

Take a good look at the picture below. If needed, click on it to watch a larger version.



See the white lightnings at the center of the picture? Those are Beijing's pigeons, flying above the rooftops under a winter Sun. Beijing's pigeons are no wild animals, flying in packs over TianAn Men square as above any given St Marco Piazza. These are beauty pigeons, bred and trained pigeons, whose main curiosity is that one or two of them bears a whistle on the tail, that whirrs when they fly.

That sound is very peculiar and specific to Beijing – as specific of Beijing as street painters in Montmartre or the black and white cathedral of Sienna. It only exists here and barely survived the 20th century: the cultural Revolution tried to sweep out that habit; it only survived due to passionate people ready to risk an illegal hobby.

Monopoly

There only one everlasting rule in Monopoly: the winner always is the one who did not want to play.



I firmly believe this game generates scores of bitter people. Firstly, those who wanted to play end up losing the game, and those who did not want to play win, but only after a long game where their friends were gloomier by the minute.

There really is only one solution: to boycott Monopoly!