

Beijing photo-essay, September 2019, by Elly



View from my window: 4th Ring Road (on the right) and Olympic area (straight ahead)

I was invited by a former visiting scholar at ASU to come to Beijing for a month, to teach syntax at the University of Science and Technology, Beijing (USTB). My students were amazingly dedicated and asked so many good questions: I really loved their enthusiasm! My host made life very enjoyable and the experience truly amazing; she and wonderful students showed me Beijing life and sights. More on all of this below! And a friend came up from Zhengzhou and we spent two days exploring the Great Wall outside Beijing, a Ming village, and saw a farm and the most beautiful mountain ranges. Themes in the below are: USTB, cityscape, transportation, world view, art, my teaching here, food, and special sights inside and outside of Beijing.



The Great Wall at Badaling

The **University of Science and Technology** has 30,000 students with a number of international students (mainly from Africa), who I was told get better dorms: 2/room where Chinese students are 4 to 7 to a room. Undergraduate fees are US \$500-1000 (4000-6000 Y) and graduate ones a little over \$1000 (8000-10000 Y) per year and dorm fees 900 Y. Students get government and departmental aid. USTB is one of many universities in the Haidian/Wudaokou district, in the NW of Beijing; others are Peking University, Tsinghua University, Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), and Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU).



School of Foreign Studies, before the semester started



West Gate of USTB; Soviet style buildings



BFSU library



BLCU North Gate

I was perhaps most surprised by how much green there is and how much older architecture is preserved. I was also amazed by how manageable the traffic is; the metro and buses are wonderful (more on that later). And there are lots of lakes to walk around, e.g. Houhai Lake, but not to swim in.



Dongchen courtyards



Roof ornaments



Houhai Lake

Hutongs are alleys with traditional courtyard residences and some stores. Many of these were demolished but now they are protected and many have been redone. Bricks are grey because red was for the emperor. It is hard to get to live in one of these as families hang on to theirs. Some hutongs have turned into tourist areas.



Guowang Hutong



Jing Tu Hutong



Commercialization of the hutongs



Hutong from above, Bell/Drum Tower area



Bathhouse in Chongwen



Silkstore



Medicine store?



Playful additions



Another silk store in Chongwen

The 14th century **Confucius Temple and Imperial College** are combined in one compound, which is an incredibly tranquil place. The Imperial College served the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties as the most important educational institution.



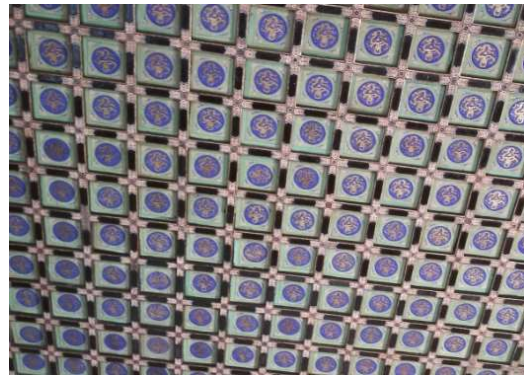
Glazed Archway, Liuli Paifang



The Imperial College Library, Ji Lun Hall
(13th century)



Biyong Hall



Ceiling detail

Modern building styles vary and many have protection over their windows on the lower floors. Special architecture includes the Bird's Nest and Water Cube and the 51-story CCTV Building. Currently, there is a law against 'weird' buildings in Beijing (so named by President Xi in 2014). I thought the CCTV Building (now the headquarters for China Media Group) was beautiful! My only complaint is that the windows seemed quite dirty. Of course, there are lots of Buddhist and Daoist temples in the city (and some mosques and churches).



Gentrification, south of the 4th Ring Road



My hotel



Building on the SW corner of USTB



Around Liudaokou metro



The CCTV Building, by Koolhaas and Scheren



It is always interesting to see the **modes of transport**: lots of electric-scooters, motorbikes, and busses and regular bikes. This reduces the pollution and noise and, because the National Holiday was coming, anti-pollution measures were in effect and the skies were mostly blue. The first night I smelled the pollution but not afterwards. It is very hard to get a permit to have a car in big cities and this makes the traffic manageable. Beijing's subways are wonderful!



Kitty bike with gloves



Bikes in Guowang Hutong





Beitucheng subway station, with a Chinese ceramics theme



Electric busses and share-bikes

Permission to drive a car in Beijing is especially hard to get. The license on the left is from Beijing but the one on the right isn't and needs special permission to drive in Beijing. As is obvious from the pictures, there are many foreign, US and German, cars.



There is much **interest in the US** of course! A few like Trump because 'he gets things done' although they don't like the trade war and the US (and European) views on Hong Kong. However, there doesn't seem to be a lot of understanding of the actual political issues. Many talk about freedoms that Americans have but then give guns as an example. Security cameras and facial recognition are everywhere and seem not to worry too many. My own internet use was a catch-22 between turning on the wifi and the VPN and then getting the wifi turned off. Many people complained that the firewall was getting sturdier before the national Holiday. I-phones are popular and Microsoft products are everywhere but google, wikis, and other content is banned. Huawei is gaining ground on apple though and everyone uses WeChat to communicate and to pay. The latter blocked me after three weeks for 'suspicious activities' and I couldn't get it unblocked. There are self-driving cars and I heard that drones deliver packages in certain areas.

Some **jokes on the trade war** with the US and the loss of meat imports. The forest fires (raging at the beginning of September) were caused by the trade embargo because South American farmers were clearing forests to provide meat for China. And a joke about the African swine flu which sent pork prices soaring was that it came from Russia because they suddenly had to provide the pork. Neither is in very good taste but there was a lot of concern about pork supplies. My impression is that the trade war will make China more self-sufficient and less reliant on the US. Trade negotiations between China and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and a few African nations were ongoing as I was there (according to the *China Daily*).

Earlier students had reported that health insurance is not that common, which always surprised me. Communism here is very different from that in Cuba and the former Soviet Union, as far as I understand it. Here, there is less of a safety net and people rely on their family. As in other places (e.g. the US), there is a huge contrast between old and new, poor and rich. One sees older people sweeping the streets although retirement is 55 for women and 60 for men (but earlier if you had a factory job). I never got clear on who gets a pension. Retirees often also take care of the grandchildren. Employed people work long hours (technically 40 in government jobs but it may be 60 in the private sector).



Street sweeper equipment



On to some of the sights I saw. **The Temple of Heaven** (Tiantan) is a Ming period complex where emperors came to pray, mainly for good harvests. There were many intricate ceremonies held throughout the year, fasting, animal sacrifice, and use of ancient tablets. The park surrounding Tiantan is used for Taichi, games, running, and relaxing.



Heaven worshipping mound



Heavenly Center Stone



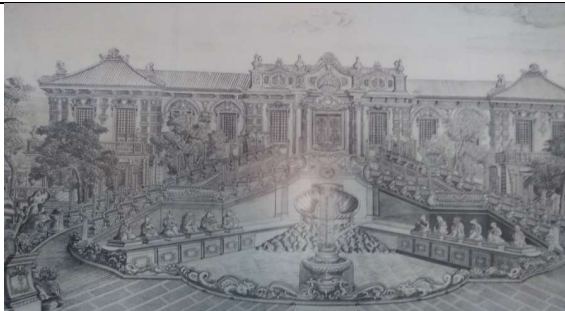


Fasting Palace



Dancing in the park

The 'Old' Summer Palace had been designed for Emperor Qianlong by Jesuits to resemble a European palace. It was destroyed a century later by the English and the French during the Second Opium War. It took thousands of soldiers several days; most of the artifacts ended up in English and French museums. This is still a sore spot! The gardens surrounding the ruins contain many other Chinese buildings, lakes, and gardens. It is a vast place with minimal signage ...



A picture of the palace in its heyday



What remains!





Labyrinth, Old Summer Palace



District 798 is a mixture of galleries of Chinese traditional and modern art and murals and street art on old industrial buildings. It's become a hot tourist attraction with the expected tourist trap stores. I much enjoyed the street art and then felt guilty about loving it so much: this is really a western art form. See also the reference to Berlin in one of the pictures. However, looking through my pictures, I noticed a lot of Chinese influence. This art type seems to have been started by western artists but is now more indigenous, where allowed!



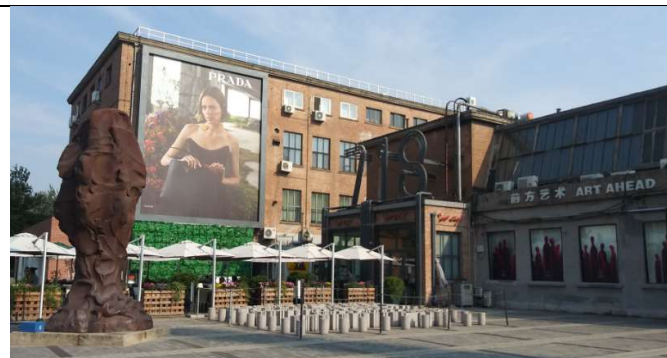
Zhang Yu, Clay Figurines



Zhu Bingren, Copper Art







Gentrification coming



Rare street art in the hutong



NAMOC, or National Art Museum of China

The National Art Museum of China is vast and I selected just one painting and one sculpture. It is a place I would happily go back to for a day.



Detail of Wang's Charm of Brush and Ink



The Azure Dragon by Zhi Min

The Forbidden City, aka the Palace Museum, housed the palaces of the emperors from around 1400 to 1924, 14 Ming emperors and 10 Qing. There are squares, bridges, gates, alleys, courtyards, palaces, and museums; with a total of 980 buildings. My guide loves history and particularly the Palace Museum so I found out a lot. The buildings have interesting names: the palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunning Gong), of Longevity and Health (Shoukang Gong), of Prolonging Happiness (Yanxi Gong), of Pure Tranquility (Qingning Gong); the gate of Supreme Harmony (Taihe Men), of Imperial Supremacy (Huangji Men), of Blending Harmony (Xiehe Men); the hall of Central Harmony (Zhonghe Dian) and of Mental Cultivation (Yangxin Dian). There is of course a Palace Museum in Taiwan, mentioned by many Chinese, but which just houses the artifacts taken by Chiang Kai-shek (another sore spot) and isn't like the forbidden city at all.





October 1st was coming and I managed to see **Tianamen Square** before it was totally taken up by rehearsals and decoration preparations for Independence Day. I had meant to go back but didn't know it would be closed. This year marks 70 years after 1949. Many schools, civic organizations etc have been practicing for this for a long time. Many of the students are volunteers or participate in parades. Security is very tight.



Great Hall of the People, Tianamen Square, before



And after it was partially closed off



National Museum of China, on Tianamen Square

Xiangshan, or Fragrant Hills, is a little to the West of the city but reachable by bus. The temples in this area were built in the Tang dynasty and added to later. The complex was destroyed in the beginning of the 20th century and only reopened in 2016. The CPC also had a Confidential Department here at the height of the Cold War that had just opened for visitors. Three students and I climbed to the highest top and looked around the park at the bottom and then had a wonderful hotpot (my third). We also visited the BFSU campus that I mentioned above.



Xiangshan entrance



Living quarters of the Confidential Department



My teaching involved a class in syntax (<http://www.public.asu.edu/~gelderren/SyntaxBeijing.htm>) and various lectures, and question sessions (in English proficiency classes). My students in syntax were really amazing. I was condensing a semester-class in a few weeks and they wanted to understand it all. Very committed with loads of questions during and after class. Making them comfortable to ask and challenge was perhaps my best accomplishment. We covered the change from early generative syntax to current Minimalism and drew trees with expanded VPs, TPs, CPs, and DPs.



Dinner after our last class

There were also wonderful assistants who wanted to get me hot water, help with the computer, and so much more. I was really spoiled. These assistants had also guided me in getting to know Beijing, as I mentioned before.



'Assistants', host, and me

During one week, I also served as a resource in five English proficiency classes. My host was the teacher of these classes and she had given the students an assignment to each come up with a question for me.

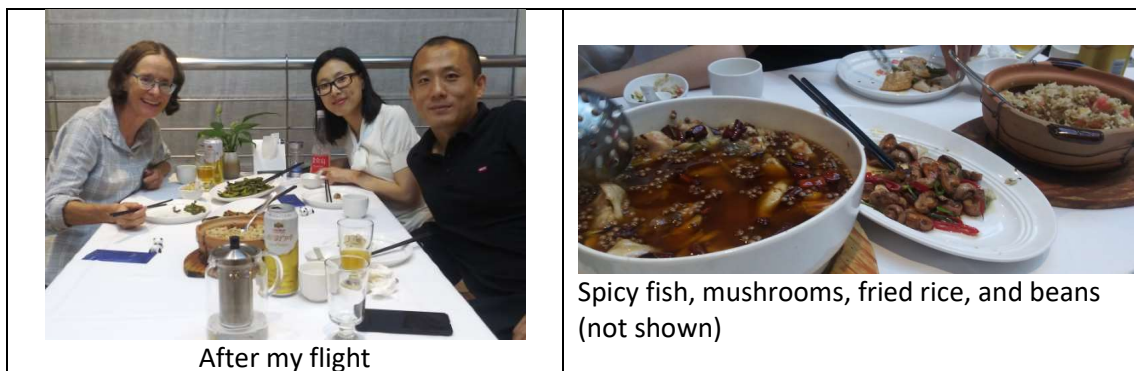
She provided them with my homepage and told them I had lived in Europe, Canada, and the US and had visited many other countries. They could ask about my impressions of China, differences, politics, etc. These were really interesting sessions and I think the idea of doing this was great. Again, the first question was often: “how safe is it in the US”? I talked about why many Americans have weapons and about recent changes in what weapons Walmart would sell and the recent changes in what was ok to carry as weapon in Costco, Walmart, and other big stores. But it also became obvious that security and peace and safety were different concepts for them and me. To me, safety is in enjoying certain freedoms (and not being hit by cars on crosswalks ...).

There were questions about other cultural differences, lawyers, healthcare, movies, cultural trends, art, smart phone use, gene-modified foods, Huawei, and freedom(s). There were also many personal questions about what was my dream, my faith, whether my paintings were impressionist [more expressionist], why I love travel, whether I get tired or lonely when I travel, what food I like, and why I like linguistics, syntax, and language change. I really enjoyed these sessions.



Syntax

People always ask ‘what do you eat?’ So here are some **pictures of food**. USTB had 8 floors of food court: amazing. I would just point at something and hope for the best, i.e. no meat and not too much vinegar. Coffee shops are coming; no longer tea for most younger people but bottled water and energy drinks; hot water can be found everywhere, to drink without tea. I can see a huge market for Starbucks but, at the moment, it is too expensive.



After my flight

Spicy fish, mushrooms, fried rice, and beans
(not shown)



A wonderful meal, a very spicy hotpot



And another delicious hotpot in Chongwen/Xuanwu



Lunch along Yonghegong Dajie



Leek dumplings



Ordering food after the Old Summer Palace visit



Sweets and drinks



Sweets in Chongwen



And KFC everywhere!



Lunch in Chuangdixia



Since we are on food, something about prices. School lunches and dinners are generally about \$2-3; a meal in a good restaurant can run into \$30. A cappuccino is \$4-5. In a supermarket, beer can range from 30 cents a can (Harbin) to \$5 for a bottle of IPA (if you can find it). Cheese is hard to get but not a lot more expensive than in the US; flowers are expensive, e.g. one lily is \$7. A bus ride is from 28 cents up; \$7 on a metro card lasts many days; and an hour's taxi ride is less than \$20. A pair of socks is 70 cents and a t-shirt is \$6 (in a regular store) but \$20 in a tourist area.

Recycling is coming. It was introduced in August 2019 and one sees stations with cans for 7 or 8 different recyclables. The reason is that dumps are filling up faster than expected! (It is ironic that some US cities have to stop recycling because China won't take the plastic anymore!) The Chinese government is

centralized so if it decides it will recycle, organize an expo, pave the rural roads, or have clean toilets, it does so. When I visited, the air quality was excellent because construction sites and factories were shut to have blue skies for the National Holiday. There are real efforts in environmental cleanup. However, the government doesn't encourage private NGOs and seems to make their life hard (Rammeloo 2019).

Outside Beijing. A Chinese (and now American) friend and I reconnected and went to see the Horticultural Expo along the banks of the Guishui River in Yanqing, a farm around Yanqing, the Great Wall at Badaling and at Juyongguan, and a traditional Ming village at Chuandixia. The many pavilions at the Expo (<http://www.horti-expo2019.org>) were beautiful, in architecture and setting: I had no idea. It was also wonderful to see small towns and villages and the beautiful mountains.



Thousands and thousands of orchids, Expo



China Pavilion, Expo



Small villages



Farm with apples, peaches, plums, spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, peppers etc



The **Great Wall** can be accessed at a few different sites. I had signed up for a tour at Simatai but then ended up on the Wall on the other side of Beijing. Some pictures follow from Badaling and Juyongguan.



The Badaling Wall



The Juyongguan section



Badaling



Juyongguan





Juyongguan



At Juyongguan, with the Badaling segment visible (arrow)

Chuandixia is a village of 90 people (30 households) who are related and share a last name. They also share a genetic (toe) mutation although both men and women marry people from the outside. It is a traditional Ming period village with four households to a courtyard. In Ming times, women would never leave that courtyard. (I already planned an escape!) The families now make a living by offering lunch (see p. 21) and a place to sleep.



Chuandixia from below



Into the valley



The road to Chuandixia and back



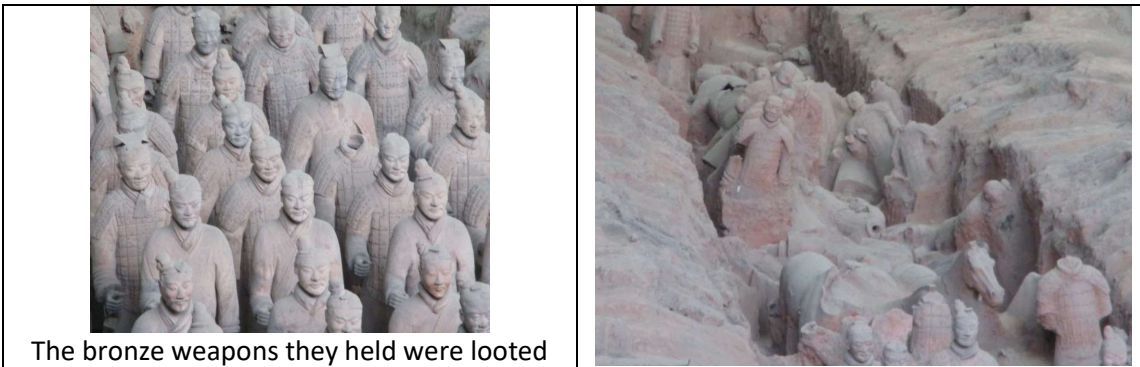
I also went to Xi'an, a city of 12 million and the capital of Shaanxi Province. It is 600 miles SW of Beijing and means [west peace]. This is one of the most ancient cities in China (an early species of homo erectus was found here, Lantian Man) and it was the starting point of the Silk Road. It is home to the Terra Cotta warriors and so much other history.

The Terra Cotta army is now the main attraction. In the second century BCE, Qin Shi Huang built a mausoleum (burying his concubines and laborers). It is an amazing sight to see these thousands of statues. His burial place is protected by mercury (I was told by a guide) and close to it are fields of warriors, chariots and horses, and acrobats for himself, in his afterlife.





The first pit, with 3000 warriors unearthed and another 3000 for future excavations

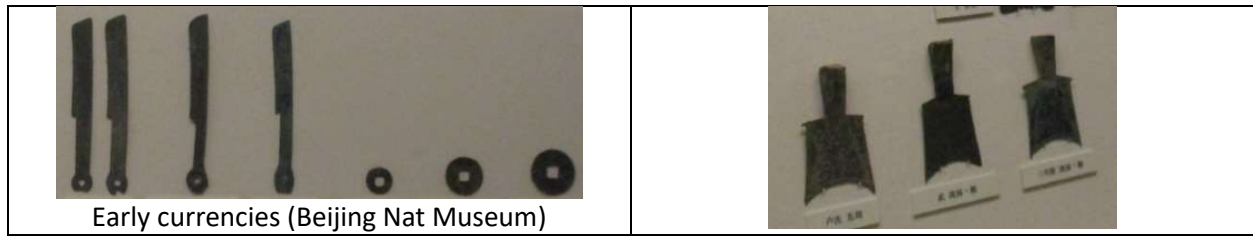


The bronze weapons they held were looted



Third pit

Qin Shi Huang was quite a person. He unified several kingdoms as well as the currency, weights, measures, and the writing system. He built roads, palaces, and the Great Wall but was a cruel and autocratic ruler and, after he died, the country reverted to chaos.



To the SE of Xi'an, **at Banpo**, there is a **neolithic village** of over 6000 years old and of the Yangshao culture. This culture was matrilineal (based on burial wealth) and was in transition from hunter/gatherer to agricultural (based on artifacts). The site was discovered in 1953 and the museum was founded in 1958 as one of the first to showcase a neolithic site. Since then, other such sites have been located and not much new has been added at the Banpo site. Apparently, tourists have stopped coming and that was obvious and a welcome relief (for me). Three types of dwellings, partly underground, circular, and rectangular. Kilns, (200) storage pits, a cemetery, and a deep moat also survive.



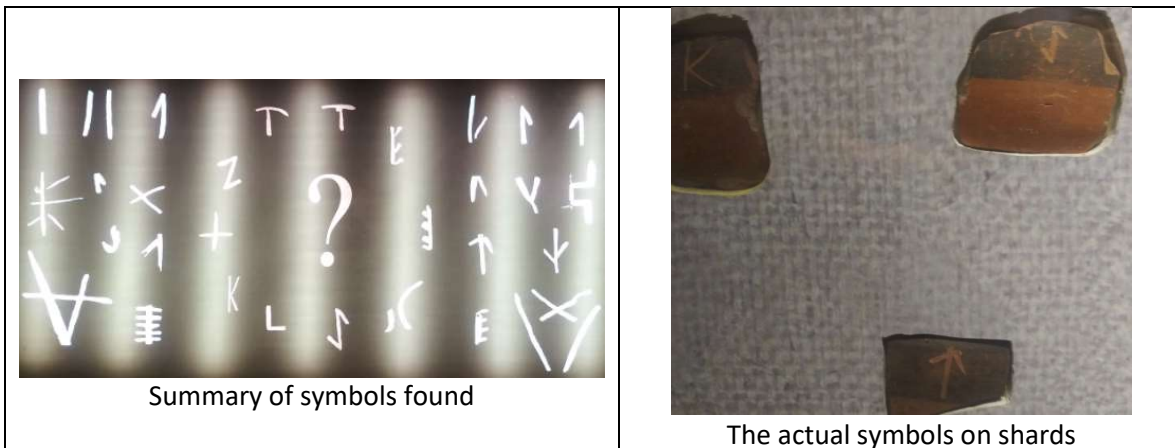
Partly underground dwelling with postholes visible, mostly N-S oriented

A lot of artifacts were found at the site and most interesting to me was the art on the pottery (geometric as well as animal/human/imaginary) and the symbols; some of them runic-looking! According to the wiki article cited below, there are 22 different symbols which occur by themselves.





Spinning tools



Summary of symbols found

The actual symbols on shards

Babies and children were buried in earthenware jars and adults in graves with their heads mostly facing west and pottery added. Many adults were found with their face down or side-ways and without pottery; these may have been accidental deaths. There was also evidence of human sacrifice of a woman and (her?) children. The site was abandoned fast (possibly because of flooding; see Mark 2015).



Waterjar

Seedpot (much smaller than the jar)

Xi'an has a vibrant Muslim community, mainly Hui, and their bazar is a colorful treat.



The Muslim Quarters

The **hot springs** at Huaqing are East of Xi'an. They have been used by several emperors, many of whom built their own baths. Chang Kai-shek spent some time here as well in the 1930s when the nationalists and communists were fighting.

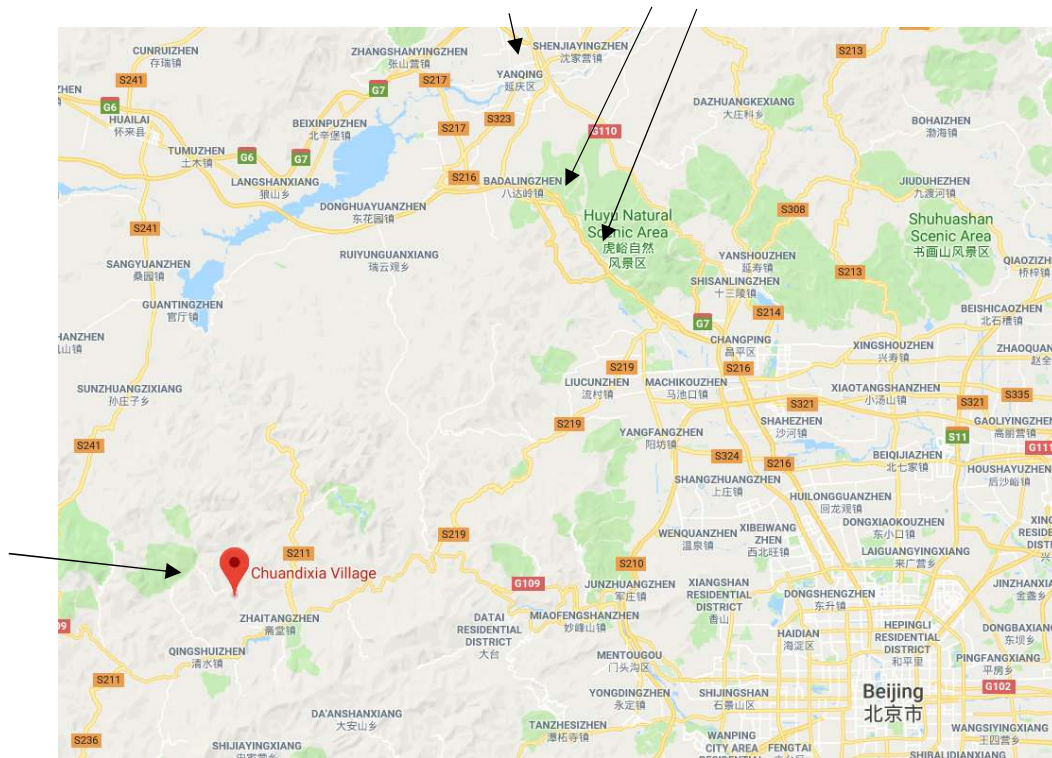


An amazing visit, with so much that I have seen and heard. Thanks to my fantastic host and Chinese friend and wonderful students.

For the future

Many sights were closed and one I would have liked to have seen, Peking University's Sackler Museum, needed permission 3-days in advance. That museum specializes in prehistory and houses the remains of 'Peking Man.' I can read up on it instead. Many people recommended southern China for more nature and I would like to see Mongolia (beautiful deserts) and of course the western parts and more of the Silk Route (Xi'an didn't have much although it is the start).

The below map shows a few of the places around Beijing I visited with my Chinese American friend. The leftmost arrow is Yanqing (Expo and farm); the middle one Badaling (Wall), and the arrow on the right Juyongguan (Wall). The red marker is Chuandixia (the Ming period village). It took quite some time to reach the latter from Juyongguan; we edged along the Guanting reservoir, using the G109 among others (not shown). Google maps can be a little odd on occasion outside Beijing, as if the blue GPS dot doesn't quite match the map.



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