

IAN W. BROWN

CHINA MEMORIES

**Journal of an Archaeologist
in the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River
in 1999**

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Front Cover Photo: 'The challenges involved in crossing a street in Pujiang, China' (Photo by Ian W. Brown). Cover Design by Ana María Calatayud.

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To Lothar von Falkenhausen

who provided me with an opportunity to explore this enchanted land. He turned to me when our plane touched ground in Beijing and said, "Ian, you are now in China."

Those few words have had such an impact on my life.

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INTRODUCTION

These memories derive from a journey that I took in China in February and March of 1999. My trip largely focused on the province of Sichuan, but several days were spent in and around Beijing. It was occasioned through my membership on the Zhong Xian Archaeological Project. This project was led by Lothar von Falkenhausen of UCLA and included students and staff from both that institution, Peking University and the Chengdu Archaeological Institute, in addition to myself from the University of Alabama. Funding for our work came from the Wenner–Gren Foundation and the Henry T. Luce Foundation.

Four other accounts of my experiences exist: 1) a hardbound field notebook; 2) two original, hardbound handwritten journals; 3) a manuscript called “A China Trip” which includes a verbatim, typed transcription of my handwritten journals; and 4) a typed edited version of my journals under the title, "Studying Salt in Central China, A Memoir" (unpublished). Whereas the journals

are presented in chronological fashion, in the order in which the events were lived and the words composed, *China Memories* is divided into subjects. It also preserves chronology to some extent, but I thought that a categorical arrangement would be more appealing to most readers. It should be emphasized that these are memories that relate to people and places.

Not included is all the rich information that I recorded on the subject of prehistoric, historic, and ethnographic use of salt, which was the focus of the research in the first place! That topic is covered in more detail than the general reader could possibly ever want in the above-mentioned "Studying Salt in Central China, A Memoir," as well as in a couple of published articles: "The Pointed-base Pottery Cup Vessel Form: A Probable Tool of Salt Production" and "Comparison of the Briquetage from Zhongba to Finds from the Essex Red Hills of Southeast England."¹

¹ Brown, "The Pointed-base Pottery Cup Vessel Form: A Probable Tool of Salt Production." In *Salt Archaeology in China, Vol. 1: Ancient Salt Production and Landscape Archaeology in the Upper Yangzi Basin: Preliminary Studies*, edited by Li Shuicheng and Lothar von Falkenhausen (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe [Science Press], 2006), 260-285; Brown, "Comparison of the Briquetage from Zhongba to Finds from the Essex Red Hills of

What I have tried to do here is to present some of the joy of travel in China as I was living it. Because I was a newcomer to China in 1999, and still am as my life thus far has not occasioned a revisit to this country, I do not feel overly comfortable with myself as an authority. Then again, a journal is a life experience as it is being lived, so hopefully the reader will find some value in my relation. China is a wonderful place, but unfortunately its character seldom can be expressed adequately in words.

I would be remiss not to mention the people on the expedition who I had most contact with, as it is their names that come up repeatedly in the account that follows. Professors Lothar von Falkenhausen (UCLA), Li Shuicheng, and Sun Hua (both of Peking University) were the principal scholars that organized the research and who were active in every part of the fieldwork. Dr. Rowan Flad, now a professor at Harvard, and Dr. Gwen Bennett, now an administrator at Chongqing University, were two of the three UCLA doctoral students with

Southeast England." In *Salt Archaeology in China, Vol. 2: Global Comparative Studies*, edited by Li Shuicheng and Lothar von Falkenhausen (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe [Science Press], 2010), 321-345.

whom I bonded. The third was the late Dr. Pochan Chen, whose demise I am still trying to come to terms with. He was a gentle soul, an impressive scholar, and a good friend to all of us.

THE ADVENTURE OF TRAVEL

February 24–25, 1999 (Wednesday–Thursday)

I had not realized we lost a complete day until Friday, but more on that later. I got up around 6 a.m. on Wednesday, worked on my journal and read most of Sage's book.² Didn't finish it before I had to return it, but I was able to get the gist of it. Rowan picked me up at 10:30 a.m. and we then gathered Pochan and his bags. The taxi had already arrived at Lothar's house before us and the driver seemed a bit miffed at having had to wait around. We were finally off to the airport but were dropped off at the wrong terminal. That was a pain but we were there early enough that it didn't mess us up. Caught a shuttle to Terminal 2 and checked in to China Air. Then we grabbed a bite to eat. I had my last pizza for awhile, but it didn't seem as such.

The plane flight was uneventful, though long. It took 12 hours as we sailed up the California and

² Steven F. Sage, *Ancient Sichuan and the Unification of China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

Northwest Coast over to Kamchatka. We finally arrived in Beijing around 6:30 p.m. their time, which also turned out to be Thursday, though I was not aware of this. While en route Rowan translated our itinerary from Chinese to English, as follows:

2/25–2/29 Beijing, prepare work

3/1 Travel to Chengdu

3/2–3/4 View results of salt excavations in Chengdu, visit museum and archaeology institute, discuss plans

3/5–3/9 Travel to Pujiang and Jiun lai salt mine sites

3/10–3/12 Travel to Zigong (visit salt museum)

3/13 Travel to Chong Qing

3/14 Travel to Zhong Xian

3/15–3/18 Visit to Ganjinggou and Zhongba sites (etc.)
view salt-related artifacts at museum/institute

3/19 Travel to Yunyang

3/20–3/21 Visit salt related site Yun'an Zhen

3/22 Visit Wu Shan

3/23–23/24 Visit Da Chengzhen salt site

- 3/25 Return to Wu Shan
- 3/26 Travel to Yicheng (Hubei)
- 3/27 Return to Beijing
- 3/28–3/31 Wrap up and plan future work

When we landed in Beijing I felt very much like when I first landed in Russia.³ All was dark, dingy and old. There was a smell of dust, oil and gas fumes in the air. We entered out into the open, and, as at the St. Petersburg airport we were herded into a cattle car and sped to the terminal. The terminal itself was small and inhospitable...

The taxi ride to Peking University was most interesting. Our driver talked incessantly for the first fifteen minutes or so, covering all that was ill about China. Then he went quiet, but expressed his anger in very aggressive driving. The mass of humanity is overwhelming. Cars are everywhere. They are small, mostly white or red, and flimsy. They dodge in and out of

³ Brown, "Behind Glass in Russia 1992: Memoir of an Archaeologist." Unpublished book-length ms. (Tuscaloosa: author's files, 1992).

each other, the horns being used far more than brakes. It is like bumper cars at the fair, though I have not as yet seen any make impact. What increases the drama of the game are the other participants. Half the population are on bikes, old bikes, as dusty as the atmosphere. No one wears helmets, no one has lights, and more often than not there are two people per bike, with the non-pedaling member hanging precariously from the rear. It is not unusual seeing family groups out for a spin in the middle of a traffic jam. And of course there are the pedestrians. They walk along the side of the road totally oblivious to the pandemonium racing by them. And every once and awhile one will see pedestrians in the middle of the highway locked between two streams of traffic. And no one seems worried by the mass chaos, except me who kept feeling for seat belts. But of course there were none. That would be an unsporting advantage...

March 1, 1999 (Monday)

We were up at 5:45 a.m. and outside ready for a taxi at 6:30 a.m. Professors Suicheng Li and Sun Hua met

us and accompanied us to Chengdu. I had a bit of anxiety at the airport because I could not find my luggage locks. I finally did discover them before having to check in my one piece of luggage to claim—not that there was anything especially valuable in it, but I just didn't want it picked over. And then when I finally did check it in, the security label was missing (it had become stuck to my other piece of luggage that I was carrying). Eventually, all was in order and we were at our gate. There Lothar handed out various delectables he had foraged for our breakfast, including crackers, dates, a walnut-like nut, a large tangerine for each of us, and liquid yogurts. I consumed all but the last. Liquid yogurt would have caused instant stomach rebellion.

I used the bathroom before boarding the plane as I needed to do some business. A busy airport like this and only one stall. I find it unbelievable, and yet there was no line. I think everyone just holds it in China. Because toilets are not easily accessible, their constitutions adapt to the situation. An elderly gent was mopping the floor. He showed me to the booth (keep in mind, this was not