

Historical Sites

I returned to China, landing on Sunday, 18 June. This time I am with a different group, ERRC (www.errchina.com), which has been offering programs in China for more than thirty years like ELIC. My six weeks here is in two parts. First is the Chinese World Views course given by ERRC during the remainder of June. During the four weeks of July I will be teaching an undergraduate science course at Peking University, one of the top two universities in China.



Landing in Beijing, 787 aircraft

Holiday Hotel and Good Restaurant

Buffet style for all meals

For our first week we stayed at the Youth Holiday Hotel on the west side of the Minzu University campus. The attached Good Restaurant provided all meals in buffet style, allowing a quick selection from a large variety of foods. The Minzu University is designed especially for students from the 55 official minority people groups of China. (The Han people group is the huge majority of the rest of the population.) There is an excellent museum on campus with cultural exhibits from many of those people groups, but photography was not allowed. We also visited an excellent art exhibit showing works by graduating students. During the end of our second week our world view lectures were held in one of the campus buildings.



The Museum of Ethnic Cultures

Student art exhibit

Rental bicycles are everywhere.

Tuesday evening we had a brief visit to Tiananmen Square, with dinner at a small Beijing Opera theater.

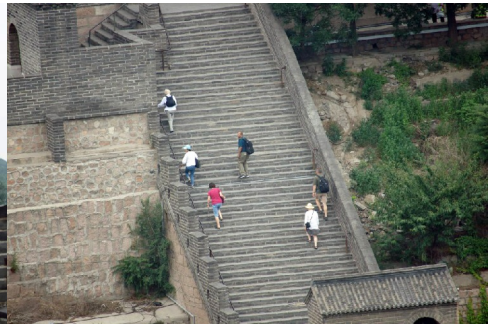
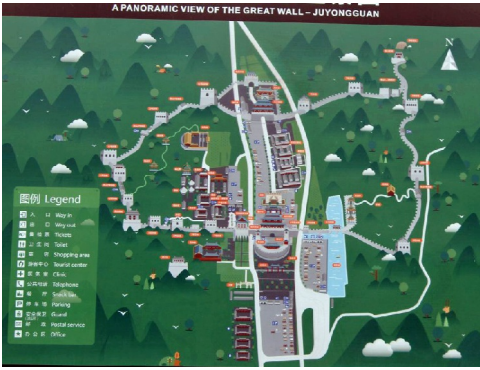


South entrance to Forbidden City

South view across Tiananmen Square

Dinner theater

Wednesday morning we went to the northwest mountains to a narrow valley pass featuring the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall. I had not previously been there. This portion consists of a loop going up both sides of the valley. I climbed up the east side and back down into the valley on that section of the loop. The other team members climbed part way up the western wall. That part of the loop peaks on a higher mountain top.



The first part of my Wall climb.

The team starting their climb westward.



I reached this eastern summit tower.



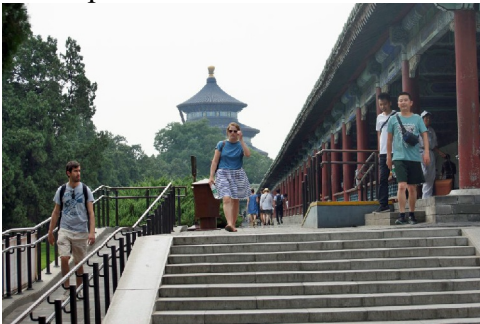
A view of the south part of the loop.



A view of the north part of the loop.

The eastern part of the loop had fewer people, making it good for observing the natural features including birds.

The afternoon was spent in the Temple of Heaven park. I did not visit inside main temple buildings this time, but I took photos to show that I was nearby. Instead I enjoyed the area as a large park and counted birds.



The path to the main temple building.



The central temple with the altar to Shang Di, the original God of China.



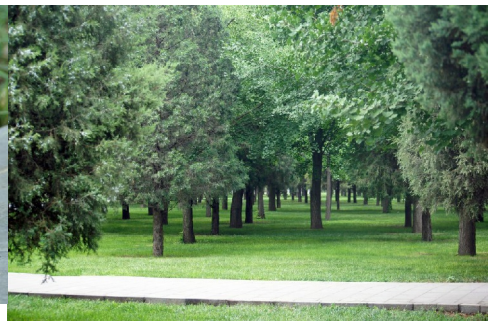
Looking over the wall to the large altar on the southern end of the complex.



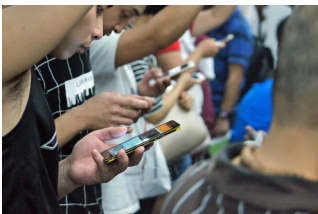
I passed through the large rose garden.



This Red-billed Blue-Magpie posed for lots of photos, got 2 peanuts as reward.



A lovely, quiet area of the park.



On the subway trip back to the campus, everyone in this line of passengers was viewing their smartphone in unison. Only the first was in focus.

Thursday morning had cool rain when we went to the northwest to the Fragrant Hills Park at the edge of the foothills. So we had the park nearly to ourselves. There was a long complex of Buddhist temples and other buildings and more than 800 years of history. In 1860 and 1900 the site was burned by European troops. One building is now dedicated to the memory of Sun Yat-sen, the first president of the Republic of China. Mao had a headquarters here in early 1949.



Pebble artwork in pathway.

Interior garden

Incense altar in the light rain.



Buddhist altar inside a building.

Prayer ribbons outside.

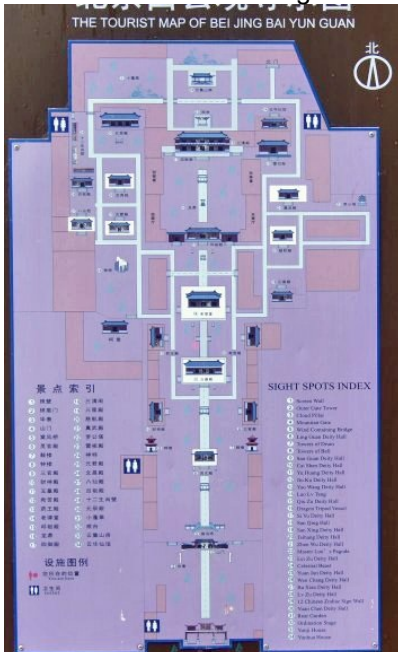
A chairlift runs up the rear ridge.



Sun Yat-sen memorial sign.

Another pebble sidewalk.

Vajrasana Pagoda, blocked by gate.



A Brief Introduction of Beijing Bai Yun Guan (White Cloud Temple)

Beijing Bai Yun Guan is honored as the chief temple of the Three Ancestral Temples of the Quan Zhen (Complete Reality) Taoist tradition. Originally called Tian Chang Guan (Temple of Eternal Heaven), it was built in 741 A.D. under Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty. In the Song Dynasty it was renamed Tai Ji Gong. At the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, Master Qiu Chang Chun was appointed to this temple by Emperor Genghis Khan to preside over Taoism in China, upon which it was renamed Chang Chun Gong (Temple of Eternal Spring). After Qiu Chang Chun's ascension to heaven, Chu Shun Tang was built to enshrine his physical remains, a hall located east of Chang Chun Gong. In the early Ming Dynasty, the temple was ruined by war, only Chu Shun Tang remained to become the centre of rebuilding, the temple was then renamed Bai Yun Guan.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the temple has undergone three extensive renovations with support from the Chinese government and so the traditional magnificence of this time-honored temple has been revitalized. At present the temple buildings cover an area of approximately 10,000 square meters, including nineteen deity halls carefully aligned along three north-south axes, with a rear garden, the overall area of the temple is about 60,000 square meters. Listed as a historic site under the protection of the Chinese government in 2001, it houses the offices of the Chinese Taoist Association, the Institute of Chinese Taoist Culture, the Chinese Taoist College and the Editorial Department of the Journal of Chinese Taoism.

Late Thursday morning we visited the Taoist White Cloud Temple area in Beijing. Some buildings are devoted to Taoist deities.



These are some of the altars to Taoist deities.



Animals of the Chinese zodiac, years. Illustrations of good family relationships. Graduation platform.

The middle of Thursday afternoon was spent at the Confucian Temple. One of our team members, Kathy Kong, is a distant descendant of Confucius (Kong Zi in Chinese characters).



Viewing the stone pillars (stele) with names of those passing the rigorous civil service exams.

Kathy Kong and Kong Zi statue.

Dragon artwork on stairway.

Written in stone!



Entering the stone stele forest



There are hundreds of steles here engraved with finely written characters. It is likely that civil service candidates had to memorize the entire content of this stone forest

to pass the final exams.



Pathway for Tibetan Buddhist Temples. The second column from left is Tibetan. Prayer wheel.



Inside temple.

Temple exterior.

Our visit to the Tibetan Buddhist Temple late Thursday afternoon was brief.

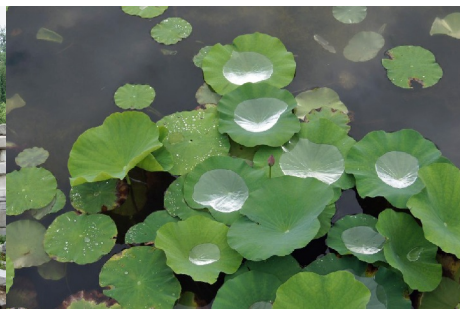
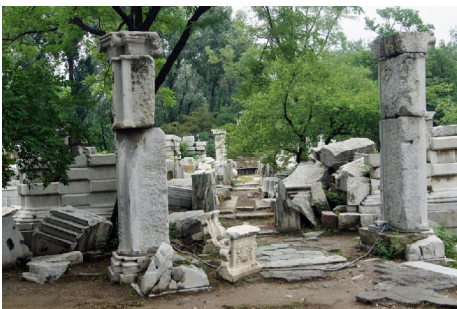


Friday morning we visited the Forbidden City, where I had been three times previously. I took these representative photos from the east side and then looked at museum displays outside the eastern wall, where I had not been.

Then we went to the original campus of Peking University. We visited displays in two buildings. The large building had classrooms and the library where Mao worked. A smaller building showed a historical time line leading to the founding of the People's Republic of China.



Saturday morning we visited the old Summer Palace park. There we saw the ruins of the buildings destroyed by European troops. China preserves the ruins as a reminder of the evil inflicted on the nation by foreigners. The last photo shows adjacent lotus leaves holding pools of rainwater.



By Dr. Ed Holroyd
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