

# One-Point-Three Billion Strong And Growing

Whitney H. Westerfield – 2<sup>nd</sup> Career Paper – January 8, 2014

Holding the office I hold has opened my eyes to a new world, several new worlds, truth be told.

I have had the opportunity to meet countless people from walks of life I'm ashamed to admit I didn't know existed. It has been a rich experience, and it has richly informed my worldview, I believe for the better.

One of the opportunities my position has afforded me was to participate in a program called the American Council of Young Political Leaders. ACYPL is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, D.C. that takes nominations for what it deems "political leaders" under the age of 40, builds a couple dozen 8-9 person delegations, and sends them to all corners of the Earth to visit and engage with political and business leaders. It's mission is "to promote mutual understanding, respect and friendship and cultivate long lasting relationships among next generation leaders in the US and around the world."

Notable alumni include HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Sen. Dick Durbin, and Kentucky's own Congressman Brett Guthrie, Hal Rogers and last but not least, the newly minted Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Mitch McConnell.

I was nominated by a Democratic member of the Maryland House of Delegates named Jon Cardin, that I met while speaking at a legislative forum in Atlanta about 2013's Senate Bill 1 (the military electronic voting bill). I had heard about ACYPL from President Stivers, an alum himself, but Delegate Cardin gave lots more information and offered to nominate me. I was flattered, of course, and little did I know the die had been struck for what would come next. A delegation invitation.

In late 2013 I received an email from ACYPL staff with an invitation to submit additional paperwork, indicating my preference for global destinations. One of those locations was China.

Fast forward a few months I learn I was included in the exchange with China, and that, as is common practice for ACYPL every other year or so, the exchange would be lengthened to include a stop over in Taiwan. I enthusiastically agreed to go.

The trip began with briefing with staff at the State Dept. in Washington, DC, and a cultural exercise with the Deputy Head Counsellor Counsellor Zha Liyou from the Chinese Embassy in DC. The State Department briefings were informative largely about US-China and US-Taiwan relations, the details of which I'll get into more momentarily. The most shocking part of the pre-departure briefings was actually about security, specifically digital security. We were cautioned by state department career diplomats to the Asian continent that any digital device we took with us to China would be infiltrated the moment the airplane door open at the Beijing terminal. More on that later.

## The Great Wall

Our 16 day aggressive-schedule tour was underway with a sightseeing visit to the Great Wall of China, a few miles outside of Beijing.

A few facts about the Great Wall: For starters, its not a single wall but a number of stretches of wall scattered throughout the country. The structure took shape over hundreds of years, used roughly 1,000,000 laborers and cost the lives of approximately 300,000 of them - some of whom are buried under or within the wall itself.

The Wall was intended to keep invaders out, but didn't succeed in that objective very well. Gengis Khan, the Mogols. During the Ming Dynasty the Wall was rebuilt and added to, fortified with granite and limestone. The length of the Ming Wall is estimated to be around 5500 miles. The towers and beacons that mark segments of the Wall were used to house soldiers and to communicate long distances. For those of you who have seen The Lord Of the Rings films, there is a part in the Return of the King movie that shows an enormous wood pile lit up as a torch to indicate help is needed. That first tower, and its torch, is visible by another presumably miles away, which would then light its own torch, passing along the message to each successive tower. Imagine the same thing on the Great Wall, but perhaps with smoke signals instead of one-use bon fires.

I can personally attest to the fact that the Wall would've kept me from invading, or escaping for that matter. The segment we visited had a large battlement with cannons at the tourist entrance point, but progressed up an incredibly steep hillside. A handful of towers separates the Wall segment here and I was lucky not to pass out somewhere after the 3rd tower. Not only was the grade remarkably steep, the steps (themselves worn in many places from countless tourist shoes) were uneven – each step different slightly run and wildly different in rise than the step before it. I realize I'm not the most fit ever to grace those steps, but I thought my climb was admirable and that I didn't lose consciousness down right impressive. The Great Wall would've kept me from getting in, or from getting out, of China.

Finally, I must clarify a common misconception about the Great Wall. While you can see the Wall from some lower level satellite imagery (Apple Maps, Google Earth, etc), you cannot see it from outer space or from the Moon.

## Import/Export

Our schedule was intensive and ambitious, meeting throughout each day with government and business officials about subject matter in their respective wheelhouses. Even the meals were planned, functional events to demonstrate and practice proper social etiquette.

We met with a number of government officials and corporate executives including Dr. Jin Zhongxia, Director of the Institute of Finance of The People's Bank of China and the President of the CNOOC Corporation (China National Offshore Oil Corporation). I'll reduce my observations about the US-China trade relationship to this short portion of my paper but this hardly does the subject justice. In addition to keeping an eye on international news coverage on the topic I'd recommend a number of web resources for historical context if you're interested.

The United States has an enormous trade relationship with China. From our debt, coal and grain and tobacco to their manufacturing and enormous (and cheaper) labor force, the relationship is strong. Both countries have a lot at stake. The term "mutually assured destruction" is applicable both militarily and economically.

I've found reports that describe various amounts, but there seems to be a consensus that China holds in excess of \$1 Trillion of U.S. debt. "Total U.S.- China trade rose from \$2 billion in 1979 to \$562 billion in 2013. China is currently the United States' second-largest trading partner, its third-largest export market, and its biggest source of imports. China is estimated to be a \$350 billion market for U.S. firms (based on U.S. direct and indirect exports to China and sales by U.S.-invested firms in China)."<sup>1</sup>

America's grain is our largest export to China, some of which comes from right here in the breadbasket of Kentucky. Electronics, motor vehicles, chemicals and petroleum based synthetics are at the top of the list. Interestingly, "aerospace products and parts" come in at the #2 spot. I was told that ACYPL strategically builds its international exchange teams and

---

<sup>1</sup> China-U.S. Trade Issues, CRS Report, Wayne Morrison 12-5-2014

agendas, to the extent they can. Part of the team was a government affairs professional from the Boeing Corporation who confided in us team members at one point that one of the biggest hurdles to trade relations between our countries is the lack of strong Intellectual Property protections. The Boeing rep on our team flatly stated that China wants Boeing latest aircraft not just to put its commercial or military cargo, and its citizens on the newest planes but so it can disassemble and reverse engineer the planes and use Boeing's IP in its own fleets without having to pay a premium to Boeing.

The US does sell some quantity of tobacco to China, and I was under the impression it was a large export market for America's tobacco farmers, but what we sell them pales in comparison to what they grow and produce natively. We had the opportunity to tour a tobacco company's cigarette factory, which is ironic in light of China's IP law situation. We were permitted, if not encouraged, to use our cameras and phones to photograph and record all parts of their cigarette production line. By contrast, U.S. Smokeless Tobacco is very restrictive about visitors and tours and photography is prohibited.

## Westernization

The trade relationship reveals a peculiar dynamic in mainland China. The country is unapologetically communist. There appears to be an immense pride in the country's communist history and tradition, but on a number of occasions this pride seemed to be just lip service. Even our guides – who remained with us every waking group moment – acknowledged a tremendous gap between the super rich and the poverty stricken. This drastic difference was no clearer than when we travelled through horrible parts of Beijing to a nearby restaurant where a Maserati owner climbed out of his car for the valet to pick it up.

For a nation that so clearly wants to exercise governmental control over so much, capitalism has a firm grip. Signs of westernization are everywhere. Shopping malls, restaurants, even the hotels have western toilets instead of the native squatty potties. If you haven't had the pleasure

of using a squatty potty then you've avoided one of the more awkward traveling experiences I've had. If you've never seen what one looks like I invite you to google it during the comfort break.

There is also a developing discontent with the Central Government, at least in some quiet pockets. You'd never hear anyone we met in Beijing say something disparaging about the People's Government, but that wasn't the case in South West China, in the Yunnan Province. We toured a college campus with students during an afternoon and the three students that showed me around explained that they and many of their peers have a growing frustration with their central government because of environmental concerns. Before heading to China I was warned about the air quality, or lack of quality, and like you I had seen photos showing an impossible amount of smog. I must say I was pleasantly surprised when I arrived, but it is still worse than anywhere else I've seen. When we visited the US Embassy in Beijing we were told our stay in Beijing happened to fall during a stretch of better-than-normal air pollution. The AQI (Air Quality Index) was in the 100-200 range during our 5 days in Beijing and I recall being able to see only two city blocks at a time. The Embassy diplomat no longer expresses fear for her children going outside to play with anything at 200 or below. I wouldn't want *my* kids playing outside on a "200 day." For those of you who've been to New York City and stood on Park Avenue to look in either direction you can see until the horizon meets the sky. I am reminded that New York, as large as it is, at 8.4 million people is less than half the size of Beijing's 21 Million.

Perhaps the most striking example that Western culture has steadily seeped into mainland China? Beijing is to Kentucky Fried Chicken as Seattle is to Starbucks. Yum Brands has been hard at work spreading their chains across at least Beijing. But I wouldn't bet their chicken tenders are actually "chicken" tenders.

## Government & Court System

The Chinese government is still an enigma, and I have a suspicion that was intentional. We met with a number of government officials during our time in mainland China. Each was gracious and kind, expressing pride in their country and their work, but I found the meetings lacking in depth and breadth. Each began with a lengthy description of that portion of the government's function (legislature, finance), and to their credit, each meeting included a fair amount of time for questions to be posed. Unfortunately, the responses were consistently lacking.

During our state department briefings we were cautioned primarily about referencing the Taiwan portion of our international exchange, or describing Taiwan as anything other than being part of China itself. Otherwise, we were encouraged to ask any questions that occurred to us. As a group, we came prepared with a number of questions that I would consider hard-hitting, but when those dicey questions posed we'd be cryptically reminded how important China considers these talks as furthering the important relationship with the United States. Questions about China's holding of U.S. debt fell flat. Questions about IP laws fell flat. Specific questions about energy fell flat. We didn't need to be told that questions about North Korea were a no-man's-land.

If we had any hope that the conversations would open up those were dashed when CNN broke the news (overnight in Beijing) that the U.S. had charged several Chinese nationals of hacking a handful of major American businesses.<sup>2</sup> There were at least two uncomfortable parts of that experience: first, CNN was blocked on subsequent days in Beijing on our hotel televisions. Second, the news broke hours before our first meeting of the day, which was the only meeting that diverted from the normal pattern. Instead of friendly, albeit shallow, exchanges, the leader of the Chinese delegation stopped short following our greetings to read a prepared statement denouncing the U.S. Government's hypocrisy and baseless charges. It's challenging to conduct a friendly dialogue after that.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/20/world/asia/china-united-states-cyber-hacking/>

One of the strangest observations of the Government buildings is the lack of people. This week the Kentucky General Assembly gaveled back into session and the halls of both the Capitol and the Capitol Annex were filled with legislators, executive branch officials, countless staff, and most importantly - citizens. In China, without exception, the buildings were completely empty but for the people we were to meet with. No staff, no government workers carrying files or papers from place to place. No citizens. Even our guide, a 30-something year old, lifelong resident of Beijing hadn't set foot inside the fences of the places we were being taken.

My first day as a lead delegate had us visiting a couple of judges and three courtrooms in the city of Kunming, itself a sprawling metropolis of over 6 Million. The trip coordinators attempted to pair the delegation with appropriate tours, and in my case they hit a home run. It was exciting to see the life of a barrister on the other side of the earth. But, like so many other parts of our trip, the tour was a stark reminder of what makes America great. The lawyers and judges in the room can appreciate the friendly environment of the Christian County Justice Center, and each of us has a war story to share about an unfriendly courtroom experience. The courts of Kunming would, particularly for a criminal defendant, fall under the latter group. The courtrooms evoke thoughts of a dystopian future. For those of you who have watched the Harry Potter films, the courts would remind you of the hearing at the start of the fifth book/film (Order of the Phoenix) which shows seating for a massive tribunal, positioned high above the accused who must sit alone in the center of the room, away from counsel or help. Its easily the most intimidating courtroom I've ever set foot in.

Curiously the juvenile courtroom was wildly different. It wasn't a courtroom in the "normal" sense at all but more akin to a board room conference table. The juvenile, the judge, the attorneys, all have a seat at the table. Unlike here in the U.S., juveniles are punished in tandem with their parents, until the child reaches the age of majority (which I believe was 18). The most curious bit about the court day was the juvenile psychological exam. We were taken into a room adjacent to the juvenile courtroom wherein a small 2' square sandbox sat on a table with

numerous figurines sat positioned in the sand. Along one wall of the room was a bookshelf filled with these figurines and pieces. The juvenile judge explained that the child's psychological examination was conducted by having the child place the figurines in the sand, and the resulting diorama was examined for meaning by the judge. The judges failed to mention either whether the sandbox method was validated, or what kind of psychology training the judges possess. I remain skeptical.

## Culture

Each meeting was a special affair with specified seating, and strict adherence to decorum. Our delegation had a rotating lead delegate for the day. Prior to leaving the US, our biographies and photos were sent at the request of Chinese authorities. We were told they would study us, research our backgrounds and know our names before we walked into each meeting. This was as much out of respect as for anything else. The people of China still adhere to social structures and gender roles that Americans would deem old fashioned. Women are often treated as second class citizens, though there are signs this is slowly changing. The state department briefers explained it wouldn't be unusual for male leaders to not look at female members of the group, or would direct answers to the males.

Of my group, only two of us were legislators, and of the two, I was the higher ranking as a Senator. Furthermore, as a man, I was atop the social totem pole. On a handful of occasions, the Chinese officials who setup the seating for each meeting, put me closest to their leader. Seating location signals the level of importance. Twice, the Chinese leader entered the room and headed straight to me instead of the female lead delegate next to me.

Gifts are an important part of the cultural exchange and were routinely exchanged as a part of each meeting. Our team was responsible for bringing both "standard" and "vip" gifts and we each brought something that was representative of our homes. While my Kentucky-shaped State Senate lapel pins were appreciated, the Makers Mark bottles were the biggest hit of the entire

team. The two judges we met with couldn't speak a lick of English but when I retrieved their two bottles of Makers Mark from my bag one of them exclaimed "whiskey!" I wish I could report the origin of the gift giving tradition, or even confirm whether it originated there, but my research came up empty, and I didn't think to ask while I was there.

Food is whole other matter. The dietary makeup of the trip, as you might imagine, is affected by geography. Interestingly, much like you'd find in the United States, the southwest of China uses more spices and the cuisine is spicier. The southern, coastal provinces naturally tend to see more seafood fare. Beef, poultry and pork are not as prevalent in some areas compared to others due to supply. Vegetation is not always trustworthy because there is no FDA counterpart to oversee how and where crops are grown, what chemicals are used intentionally on those crops, or what chemicals are unintentionally exposed to them. And of course, chopsticks are a learned method of transferring food from your plate to your mouth. I wouldn't recommend using them to eat noodles unless you've become proficient.

I didn't lose weight while I was there, so it wasn't all bad. But, I lost count of how many whole fish we were served. Drinking, and specifically, drinking rice liquor, is an important social part of formal dinner settings. I respectfully declined participating. Soft drinks are not routine menu items outside of chain restaurant locations, and even then they aren't served very cold. Suffice it to say that by the end of the second day, our guide knew to ask each server for rice and soy sauce at the start of the meal.

## Conclusion

My experience China was enlightening and enriching. I can easily recommend the country should you have a chance to visit. China has a rich history spanning centuries, and with over 1.3 Billion citizens, represents the largest national population on Earth. I can hardly serve the nation's heritage justice in a single Athenaeum paper, or even over the course of 16 days in-country.

But it would behoove each of us to learn more about China. They are an important member of the international community, economically, militarily and diplomatically. China holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. As long as they remain the economic engine of the East you can be certain they will remain a part of the international conversation. Trade talks must factor-in China. I could give a whole paper on China, Taiwan and the Trans-Pacific Partnership alone and still not cover all the bases.

My hope is that you leave tonight with your curiosity piqued every so slightly more for a sample of the Orient.