



Across China in Search of the Belgian Mandarin

by Anne Spilingaerd Megowan

The first step of this journey was taken 10 years ago. From the time I began writing the story of the Belgian Mandarin, Paul Spilingaerd, I knew I would be making this trip to China as his story would not be complete without a trip to the land where he lived for 41 years. It would not be an easy journey, as Paul's tracks traversed China from the east coast to the western extreme, but it was essential to a more faithful telling of his story.

When originally planning this trip, I had ambitiously hoped to master enough Chinese to do some research on Paul in Chinese. Having been born in China was a definite advantage in learning the sounds, but since I left China when I was three, I had to take classes in both traditional and simplified Chinese to barely master enough mandarin to carry on simple conversations, and to read and write badly about 500 characters.

Two cousins joined me on this journey. Travel-savvy cousin Angela came from Vancouver, and Frank from Perth. Based on a tentative itinerary I had made, we set aside 4 weeks for this "mission". All three of us were born in Tientsin, now known as Tianjin.

First stop: Tianjin. Aside from being the city of my birth, this was where Paul ended his two-month sea voyage from Brussels in 1865. He also resided here after moving back from the west of China, to his new position with the Kaiping Mines.

There are currently no direct flights to Tianjin where we were to meet with Frank, so Angela and I flew to Beijing from Vancouver, and upon arrival, crossed the street from the airport entrance to the convenient Tianjin shuttle.



For 70 yuan each, our luggage was loaded into the lower baggage compartment, and we rode in the comfort of a large air-conditioned sightseeing bus for our hour-long ride. By contrast, Paul's 125 km. ride between Tianjin and Beijing in 1865 took 2 days. Our ride through China's capital city was an impressively scenic one through beautifully landscaped wide streets with an abundance of colorful flowers. Large modern buildings made it hard to distinguish from any European or American metropolis were it not for an occasional glimpse of tiled roofs with the turned up corners, and other characteristics of Chinese architecture. The host city of the 2008 Olympic Games has clearly started unrolling its welcome mat.

Tianjin had a different "feel" to it. There was a lot of construction going on, which mean a lot of *de*-struction had to happen, and is happening, but fortunately we were able to find vestiges of the city I was seeking. On Angela's suggestion we were booked at the Tianjin Imperial Palace Hotel, on Jiefang Lu, located perfectly for our purposes. (note to travelers: this reasonably priced hotel does not have elevators.)

Within a few short blocks of our hotel (pictured at right) we were able to find the building that once housed Jardine Matheson, the British maritime trade firm that provided Paul with goods with which to trade in Mongolia during his fur-trading days. A couple of blocks in the other direction we found the Astor Hotel, whose halls are filled with pictures of historic Tianjin, including many photos of the powerful Viceroy, Li Hongzhang, who made Paul a mandarin in 1881, and who remained a friend till the viceroy's death in 1901, not long after he signed the Boxer Protocol.



Our hotel provided an ample selection of food for breakfast, which was included, but Angela and I could not resist buying a freshly cooked *guozi* fresh out of the open-air cooker as we took a morning walk around the neighborhood. Biting into the long, doughnut-like pastry *guozi* was getting a taste of remembrance of the old China we left as children.

Angela guided us to a garbage-strewn gate in front of a once-grand building, and identified it as St. Louis church where my parents were married on April 11, 1942, and where I was baptized some years later. I had brought along a photocopy of the wedding party standing in front of the church, and on checking,

verified that the arches over the doorway were the same ones. We were let into the building by an elderly man we found by knocking on a few doors on the premises. Inside it was barely recognizable as a church, yet a statue of Mary was still standing on the altar, slightly askew. We also came across a nativity set that was nearly intact,



except for a decapitated shepherd. There were some buckets and pans set around as if they were meant to catch rainwater from a leaky roof. The effect was that of a bombed out building, as despite the fact that the walls were still standing. There was rubble everywhere, and what pieces of furniture, trunks, boxes, and several bathtubs lay around were covered in dust.

As a young man in Brussels, fresh out of military school, Paul worked as a lay assistant for the founder of the CICM (*Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*), or Scheut order of Catholic missionaries. It was with Fr. Theophile Verbist and 3 other priests that Paul left Brussels in August of 1865 to travel to China.

Our bilingual friend in Tianjin, **Isaac Huang**, played a vital part in the success of this trip. He is a former classmate of Angela's brother, Ken Cox. His excellent communication skills allowed exchanges in Chinese with people I wanted to see in China. The same churches and institutions I had written to in English and never heard back from, were responding to Isaac's letters in Chinese. I had obtained a few addresses from Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM of the same order of missionaries as the Belgian priests with whom Paul traveled to China at the age of 23. After Paul's 3 years of employment with the missionaries paid off the cost of his passage to China, he left the mission, but maintained contact with his missionary friends throughout his life.



One very happy result of Isaac's efforts was that the Catholic church in Lanzhou passed on word of our quest to members of my Chinese paternal grandmother's family. The Zhang family still lives in Lanzhou, capital of Gansu province, where the family had once owned a major tobacco plantation. My grandfather, Remy, Paul's second son, married my *nainai*, Anna Zhang, and her aunt married Remy's older brother, Alphonse, who happened to be Angela and Frank's grandfather. The Zhangs wrote back enthusiastically, and I knew that meeting them was going to be a highlight of our trip.

Dinner at the still elegant former German Club was with former classmates of Angela's older brother Kenny, who passed away many years ago. Angela travels regularly to China and has kept up

with many China contacts. She organized a Tientsin reunion there in 1996, and had maintained a good relationship with these gentlemen who regard her as a *meimei*, or younger sister. At this dinner I would meet Bobby Tan, the retired surgeon who graciously agreed to travel with us and assist us with communication in Chinese. We had originally hoped Isaac would be able to travel with us, but he did not feel up to the rigors of the extensive travel, so suggested Bobby to us. Angela knew Bobby and thought him an excellent choice. After meeting him, and being quite impressed with his impeccable British English and sense of humor that came across in both languages, we all agreed. Two of our destination cities, Xian and Lanzhou, happened to be home to two of his wife's brothers, so with our willingness to cover his travel expenses in exchange for interpreting services, there were no regrets on either side.

Day 3. In the course of near-daily faxes and e-mails to and from Isaac before the trip, I had sent a list of goals for this expedition. One of them was to get more information on the Mandarin patches, as Paul had reached the top level of the mandarin, and I wanted to learn more about the way these government officials were ranked. The morning after our German Club dinner, Bobby came by to walk us down the street (did I say we were well located?) to the auction house (formerly housed the Banque de l'Indochine). Bobby had arranged for us to meet his friend, Mr. Liu You Zheng, an important auctioneer in the city, and also director of the Tianjin Culture and Art Center. Mr. Liu gave me a CD on which he had placed full-color illustrations and information on official Mandarin attire, and Bobby gave me an English translation of the text. It included images of the robes, the patches, the beads, the summer and winter hats, and close-ups of the finials that also denoted a mandarin's rank. In other words, it covered the information I was planning to look for in the library in Beijing, saving me a good deal of time.

Pictured at right is the patch of the style Paul would have worn as a top ranked mandarin in the Qing government. The *ding* or round finial he wore on the top of his hat was ruby red.



Mr. Liu who had just returned from a successful trip to Germany where he found and brought back a large centuries-old blue silk tapestry from the early Qing dynasty. He shared with us a newspaper in which there was a prominent front page picture of him with his find. We were introduced to members of his staff, and served tea. .

We were in for another treat. Mr Liu asked his assistants to bring in the silk tapestry featured in the newspaper article. It bore the embroidered image of an imperial dragon worked in predominantly gold threads, with brilliant blues.



Mr. Liu shows us the important wall hanging he found in Germany.

We couldn't leave Tianjin without a meal of dumplings at the famous Goubuli restaurant. The young waitresses were very friendly and interested in learning some English from us. One of them had been assigned the duty of welcoming a group of English-speaking visitors, and asked for some help with the speech. We did so with minor adjustments in grammar, word choice and pro-nunciation. This kind of interaction with local residents made the journey more interesting for all three of us. The young lady's appreciation was expressed with bows and good wishes to us as we left.



English lesson at Goubuli in Tianjin

A funny incident on one of the major shopping streets we walked along to get to the Cathedral. Knowing that Paul was a fur trader in Mongolia, I noticed some young men offering furs

for sale from their wheeled dollies. As I approached them, they offered a variety of pelts for sale, and told me they were good price. I told them I could not buy any of their furs, but offered pay them to pose for a picture with the furs. They said, sure, and no fee was required, then in the next second, we witnessed scene out of a classic Keystone Cops movie. The young men shouted something to each other in Mongolian, bagged up their furs while running away at full speed. We turned around and saw a police car, out of which a couple of police men jumped out with whistles and chased in the direction of the fur mongers, who were now out of sight. Oh, well, I thought, I wasn't fast enough with my camera, but at least it shows there is an attempt to control the illegal trade in the hides of exotic or endangered animals.



Before I could finish my thought, the young fur salesmen were in front of me again, and I was able to snap a couple of shots. When I tried to hand the young man a few bills, he said it wasn't necessary. Then the man standing next to him said something to him, took the cash and handed it to the man in the picture. (Here is one of the shots. I had no idea there was a dinosaur lurking in the background when I took it.)



The Catholic Cathedral of Tianjin, where the Monsignor helped us with addresses of churches in Inner Mongolia



Uncle John and Aunt Maggie in front of their house at left, and the house we were told is the same one, taken from the museum/restaurant across the street.

On our last night in Tianjin, we were treated to a feast chez Huang. Isaac is semi-retired and works as a translator and interpreter to a textile company, which coincidentally has a branch in West Los Angeles not far from my home!

The picture does not do justice to the variety and sumptuous flavors we indulged in at the Huangs. Clockwise from the right:

Isaac's wife, whose hand is on the shoulder of her niece's daughter (coincidentally, also named Angela). Man in white is Angela's father. Behind him is Isaac, and Mrs. Huang's niece is next to him.



Second stop: Beijing. A 60 yuan taxi ride took us to the Novotel Hotel after a comfortable train ride from Tianjin. My main purpose in the capital city was to visit the Beitang or north Church, which my great uncle Alphonse, (Angela and Frank's grandfather) helped defend during the Boxer (*yihetuan*) uprising, and for his role in its defense, was awarded medals from Italy, England and Belgium. At that time Paul was in the far west of China, in Gansu province, guiding a pair of Belgian engineers to safety through the Gobi desert.



Frank, Anne, Fr. John, Angela, Bobby, and Sister Maria in Nan Tang guest room, Beijing.

Since the South church, or Nan Tang, was closer to our hotel, we went there first. The young pastor, Rev. John Hou Tianxiang, was educated in the States, so spoke English. He kindly gave us directions for Beitang and the former Catholic cemetery, **Chala**, where Paul and his wife Catherine were buried.

I knew that the original graves at Chala had been removed during the Cultural Revolution, and the headstones used for other purposes, but that the markers for more celebrated dead Catholics were still there. Just for the sake of being on the same grounds where our great grandparents were laid to rest, we headed for the former Chala cemetery. For a small fee we were allowed to visit those markers and take as many photographs as we wanted. The setting is now the park-like garden of a government educational facility. (photo at right)





Paul and Catherine Spingaerd's graves at Chala before the Cultural Revolution. (photo from family archives)

From the CITS (China International Travel Services) practically next door to the Novotel Xinqiao Beijing Hotel where we were staying, we were able to book our flight to Hohhot, and planning ahead, to Shanghai from Wuhan, as well as our soft sleeper train tickets from Baotou to Xian. The staff was very friendly and helpful, and could speak some English, as well. Their rates for airfare turned out to be less than those through a travel agent.

Two important words we learned in Beijing were “**Wang Ba**”. They mean Internet Bar. These were the magic words that brought us to portals through which we could communicate inexpensively with our friends and family back home. We were lucky to find one around the corner from our hotel, and used it a couple of times during our stay in Beijing. (note to travelers: most hotels have “Business Centers” with internet, but generally charge more per hour than the Wang Bas on the street.)



Happiness is locating a *Wang ba*

Hot Pot in Hohhot. Although Zhangjiakou, (or Kalgan, as it was called in Paul's days) was in the original itinerary planned for our next stop after Beijing, there was no information from that

city that would help us with identifying anything to do with Paul, so I decided we would skip it and fly directly to our next destination in Inner Mongolia. Hohhot, aka **Huhehote** is the city where Paul opened a second branch of his fur trading business, back when it was called **Guihuacheng**. It was in this city that Paul married Catherine Tchao Li. This is where the first five of their twelve children were born. He wanted to settle here, have a big property and have his children reside close to him.

My objective in coming here was to find the church built by the Scheuts, as I knew it was adjacent to Paul's house. He was instrumental in helping his Scheut missionary friends buy the lot next to his and then helped them build their mission post. He liked the idea of having his priest friends close by to keep a protective eye on his family as his fur-trading concern required a lot of time away from home. If the church were still standing, it would give me a sense of where Paul lived, even if the actual structure had been torn down. Quotes in books mention that Paul not only aided the priests by securing the land next to his home for their mission, but had "40 carts of bricks, each at least 1200 lbs." delivered to the site for the construction of the Scheut mission church.

In planning our itinerary, we wanted to visit the northern cities first as I had heard the winters were quite severe in that region.

We had not made hotel reservations in Hohhot, so when greeted at the airport by a neatly dressed young lady who offered a free ride to the reasonably priced Phoenix Hotel, we took her up on it. The Phoenix turned out to be a luxurious facility, very well located, and with an excellent breakfast tossed into the cost of our lodging. Breakfasts in the most elegant setting on the second floor were a delight, and varied enough to please both Chinese and western palates.



Even armed with the address of the Catholic Church in Hohhot, where we were to meet the pastor, it was difficult to find. It was already dark, and the church was not visible from the street.

We persisted, and had to walk down a dark alley between a brightly lit teahouse and a Muslim restaurant to find the church, and Fr. Pang, the young pastor of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.



Frs. Pang and Wang and book that mentions Paul. We enjoyed a wonderful Huo Guo (Hot Pot) meal with them after chatting with elderly Frs. John LiYing and Lucas Tian Weiyun at the rectory.

We were shown a book in Chinese, published by the Verbiest Institute in Louvain, Belgium, that mentioned Paul and some of the priests he traveled to China with in 1865. Since Jerom Heyndrickx, who supplied me with addresses of churches in China via e-mail is a former director of the Institute, I made a mental note to write him for a copy of the book, “Mission Beyond the Great Wall”



The devotion and the active participation of these warm-hearted people were inspirational

While waiting for Fr. Wang in the courtyard, we exchanged greetings with many of the friendly parishioners. They had gathered around to exchange friendly smiles, “Ni hao’s” and bows. Father Wang came out, and I asked for some help in saying a few words to the community, as Bobby was busy in his own conversation. I am not given to making speeches, but here I was telling them who we were, why we were in their community today, asking if anyone had heard about the Belgian Mandarin or his Chinese wife, and thanking them for their kindness in making room for us, and

complimenting them on their singing and general spirit of charity and community. It struck me funny that words I thought I was saying in Chinese, were translated by Fr. Wang into understandable Chinese for the group.



Fr. Wang in the middle, with cousins, surrounded by parishioners of Holy Trinity Church in Hohhot. The two girls in front in blue outfits took us to find a Wang Ba (internet Bar)



On the grounds of this old temple known as “Tabun Suburga” or Five Pagoda, we found loofah archway at the entrance, and gift stores in the back where I was able to cross off another item from my Trip shopping list: Mongolian snuff bottle. I knew it was a Mongolian custom to exchange snuff when Mongols met, so Paul probably carried one of those to offer to his friends and acquaintances.



Mongolian snuff bottle in Mike Megowan's hand.



We took a cab to the old church in Baotou's old town, with hopes of finding a church that may have served our great grandmother whose family lived in this city. The elderly priest we found at this church had been called by the Hohhot priests, so was expecting a visit from these three foreigners. He joined us for lunch, but only recalled vague mention of the Belgian Mandarin, and nothing about his wife.

We were at one of Baotou's many parks visiting a compound of deer (Pere David's?) when I received a call from Isaac urging us to fly directly to Lanzhou to meet with the municipal Archivists before they closed up their office for the week-long national holiday that begins on October 1st.



We had already purchased our train ticket from Baotou to Xian, so simply made plans to fly from Xian to Lanzhou directly, and go back to Xian after going to Lanzhou, Jiuquan and Jiayuguan.

In Baotou we boarded our first “soft sleeper” for our ride to Xian. In the hallway outside our cabin, we met a senior engineer with the Northwest Electric Power Design Institute, Mr. Yan Shengxun, who was in the cabin next door. He seems to have taken a fancy to the foreign travelers, and was very friendly and helpful with travel advice. In the course of enlightening us on social and cultural happenings in China, and explaining some of the geography of the area, he thoughtfully refilled our hot water thermos, bought dinner for all of us, and shared a packet of his flavored sunflower seeds. His visit made the trip go faster for Angela, Bobby and me. Poor Frank was not feeling well. From my just-in-case first-aid packet, I gave him a couple of my Mylanta pills, and a couple of doses of ibuprofen as he was hot with a fever. He slept for most of the train ride, and was better by morning.



Mr. Yan enlightens us on our “soft-sleeper” ride to Xian

Xian Thursday, September 29. Thanks to the numerous conversations Bobby had with our Xian cousin, Zhan Da Quan, to get details on our arrival, we were met on the train by two very helpful young men who seemed to know exactly where to find us. They were the son and friend of cousin Zhang, and assisted us with our luggage. A well-dressed, distinguished-looking gentleman was standing outside our car #8, was waving at us. We waved back, knowing it had to be Mr. Zhang. With umbrellas he provided for all of us, we made our way through the rain to their white van in the parking lot.

Mrs. Zhang had hot tea and treats for us at their well-furnished and lovely apartment with a view. Mr. Zhang is the son of my Nainai's younger brother.

Since we were going to return to Xian before heading to Chongqing to catch our Yangtze boat cruise, the Zhangs graciously let us leave some of our extra baggage at their apartment till we got back from Lanzhou and Jiuquan. I left the plum blossom painting I had purchased in Baotou, and Angela and Frank left a few items, as well.



Before taking the 45-minute drive to the airport to catch our 4:40 flight to Lanzhou, the Zhangs treated us to a superb banquet. The young man standing between Angela and me is Zhang Zhi, the Zhang's son.

Lanzhou, Thursday, September 29, 2005. While waiting for our luggage at the airport baggage claim, a small group of two women and a trio of men began waving to us from the doorway. I suppose we looked different enough from the other travelers to be distinguished as the foreign relatives they had come to receive. We were told they knew immediately it was us.

The younger lady was Zhang Hong Xing, who greeted us with a couple of English phrases she had memorized for this occasion: "Welcome, go home." I know she meant, "welcome home", as the reception they gave us was a very warm and welcoming one. Ms. Zhang is quite an organizer, and had been in communication with Isaac for about a month now, ever since their parish Church sent

them word that I had been looking for family in Lanzhou. Her first note to Isaac indicated that her family had been looking for us since the last of the Splingaerd family left China in 1949. She had now taken charge of us, scheduling our days in Lanzhou based on what Isaac told her I was after in Gansu province. She booked us at the Ningwozhuan Hotel, where visiting dignitaries are housed. It was a very luxurious and well-located hotel behind gates guarded by uniformed soldiers. She had somehow managed to get a great discount on our rooms, which with breakfast, would only cost us about \$50/day.

After depositing our luggage in our well-appointed rooms, the relatives treated us to a banquet in the second floor dining room in the newer building of the hotel complex. With Bobby's able interpreting, we got acquainted, and established the relationships. The older lady was my *nainai's* (paternal grandmother) niece, the daughter of her *didi* or younger brother, so she was my Dad's first cousin, Zhang Jian Qin, my *Yiyi*. With her was an elderly uncle, Zhang Xue Xin, his son, Zhang Zhi Gang, and *yiyi's* nephew, Zhang Hui.



Pictured: Bobby, Professor Liu Guang Hua, Zhang Jian Qin (yiyi), Angela, Uncle Zhang Xue Xin, And Anne at Ningwozhuang hotel in Lanzhou.

The next morning we were met by our relatives at the hotel, and taken to our appointment with the Archivists of Gansu and Lanzhou. We were joined by *yiyi's* husband, Liu Guang Hua, a history professor at the University of Lanzhou, and a classmate of one of the archivists. In a large meeting room lined with stuffed easy chairs, each set with a cup of tea, we met with officials. I sat next to Mr. Jin, the Director of the Culture and History Information Commission under the Gansu People's Political Consultative Conference.



In a brief presentation, I gave Mr. Jin a copy of my brief narration of Paul's life and copies of the pages from his biography that relate to Lanzhou. In return we were all presented with a book about Gansu, wrapped in red ribbon. We were told the Belgian Lins (Splingaerd in Chinese) made great contributions. We were also shown books in which Paul and his son, Alphonse, known in Chinese as Lin Ah De, are mentioned. We were given photocopies of pages from their archives where Lin Ah De is referred to as Belgian counselor. The author of one of the books was uncle Liu's classmate, Mr. Deng Ming. He took our names down and later presented us each with an inscribed copy of his illustrated book on the history of Lanzhou. I promised them a copy of Paul's biography when finished. The meeting was followed by a banquet in our honor.



Banquet hosted by Lanzhou archivists. Zhang Hong Xing in center, uncle Zhang Xue Xin to Angela's right.



The exotic dish of Camel's foot (luo tuo tizi) in typical presentation next to a "snow-capped mountain" of meringue. Other menu items included: Cloud ears, roast lamb, wan dou, sliced mushroom in abalone sauce, ba bao fan. One of the specialties of the region is Bailan gua, or Walaxi gua, a cantaloupe introduced by USA vice president Henry A. Wallace who brought seeds from the States in 1944.

Following our excellent lunch banquet, Mr. Deng took us to places that have traces of Lin (Splingaerd) involvement. We went to the place where factories introduced to the area by Belgian engineers and businessmen once stood. We saw the sites of the soap and the candle factories introduced by Belgians, a school of Western technology, and the star feature, the Zhong Shan Qiao, or Sun Yatsen Bridge, which is the cover illustration of the book he gave us, whose subject was "The First Bridge Across the Yellow River."



Before the bridge (in background) was built, people and goods were carried across the river on rafts made of ballooned sheepskins, *yang pi*, shown in the foreground. It was Paul who proposed the building of the bridge to viceroy Peng at the turn of the century, and even though he did not live long enough to see its completion in 1909, by a German company, it is referred to in J.M. Frochisse's book, *La Belgique et la Chine*, as a project that "belonged to Splingaerd." It was the first steel

bridge across the Yellow River, and Angela brought along a copy of a picture from her mom's album, taken the day it was opened on July 26, 1909.



The bridge is no longer open to motorized vehicles, even though it has been reinforced in 1954 with steel arches, but is still used a lot by pedestrians. It is regarded as a historical monument, and several little kiosks offer tourists the opportunity to be photographed with it. Since we brought our own cameras along, we three great grandchildren of Paul Spingaerd also had our picture taken there.



Books and other items that feature the bridge



Above, Paul Spingaerd descendants from USA (Anne), Australia (Frank) and Canada (Angela) pose at the bridge proposed by their great grandfather to viceroy in 1905. At right, Angela and her newly discovered uncle Zhang Xue Xin, pose in front of plaque commemorating the “First Bridge on the Yellow River”



After much sightseeing with relatives, and “meet-relatives” banquets at the rate of 2 a day, we participated in a large one that used up 5 banquet rooms as Ms. Zhang used our visit as a reason to have a gathering of the Zhang clan. My grandmother’s family once owned a large tobacco plantation in Lanzhou, and although 3 members of the family married sons of the Belgian mandarin, there had been no communication till now, so Zhang Hong Xing tried to get us to meet as many as possible of the 200 or so relatives who are still in the area. Many now have relatives in different parts of China, and in the States. I cannot remember the names of everyone we met, just the warmth of our welcome into a family that had been unknown to us as early as two months prior.



Cousins with Zhang relatives at one of the banquets on our last day in Lanzhou



Last banquet in Lanzhou

our 9:40 soft-sleeper train to Jiuquan, we were given a last look at “our bridge”:



Lanzhou holds some of the most memorable moments of the trip.



Sunday, October 2, 2005. We woke up in Jiuquan. This western city was another featured destination on my itinerary as this is where Paul and his family lived for 14 years, while stationed there as the Customs official or mandarin.

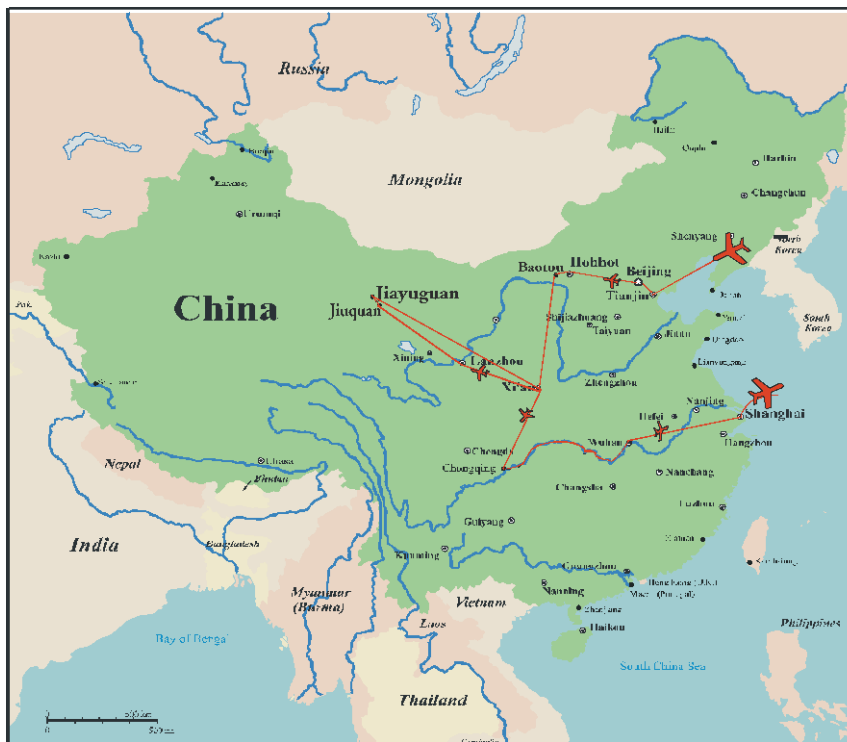
Viceroy Li Hongzhang appointed Paul to the post in 1882. The Treaty of St. Petersburg had been signed between China and Russia, after the latter returned to China the Ili territory it had held for many years. Terms of the treaty required a Chinese Customs official to be stationed at this western outpost, and Paul was chosen to fill this post. Li took into consideration the fact that Paul had traveled throughout China as assistant to the well-known German geologist and geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen, and he wanted to place a man with knowledge in these fields.

As Richthofen's guide, interpreter and factotum on voyages that lasted over 3 years (1868-1872), Paul learned from the geographer how to record the flora, fauna, and most importantly, the mineral resources of the country. Richthofen was commissioned by the foreign-run Shanghai Chamber of Commerce in 1869 to traverse the country and report his finds. It was Richthofen's reports that told the world that China had vast amounts of coal, and this fueled a lot of foreign interest in tapping into the reputed mineral riches of the country. Li was given reports, and in the course of

Paul's years in Gansu, sent him on various investigative missions in the region, including Urumqi, in Xinjian, now classified as an autonomous region.



Richtigthofen and Paul's journeys through China 1868 –1872, marked in red.



The route we took in Fall of 2005, marked in red.

Isaac arranged for us to meet with history professor He in Jiuquan. By happy coincidence, one of Professor He's former students was the manager of a great hotel in the city, and he made a call to reserve rooms for us at the Jiuquan Bing Guan Hotel at a great discount. For the approximate amount of US \$26/day, we got all the comforts of a luxury hotel that would have cost at least five times that in the States.

As a general observation to travelers in China, just about every hotel we stayed at had electronic key cards instead of actual keys. These cards are to be placed in a slot by the door to activate electricity in the room. Sometimes a second key card is available upon request. Most rooms do not provide washcloths, but Angela was aware of this from her many trips to China, so we were both pre-warned, and pre-armed. The Jiuquan Bing Guan happened to be one of the first hotels to provide these. Even the simplest hotel rooms seem to have a remote control base next to the beds to control lights and television sets. Many hotels do not provide facial tissue, so have a supply handy.

A nice touch at this hotel was that each travel-weary guest was presented with a hot washcloth and a cup of hot tea while awaiting our room assignments. Mr. He arrived with a small entourage. Even though the national holiday had officially begun on Saturday, a couple of officials from the People's Political Consultative Conference came to the hotel with him, and they accompanied us to our rooms after introductions. Our stay in Jiuquan would be under the care of our government escorts who had been in communication with Isaac and knew what we wanted to see and do.



Professor He and Bobby at banquet in Jiuquan.



The Bell Tower in Jiuquan, above, left, and the location of Paul's *yamen* (office/residence) at right.



On the street where Paul lived: the corner of current Bei Da Jie and Beihuan Donglu



Mr. He brought us to a house in the style of Paul's office/home in Jiuquan

Although Paul's official residence and office had been replaced long ago, Mr. He took us to a cultural park near the school where he taught to show us the style of architecture of Paul's *yamen*. Books about him mention it was quite a grand affair with a courtyard, and among the extra rooms on the grounds, his wife Catherine ran a health clinic and between them saved many lives. Mr. He mentioned was that Paul introduced western smallpox vaccine to the region. He said young women seeking husbands were spared pox-marked complexions as a result of this introduction.



Tea and treats with Professor and Mrs. He at their apartment..



Picture at left portrays the origin of the city name, Jiuquan, which means “Wine Spring”. Right: L-R: Frank, Angela, Mr. Wang of the People’s Consultative Committee, Anne, Professor He, Mr. Fu Bai Shen, seismology engineer, and Dr. Bobby Tan.

The city of Jiuquan, where Paul worked for 14 years as customs official was named for the spring where a victorious general received a generous shipment of wine from the emperor, and decided to share it with his soldiers by pouring the wine into the spring so all could partake of the reward.



Bei da He river.



Cousins and Mr. Wang on bridge over Beidahe.

While Paul was stationed in Jiuquan, during a particularly severe storm, a couple of fishermen found themselves stranded on an island in the Bei Da. Paul was summoned, and by crossing the river twice on horseback, brought both men to safety.



Mr. Wang's counterpart (and good friend) in the city of Jiayuguan met us in front of his office. We traveled in two chauffeured cars to the fort at the end of China's Great Wall.



Frank offers prayers after being shown the proper way to light incense. Mr. Wang looks amused.



Angela, Anne, Bobby and Frank at Jiayuguan Fort at the western end of the Great Wall of China.

The spectacular view from the top of the fort gave us an appreciation of the terrain that surrounded the area Paul lived, and the view of the snow-capped Qilian Mountains



As guests of the city of Jiayuguan we were treated to an elegant luncheon banquet, and a tour of a water conservation park, as well as Jiayuguan Fort and its fine museum.

Bobby and Angela admire the government building where Mr. Wang and Mr. Fu work. The two black cars parked in front of the stairs transported us around Jiuquan and Jiayuguan.



Upon our return to Jiuquan we were taken to the offices of the municipal archives. Even though the city was now into the “Golden Week” holiday, the archives were opened for us and we met Ms. Li Jin Xiang, chief of Archives, and her staff. Just as elsewhere, we were told that much had been destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Records of Paul’s stay would be hard to come by.



We were honored by being asked to sign in the red-paged guestbook at the Archives of Jiuquan.



Left photo: Ms. Li, Anne and staff member at the conference room of the Municipal Archives of Jiuquan.
Right photo: Bobby is dictating a translation of some pages of my biography of Paul Splingaerd. October 4, 2005



Our last banquet in Jiuquan was hosted by hospitable Mr. Bian Yu Guang (at left in photo), secretary of the Suzhou Regional Committee of Jiuquan of the CPC.

He impressed us as being a very important official, who is keen on promoting local products for foreign markets. Before dinner was over we were each presented with a set of Jiuquan's famous luminous jade wine cups.

Jiuquan and Jiayuguan are not as publicized "destinations" on the Silk Road, as is nearby Dunhuang and its Mogao caves, but even for visitors with no family history in the area, they are definitely worth a visit. The new Jiayuguan museum offers world-class presentations in an elegant setting and the park built around Wine Spring offers a beautifully designed environment for relaxation and for taking in some local history.



Pictured here is the cloissonné table stand given to Paul Spingaerd by the citizens of Jiuquan (Suzhou) upon his departure in 1896 from their city after 14 years in that city. The inscription on the fan-shaped standard reads:
To honorable Elder Lin (Paul's Chinese name), well known businessman in China and abroad, we express our gratitude.

We were taken back to the hotel to get a couple of hours sleep before taking a cab back to Jiayuguan to catch our 4:16 AM train to Xian.

Back in Xian, Cousin Zhang Da Quan, his son and friend again met us at the train station even though it was 11 p.m. when we arrived. They took us to the hotel they had booked for us, and bid us good night with promises of seeing what we wanted to see in the city the next day.

We visited the church associated with the hospital in Xian where Paul died in 1906. It was rainy on that day, too.



We were taken to the Stele forest near the city gate, where we saw the Nestorian Stele that showed that Christianity had reached China by 781. Paul and his wife Catherine were given credit for making many converts in Jiuquan during their stay there.



The Terracotta army was discovered many years after Paul died, but you can't very well go to Xian without seeing them, can you? It really was as impressive as I had heard.



Last meal with Zhang relatives in Xian, when we met their lovely daughter (next to Frank) then to the airport.



Aurevoir, Xian.

Our flight brought us to Chongqing in time to catch a beautiful Sunset overlooking the river from Eling park. Chongqing is where we boarded the Princess Jeanne for our Yangzi River cruise.





At Chongqing I admired the work of Huang Guofu “The Artist of No Arm”, and acquired two of his paintings



Meeting the staff on board the Princess Jeannie



Did Paul see hanging coffins along Yangtze?

Trackers pulled our “peapod boats” through the most scenic part of the river cruise. (Photo at right, above)





Angela at vista point over the Three Gorges Dam



Tues. Oct. 11, we dock at Wuhan Princess Jeannie manager, Mr. Xie, does not let us off the boat till the multi-talented crew donned band uniforms and were lined up to serenade us so we could disembark to their festive notes. While waiting for the band to get into place, I talk with Mr. Xie. He was curious about whether I spoke Chinese as he noticed me spending a lot of time with the snuff bottle painter, Mr. Chang. He told me Mr. Chang did not speak English. I explained my background, and showed him my “press release”. Since we were docking in Wuhan (a conglomerate of the cities of Wuchang, Hanyang and Hankou), I told him about Paul’s involvement with the first

railroad down the “backbone of China”, from Beijing to Hankou, which was initiated in 1898. He said that railway, known as Jing-Han

喊 is credited with bringing prosperity to the Wuhan region as it facilitated transportation. From Hankou the railroad was extended to Canton. He asked our Senior River Guide, Howard, to write down the name of the station so we could show it to a taxi driver. The original station is no longer in use. It is now a museum, but is still a landmark.



Hankou train terminal on *Che Zhan Lu*, which means Station Road.

Angela’s friend, Jimmy Ma is an orthopedic surgeon at the city’s main University hospital. The accommodations he arranged for us at the guest housing facility close to his house was one of the greatest bargains of the trip. For 180 yuan (approximately \$20 US),



Jimmy's grandchild, Margarita, was a charmer. On our after-dinner riverwalk stroll, I discovered she knows a lot of English words.

Our next and final destination city on this trip was Shanghai. We flew there from Wuhan on Wednesday, Oct. 12th. This is where Paul's family moved to in 1896 after their stay in Jiuquan. The twelve children attended school here, and four of Paul's daughters became nuns who lived and worked at the Jesuit community of Xujiahui, formerly known as Zikawei. A call to Tess Johnston, who has written books about cities in China with large foreign populations, told me that old Zikawei convent had been converted into a restaurant. We couldn't find the Scheut vicariate, or the former St. Francis Xavier College where my grandfather and his brothers attended school. We did find the church and convent at Xujiahui, though, and tried to picture it as the residence our aunts a century ago. The former convent now has a railroad theme, but seemed pleasant enough, so we celebrated Angela's birthday with lunch there, with a view of trains set up in what must have been the garden before. We checked out all the pictures of Old Shanghai hanging on the walls, and the antiques in display cases that may or may not have come from the convent itself. Angela and I also went upstairs and found a room that must have been the chapel, but is now set up as a banquet hall.



St. Ignatius Church in Xujiahui, and the convent that is now “Ye Olde Train Station Restaurant”



The Jardine Matheson Building on the bund, at the turn of the century, and today.

The picture on the left was of a photograph on the wall of the Olde Train Station Restaurant in Xujiahui. The photo on the right was taken on this trip. Paul traded for furs in Mongolia between 1872 and 1881 with goods brought in by J-M. He also corresponded extensively with this office, and must have come here in person when it looked pretty much like the photo at left.

The Shanghai historical museum located at the base of the Pearl Tower did a superb job of presenting re-creations of what the city was like in Paul’s day. That is where I shot the picture of the cricket fighting equipment in the photo below.



The Russian explorer Obruchev was a guest at Paul's yamen in Jiuquan, and wrote about the great meals followed by cricket matches. Here is a picture of the equipment. Arena at left, and cricket holders in center.

* * *

One month in this vast country have given me a sense of the place that had been the home of Paul and his family, while making us keenly aware of how different the place is today, a century later. Many of the cities we visited so far in China, offer a sense of tremendous progress blended in with revered ancient traditions that give this culture its distinctive charm.

Prosperity, communications and transportation have brought this formerly remote region into the 21st century with style and grace, and the feeling that an even brighter future awaits the population as the plans are carefully laid for continued advances in every aspect of the country. It was exciting to be witnessing the rise of the country where I was born and where I have found family. I left China on October 16 with valuable material to complete my biography of Paul Spingaerd. I also left with a strong desire to return and to watch more of the process by which China is blossoming into a role as an important world leader, while still offering the ability to savour the elements that have retained China's unique ethnic identities. *Zai Jian! Bayartai!*



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