

ICWA LETTERS

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EAST ASIA

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“Field of Dreams” —Tourism in Guizhou Province—

“Tourism is one of your advantages; you have the conditions to develop this sector. Just focus on making good use of your abundant natural resources. That would be enough. There is no need to invest in all kinds of crazy stuff (luanqi bazao), like fancy hotels. You don’t need that. Just make sure you build decent bathrooms, and keep them clean. That and a good shower are sufficient.

Your food tastes good down here, like what I ate today: not much meat but your vegetable dishes were quite nice, and not expensive. This is attractive. There’s no need to thoughtlessly spend money. Focus on efficiency. As tourism develops and transportation conditions improve, that, one day, will be true prosperity.”¹

— Premier Zhu Rongji, 1996, during inspection tour of Guizhou Province

GUIZHOU, China

December, 1998

Mr. Peter Bird Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755 USA

Dear Peter:

Imagine, for a moment, that you are a resident of Guiyang, Guizhou’s bustling capital city. You sit at your desk-job where you have worked hard through the 1980s and 1990s to cocoon yourself from life outside the provincial center. Yet while enjoying the conveniences of the city, you have become weary of the traffic, the constant noise, the worsening pollution and the monotony of your life’s routine. You have disposable income like never before and since 1993 you have had two-day weekends.² Still, you feel pent up.

You pick up the newspaper sitting on your desk and notice a full-page spread about a newly opened tourist site: highland grasslands just 48 kilometers southeast of Guiyang.³ The article describes a “Spanish-style” mountain cabin with a stone-hearth fireplace. Outside the lodge and under the expansive canopy of a clear night sky, friends sit around an open fire as the staff cooks a whole mutton on a spit. There are ethnic dancing and singing performances, horseback riding and plenty of fresh air. And all this in a place called

¹ *Zhongyang qiannan zhouwei bangongshi, zhou ban fa* (General office of guizhou province qiannan buyi and miao autonomous prefecture communist party) document no. 17 (1996).

² In 1993, Guizhou introduced its version of a nationwide law that called for two-day weekends. Prior to that, six-day workweeks were the standard practice.

³ *Guizhou dushi bao* (Guizhou all-city newspaper), 7 June 1998, has an entire spread on the *Magenuojie* Grasslands.

“Magenuojie” — the local Miao minority language for “where the beautiful women live.”

You’re on your way.

BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

“Only 48 kilometers from Guiyang, huh?” I grumble to myself as my wife, my two kids, two friends who had flown in from Beijing and Shanghai and I toss back and forth in our van as it labors through steep hairpin turns in the rugged mountain road.⁴ One hour passes, two hours, ... the jaunt *just outside* the city takes over three hours (that’s just a six-minute mile). The promotional literature doesn’t mention that between Guiyang and the grasslands one’s vehicle must climb almost 2,000 meters.

“It’s a grassland, all right,” we mumble to each other as we pile out of the van, surveying the desolate landscape — the kind of wild beauty you’d find on the moors of northern Scotland. A stiff wind and frigid drizzle chill our bones. It wasn’t nearly this cold down in Guiyang. We are all underdressed. “Here we are,” I think. “My friends have come from the comforts of the coast to freeze in the distant mountains of the interior.”

As we step into the cabin, however, my complaint melts. A crackling fire, prepared well in advance of our arrival, blazes in the stone hearth. The wooden cabin, simple but thoughtfully designed, has a nice feel to it.

“This is well done. It reminds me of a hunting cabin

in the pine forests of south Georgia,” I say to Director Liu Shijie, head of Qiannan Prefecture’s Tourism Bureau, as I move my family closer to the fire.

Director Liu beams with delight that a foreigner has said the cabin reminds him of something Western. He designed it himself.

Liu tells me of his “struggle with the elements” in developing the site to the point where tourists could actually visit. “Even bringing in such basics as water and electricity were a tremendous challenge. And there are other issues like how to dispose of the garbage and how to keep away the rats, especially in the summer months,” Liu explains. “And if we could just get the road up from Guiyang paved.” Our heads nod in agreement.⁵

In the face of all these difficulties, Director Liu is especially proud of what he has accomplished. He should be.

“Our focus is to provide Guiyang’s two million residents [his target market] with experiences they cannot have at home in the city, memories that will bring them and new friends back. There are plenty of mountains and rivers in Guizhou, but only one grasslands. What I have no one else does. And where in Guiyang can you warm yourself next to a cozy fireplace?”

“And the ‘beautiful women’?”

“That’s just what this place is called by the locals.



Qiannan Prefecture Vice Governor Chen Qi (r) and Prefecture Tourism Bureau Director Liu Shijie (l) relax in front of the fireplace in the Magenuojie grasslands’ “Spanish-style” cabin.

⁴ Our guests were a U.S. energy company executive and the director of the Shanghai office of the U.S.-China Business Council, both good friends from graduate school.

⁵ In addition, the prefecture tourism bureau has a squabble going with the county: County officials have set up tollbooths at either end of the road leading into the grasslands. Even our provincial-government vehicle had to hand over the appropriate fees (eight *yuan* — about U.S.\$1 — per person) before being permitted to pass. One frustrated official told me: “You could be the emperor and they wouldn’t let you past without paying. This problem must be solved.”



Riding “Japanese thoroughbreds”

Rather than calling it the Longli County Grasslands, we thought the traditional name given by the Miao villagers added a nice touch.”

As a former journalist, Director Liu knows how to package his message. Over the last year, his project has been written up in over a half-dozen newspapers and tourism publications.

Liu is succeeding. In its first full year of operation 7,000 tourists, who pay about U.S.\$10 a head per night, have visited the grasslands. At that rate, Liu says, investors — a consortium of three Chinese companies — should be able to recoup their two-million-*yuan* investment (U.S.\$180,000) in just three years.

Liu proudly says, “The government has not spent one *fen* [cent] on this project.”

For us, the two days at the *Magenuojie* grasslands, besides remaining a bit chilled the entire time, were full of memorable activities: the fireplace, eating roasted lamb with our fingers next to candle light (it was raining so we skipped the outdoor campfire), a colorful song-and-dance performance by local villagers and riding “Japanese thoroughbreds” across the spacious grasslands.⁶

All this, I imagine, would be very attractive to Chinese urbanites cooped up in Guiyang.

CHANGING TIMES

What fascinated me most as I observed the two-dozen Chinese tourists who milled around the lodge and who we joined to watch the song-and-dance performance, was

how this group of people, who only years ago insulated themselves from anything outside the city, are now beginning to return to the countryside — at least when the visit is user-friendly and lasts just one night.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the depth of emotion some Chinese have toward their personal histories in which many escaped the hardships of the countryside for the conveniences and securities of city life. Their feelings parallel historical events as well as government policy, which set partitions between urban and rural society, favoring the development of the city while the countryside footed much of the bill. That many urban dwellers have begun to return to the countryside “to play” reflects a sea-change in attitude.

The fact that one of the most popular dishes at the grasslands lodge is “*zhiqing chaofan*” [sent-down-youth fried rice] indicates that some who were sent to the countryside as students have actually begun to pursue the memories of their Cultural Revolution experiences. Now parents, these grown-up sent-down youth have much to pass on to their children through stories of “when I was a child.”

The chili-pepper-eating, horseback-riding general manager of the grasslands project — he’s the one who put *zhiqing chaofan* on the menu — was himself “sent down” to Guizhou from Shanghai as a youth. He never returned. This forty-something manager is quite a contrast from the stereotypical Shanghainese.

Some younger urbanites — those in their 20s and 30s, who didn’t directly experience the Cultural Revolution — appear to be in search of a feeling when they head for

⁶ The horses, which are much larger than the local work ponies, are advertised as “Japanese thoroughbreds.” “Actually,” Director Liu later mentioned in private, “the horses are Chinese, we got them for free when an illegal race track in Guiyang was shut down. Chinese like things that are ‘imported,’ so we say they are Japanese.”

*Villagers from the area
[Miao national minority]
provide nightly entertainment
for the visitors in a show of
local customs, including
singing and dancing.*



the mountains. The Guizhou *All-City* newspaper article quotes a woman after she returned from the grasslands, where she rode a horse for the first time: "I came back and told a friend that I had found the sensation of being perched out over the bow of the Titanic as it sliced through the vast ocean ahead, just like the movie."

Personally, I have trouble making the connection between a galloping horse and the bow of the Titanic, but I can fathom the significance of how 20 years of economic reform and industrialization are leading to a shift in the way China's urban residents, young and old alike, view the countryside.

On the other side of the equation, it fascinates me to consider what goes on in the minds of the colorfully dressed but poor Miao villagers as they entertain groups of privileged city dwellers. In one activity, for example, Han tourists and Miao hosts compete to see which group can outlast the other in remembering choruses to sing back and forth at each other from across the lodge. A head-on clash of culture? Hardly. The well-rehearsed tunes Miao villagers shoot back are Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop songs. And you can bet the Chinese tourists are not singing traditional Miao folk songs, either. Still, both sides appear to have great fun.

Do the Miao people benefit from this invasion from the city? Tourism brings significantly more cash to the local villagers than they would have otherwise.⁷ And if I were a Miao, I would feel proud of my heritage as I com-

pare myself to the sometimes-obnoxious tourists. Even so, one has to wonder what they are really thinking as they dance a local version of the two-step with their Han guests.

For better or for worse, the city and the countryside, Han and Miao, now meet each day on the *Magenuojie* grasslands.

The grasslands are but a microcosm of a rapidly growing tourism sector in Qiannan Prefecture, Guizhou Province and across China. Separate from the millions of dollars foreign tourists inject into China's economy each year, Chinese tourists themselves are swelling in numbers and spreading around significant amounts of cash. In 1996, for example, of the 256 million urban citizens that traveled, 125 million were on vacation.⁸

In poor but scenic Qiannan Prefecture alone, Chinese tourists spent 85 million *yuan* in 1995. The large amount corresponds to a ten-fold increase in tourists that visited Qiannan since 1992: 85,000 guests in 1992, 500,000 in 1995, and one million in 1997.⁹

Indeed, throughout China in the 1990s, domestic tourism has taken off.

FRESH VISION

Guizhou residents often say to me, "the mountains are our greatest difficulty; they are also our greatest

⁷ The group of 10 Miao performers receive 200 yuan (U.S.\$24) per night for their hour performance and a free meal. They make in one month what most villagers in that area make in one year.

⁸ Survey on China's Domestic Traveling, China Tourist News, 9 October 1997.

⁹ *Mai xiang xin shiji: qiannan gaige kaifang jishi* (Striding towards the new century: a record of reform and opening in qiannan prefecture) (Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House, 1998), 252.

¹⁰ Guizhou Province is 87% mountainous.

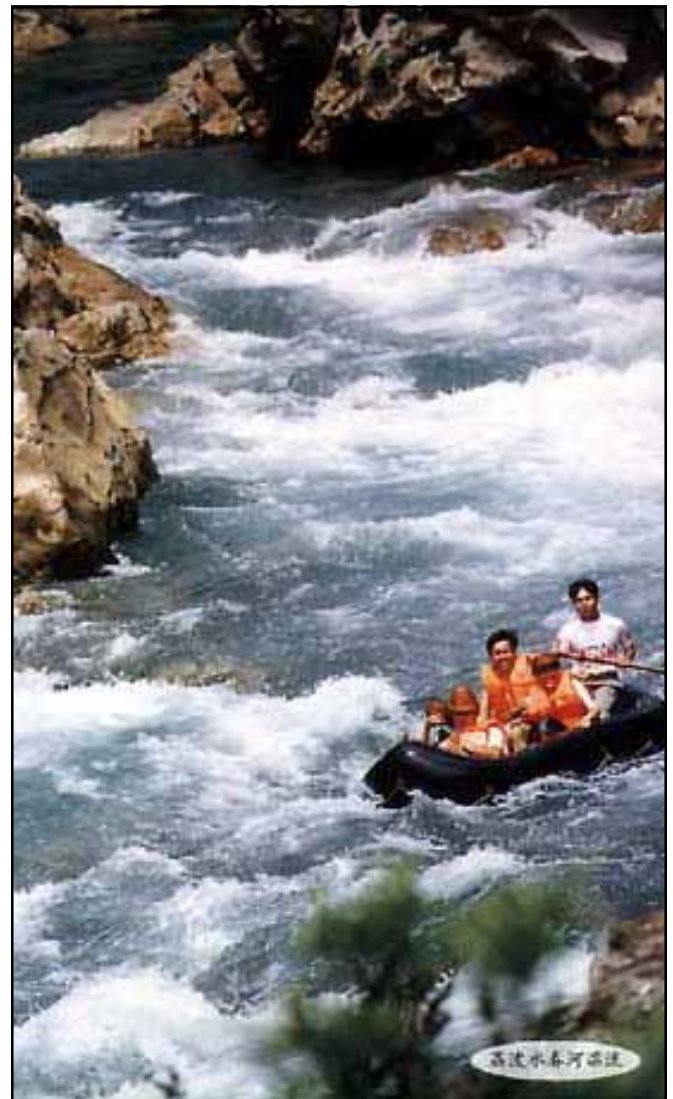
hope.”¹⁰ More and more, the optimistic side of this saying refers to more than just the abundance of minerals yet to be mined. People have begun to realize that Guizhou’s tourism potential ought to be able to capture more than just the one-percent share the province currently holds of nationwide tourist-generated revenue.

Tourism’s multiplier effects within the local economy are also becoming better understood and appreciated. Qiannan Prefecture’s government reports that for every person employed in its tourist sector, five jobs are created. Similarly, for every one *yuan* in profit to the industry, nine additional *yuan* are earned throughout the local economy. “For an impoverished, backward area like Qiannan Prefecture,” a *Guizhou Daily* article says, “the effectiveness of tourism-related development in poverty relief is extraordinary.”¹¹

But for Guizhou Province, a poor region long used to development along the lines of comparative *disadvantage*,¹² a relatively recent focus on developing advantages is challenging government official and entrepreneur alike to use fresh eyes and new skills to make use of their “tourism resources”: natural beauty, colorful local cultures and history.

The development of Guizhou Province’s tourist industry was given a boost in August 1998, when a young central-government official arrived from Beijing for a tour in Guizhou as vice governor.¹³ An economist by training (Ph.D. in comparative economic systems from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), 42-year-old Guo Shuqing is as certain as anyone of the importance of encouraging Guizhou’s development along the lines of its comparative advantages. Tourism is one of the items in the vice governor’s portfolio.

In an October 1998 speech to provincial tourism officials, Guo said, “In Guizhou, there are beautiful landscape scenes wherever you look. We are a ‘province of parks’ well worthy of the name. ...There is no other industry like tourism that both affects and is influenced by so many sectors of the economy, including business, transportation, energy, culture, sanitation, public security, even roads and schools. While tourism brings benefits to these areas, if any of these sectors is lacking, tourism’s development will suffer as well. ...Tourism is a service-inten-



Mountains and rivers are trademarks of Guizhou’s abundant endowment in natural resources. I know of at least three rivers in Guizhou Province that now offer white-water rafting.
sive industry under all the demands of modern society.”¹⁴

In considering priorities to further develop tourism, Guo reminded the officials, “The most important thing we have to do is make the needs and desires of the tourist the number-one priority. ...We must eliminate placing our own wishes, our methods and ourselves at the center. We must thoroughly survey and

¹¹ *Guizhou ribao* (Guizhou daily), 27 May 1998.

¹² The problem was especially acute in the 1960s and 1970s when the central government directed a national-defense-motivated strategy in western provinces like Guizhou that emphasized the construction of steel, armaments, machinery, electronics and petroleum industries. For a more detailed discussion of China’s industrial policy in the 1960s and 1970s, and its present-day consequences, see my report DBW-9.

¹³ “*Gua zhi*,” the practice of sending talented young central-government officials to a remote province to work for a few years, is a fascinating method of cultivating future leaders. These officials usually return to promoted positions in the central government after learning, through hands-on involvement, about regions of China quite different from Beijing. It should be noted that “*gua zhi*” is practiced on more local levels of government as well. For example, a promising young prefecture-level official may be sent to work for a time as a county-level official.

¹⁴ *Guo shuqing fu shengzhang tingqu luyou gongzuo huibaohou de jianghua* (Vice governor guo shuqing remarks after hearing tourism work reports), 20 October 1998.

*“If you build it, ... they will come.”
Though infrastructure improvements
such as the construction of this
section of an expressway that will
shorten the trip from Guiyang to
Duyun by half the time, are critical to
the development of Guizhou’s
economy, tourism is not simply a
matter of building roads.*



understand the interests of the tourists.”

Because he comes from outside the province, Guo brings vision to both the potential and the challenges of Guizhou tourism. Along with a fresh perspective, he brings new momentum.

While able to articulate the big picture, Guo also shows talent in bringing specific ideas to the table. For example, while exhorting the officials to think and prepare toward the future, he suggested constructing a series of “rest stops” (with bathroom, telephone and convenience store) along highways yet to be built. As transportation infrastructure in Guizhou continues to improve and road traffic (tourist and otherwise) grows, demand for the convenience of rest stops will strengthen.

Shortly after Guo Shuqing arrived in Guizhou, he and I met through the introduction of ICWA Trustee Peter Geithner. Among the many topics we discussed during our initial visit was my unforgettable experience hiking stretches of the Long March. When I saw the vice governor again two months later, he mentioned that he had been thinking about how to develop tourism in the mountain areas around Zunyi, the region where the Red Army spent several critical months of their Long March in 1935.

Guo and I began to brainstorm. What about preparing Appalachian Trail-like guide materials for people interested in tracing the Red Army’s route, with designated hostels along the way? Or maps that lay out guided tours for mountain bikes? Or, for those who are not interested in walking or riding bikes, minivans that stop at historic sites around the Zunyi area? In my estimation, there are treasures along the Long March trail that (beyond the Zunyi Meeting Hall and monuments to the Red Army

Martyrs in Zunyi City, the Chishui River crossing in Maotai and the battle at Loushan Mountain Pass), have not been explored or developed to their full potential.

During a recent visit to Washington D.C., I got in touch with the staff at Gettysburg National Battleground and requested materials on their light show and driving tour, ways in which the events of the three-day battle that turned the American Civil War — like Pickett’s Charge — become real to the visitor. Guo and I will continue our conversation about how the tourist aspects of the Battle of Gettysburg may assist the Chinese people in commemorating their own history and developing their local economies in the process.

“If you build it, ... they will come”

With fresh input from a new vice governor, the entrepreneurial minds of people like Liu Shijie and increasing demand from urban residents around the country, Guizhou’s tourism sector will continue to grow as an important engine of development in the province’s economy. But it will not be as easy, or as automatic, as some may think.

Whether developing grasslands, rest stops along an expressway or hiking tours along the Long March trail, the obstacles to developing tourism in Guizhou are, in fact, as great as the potential. For all the abundance in natural beauty, culture and history, lasting development is not simply a matter of hanging a sign that reads: “Open for Business.”

That is, unless it’s Hollywood. In the movie “Field of Dreams,”¹⁵ a miles-long line of cars is magically drawn to a cornfield-turned-baseball diamond in the

¹⁵ Universal Films (1989), starring Kevin Costner.

middle of America's hinterland. For reasons they cannot explain, thousands of baseball fans are attracted to witness what turns out to be a re-appearance of "Shoeless Joe" Jackson, legendary slugger of the 1919 "Black Sox."

But that's the movies. A Guizhou tourist official who is not so easily optimistic about the future of tourism in Guizhou told me that she is concerned because, still too many people believe that tourism is simple. Just build it; they will come.

A mentality that oversimplifies tourism, especially when it's in one of China's most backward provinces,

easily leads to careless upkeep, poor service — and nasty toilets.

Perhaps this is what Premier Zhu Rongji meant when he toured Guizhou in 1996 and urged local officials to "build decent bathrooms, and keep them clean" as a focus in developing the province's tourism industry.

Zhu's point, though at first blush almost comic, is actually profound. Sure, there are complex, big-ticket items that must be considered — investment and infrastructure are among the largest issues. But in the final analysis, it is not far off the mark to suggest that a significant determinant of the future success of tourism in Guizhou is the quality of the service provided — and how clean the bathrooms are kept.

Sincerely,




In addition to some of the best scenic and cultural attractions that remain untouched, a few key tourist locations in Guizhou Province include: (1) Huangguoshu Waterfalls, (2) Longgong Caves, (3) Caohai Nature Preserve, (4) Zunyi — Zunyi Meeting and Long March, (5) Mt. Fanjing Nature Preserve, (6) Magenuojie Grasslands and (7) Maolan Nature Preserve.

Index to ICWA Letters by Daniel Wright

Entries refer to ICWA Letter (DBW-1, etc.) and page, with Letter number given before each page entry

A

adopt-a-student 4.7
advertising, TV 13.2
agricultural cooperative foundation
(*nongye hezuo jijinhui*) 4.3
agriculture 5.6

B

Baisuo Town 4.2
Bank of China 1.6
baozi (Chinese breakfast dumpling) 1.5
Barnett, Doak 1.9, 7.3
bathrooms 14.7
Beijing 2.5, 2.7
Bi Jiangang 13.2, 13.4
Big Nest Village 11.1
"Blood Field" 3.3
Boyao Township 4.1, 4.6
Braun, Otto 10.3
Buck, Pearl 7.3
Bund 1.1, 1.2
Burghardt, U.S. Consul General
Raymond 7.1
Buyi 1.6, 8.4

C

Calamity and Reform in China 2.6
Carter, Jimmy 7.4
Central Committee of the Communist
Party 12.4
Chen Chunfen 12.2
Chen Dongfang 11.1
Chen Junsheng 3.6
Chen Zhixian 11.1
Chiang Kai-shek 2.3, 7.3, 10.2, 10.4
China Southwest Airlines 1.4
China Youth Development Foundation
12.1, 12.4
Chinese Academy of Sciences 6.3
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
6.2
Chinese New Year 5.1
Chinese Spring Festival 5.2
Chishui River 14.6
Chishui River crossing in Maotai 14.6
Chongqing 2.4
Chuangzao Xiwang (Creating Hope)
12.5
Chuzhou Wireless Communications
9.1
Clinton, President Bill 7.1
Coca-Cola Company 12.5
Communist 2.2
communist revolution 7.3
Communist Youth League 12.4
computers 13.2
corruption 12.3

county-towns (*xian cheng*) 4.1
CPPCC (Chinese People's Political
Consultative Conference) 1.7
Crane, Charles 13.1
Crane, John 13.1
Crow, Carl 7.3
Cultural Revolution 2.5, 2.6, 2.7
culture 5.1

D

Daguan Village 3.2, 3.5, 4.1
Dalian 6.5
Daloushan Mountains 10.3, 10.4
Dazhai production brigade 3.2
Deng Xiaoping 1.1, 1.2, 1.9, 2.7, 6.1,
6.2, 6.8, 7.5, 9.3, 13.5
Dongguan 5.4
drugs 9.7
Dunkin Doughnuts 7.6
Duyun 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9, 2.1,
8.4, 9.1, 9.4, 9.8

E

economic conditions and trends
1.6, 2.7, 3.6, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7
economic growth 9.9
economic transition 13.6
education 13.2
Education and Economic Development
for Ethnic Minorities (3E) 1.7
education and schools 12.1
education, computer 13.5
education, elementary 11.1
education financing 12.3
education, primary 12.2
education, private 13.1, 13.6
educational video 12.5
electronics factory, "083" 13.3
ethnic groups. See
Buyi; Han; Miao; Shui

F

factory "321" 9.1, 9.3
Field of Dreams 14.6
Fifteenth Party Congress 1.1, 9.3
filling station 4.6
fishing 4.10
Focal Point (*Jiaodian Fangtan*) 6.3
Fourteenth Party Congress 6.2, 6.3
fundraising 12.5
Fuquan City 2.4

G

Gao Gang Harbor 1.2
Geithner, Peter 14.6
geography 1.5
Gettysburg National Battleground 14.6

Grand Canal 1.2
Great Leap Forward 2.2, 2.6
Great Wall 7.7
Grey, Anthony 10.4
Guangdong Province
5.1, 5.6, 6.2, 8.4, 9.5
Guangxi Province 1.5, 8.4, 12.3
Guangzhou 1.4, 1.5, 1.6
guerrilla warfare 2.4
Guiyang
1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 7.2, 10.4, 14.1
Guizhou 13.2
Guizhou *All-City* newspaper 14.4
Guizhou Economic Daily 5.7, 9.7
Guizhou Province 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4,
1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.10,
3.2, 5.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 7.1, 9.3,
9.5, 10.1, 10.2, 10.4, 10.6, 11.4,
12.3, 13.6, 14.1, 14.4
Guo Shuqing 14.5

H

Han 1.6, 8.4, 14.4
Hard Rock Cafe 6.8
He Yuanliang 3.2
Hebei Province 12.4
Henan Province 12.4
history 2.2
Hong Kong 1.1, 1.5, 1.6, 1.9
Hu Angang 3.1, 6.2, 6.3
Hubei Province 12.4
Hunan Province 5.5

I

illiteracy 10.6, 12.2
'impoverished township' 4.7
infant mortality 10.6
Internet 13.3
investment per capita 6.2
iron rice bowl 5.5

J

Japanese occupation 2.2
Jiading Township 4.9
Jiang Zemin 1.1, 2.4, 4.1, 6.3
Jiangsu Province 1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 2.7, 4.3,
7.2, 9.3
Jiangxi Province 2.2, 10.2
Jiaotong University 2.4
Jing Lin 13.6
Jiuqian tujiu (home-grown rice wine)
2.5
Judd, Walter 7.3
jump into the sea 1.6

K

Kang Xiaoguang 12.5

Karnow, Stanley 7.4
Kou'an 1.2
Kuomintang party 2.2, 2.4

L

'Lady Democracy' (*ziyou nushen*) 7.5
laid-off state-owned-enterprise workers 9.7
"Laid-off Worker Tax-free Alley" 9.8
laid-off workers 9.6, 9.7, 9.8
Laos 1.5
Lei Feng 3.2
Li Cheng 1.4, 10.4
Li Fangfang 9.5
Li Peng 6.3
Liaoning Province 9.5
Libo County 4.8
life expectancy 10.6
life styles 1.6, 5.3, 8.4, 10.6, 11.4, 11.5, 14.1
literacy 11.5, 11.6
Liu ji 1.1
Liu Shaoqi 2.5, 2.6
Liu Shijie 14.6
Longli County Grasslands 14.3
Loushan Mountain Pass battle 14.6
Luce, Henry R. 7.3
Luodian County 3.2

M

Madsen, Richard 7.5
Magenuojie 14.2
Magenuojie grasslands 14.4
Mandarin Chinese 8.4
Manifest Destiny 7.2
Mao jackets 1.6
Mao Zedong 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.2, 7.5, 9.1, 10.2, 10.3
Maotai 10.6
McDonalds 7.6
Mekong River 1.5
Meng Shihua 2.4, 2.5, 2.6
"mess hall eating" 2.6
Miao 1.6, 2.1, 8.4, 14.4
Miao minority 14.2
micro-credit 1.7
micro-enterprises 1.7
migrant labor 1.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 6.1, 6.6, 6.8
Ministry of Civil Affairs 12.4
Ministry of Education 12.3
Ministry of Electronics 13.3
mortality rate 2.6
multimedia equipment 12.5
Myanmar 1.5

N

Nanjing 1.2, 2.4
National Day celebration 1.1
Nationalist Party 10.6
New Pudong Area 1.2
Ningbo 6.5

Ninth Five-Year Plan, 1996-2000 1.4, 6.4
Nixon, Richard 7.4
non-governmental organizations (NGO's) 12.7
North Vietnam 2.7

O

off-post 5.4, 9.3
one-child policy 10.1, 11.5
opium 2.2
Oriental Pearl TV Tower 1.2
Overseas Chinese 5.7

P

paddies 8.1, 8.2
parties 2.2
Party Congress 6.4
People's Bank of China 12.4
People's Daily 3.2, 3.6, 13.6
People's Liberation Army 2.6, 7.5, 11.4
per-capita GDP 1.5, 6.1
per-capita GNP 6.2, 6.8
per-capita income 4.4, 4.7, 5.1, 6.8, 8.3
Ping-pong diplomacy 7.4
Pizza Hut 7.6
Politburo 3.2
population 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 3.5, 4.7, 5.4, 14.2
population, floating 5.2
Portman Ritz-Carlton Hotel 7.1
poverty 3.1, 4.4, 8.3, 9.7, 12.1, 12.3
Project Hope 12.1
prostitution 9.7
provinces (China). *See* Guangdong; Guangxi; Guizhou; Hebei; Henan; Hubei; Hunan; Jiangsu; Jiangxi; Liaoning; Sha'anxi; Shanxi; Sichuan; Tibet; Yunnan

Q

Qiannan Computer Vocational-Technical School 13.2
Qiannan Education College 1.6, 1.8
Qiannan Miao and Buyi Autonomous Prefecture 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 2.4, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.8, 9.8
Qiannan Prefecture 14.4, 14.5
Qiannan Prefecture's Office of Poverty Alleviation 3.1
Qiao Shi 6.4
Qing dynasty 2.2
Qingdao 6.5

R

radar systems 9.1
railroads 5.1
Red Army 2.3, 10.1
Red Army Martyrs 14.6
"Red Guard" generation 9.6
Red Guards 2.5
Red Star Over China 2.3

rest stops 14.6
Reston, James 7.4
rice 8.1
rivers. *See* Mekong; Xiang; Yangtze
Rogers, Walter 13.1
Ross, Edward A. 7.3
Rural Chinese Government Administration 4.3
rural development 8.3
rural surplus labor 9.7

S

Salisbury, Harrison E. 2.2, 10.6
Sandu County 4.8, 6.6, 6.8
Sandu Shui Ethnic Minority Autonomous County 2.4, 6.4, 6.5
Sasser, Ambassador James R. 7.1, 7.6
school libraries 12.5
school-building 12.5
"schools established by social forces" (*shehui lilian banxue*) 13.2, 13.4
service-related activities 9.6
Seventh Five-Year Plan 6.4
Sha'anxi Province 2.3
Shanghai 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.6, 2.7, 7.2
Shanxi Province 3.2
Shenzhen 1.5, 1.6, 6.5, 6.8
Shenzhen Airlines Co. 4.7
Shenzhen Hope School 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.8
Shenzhen Representative Office 6.6
Shenzhen Special Economic Zone 6.2, 6.5, 6.8
Shui 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 8.4
Shui Jianhua 8.1
Sichuan Province 1.5, 2.4, 2.7, 10.4
sister-city relationship 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.8
skills transfers 5.8
Snow, Edgar 2.3, 7.3, 10.2
social conditions and trends 8.1, 8.2, 8.4, 8.10
social safety net 9.6
Song Meilin 7.3
South China Sea 1.5
Southeast Asia financial crisis 5.8
southern tour 6.2
Southwest Airlines 1.4
Soviet Union 2.7
'spirit of a screw' 3.2
Splendid Village 8.1, 8.2
State Planning Commission's Macroeconomic Research 9.7
state-owned enterprise (SOE) 9.3
production 9.5
reform 9.4
Steele, A.T. 7.3

T

Taiwan 2.7
Taizhou City 1.3

teacher-training 12.5
telephones 13.2
The Long March 2.3, 10.1, 14.6
The Long March: The Untold Story 2.2
Third Front industrial structure 2.7
Third Front industrialization program
9.1
"third sector" 12.7
Third-Front Construction period 13.3
Tiananmen Square 7.1, 7.5
Tianjin 1.5
Tibet 1.5
Time magazine 7.5
Tourism 14.1
tourism statistics 14.4, 14.5
town (*zhen*) 4.2
township (*xiang*) 4.2
township and village enterprises (TVEs)
4.7
travel permit 4.4

U

U.S. Air Force 4.2
unemployment 9.6

unemployment, "hidden" 9.7
unemployment rate 9.7

V

Vietnam 1.5, 2.7
Vinzani, Debbie and Tim 1.5, 1.7, 1.8

W

Wang Mingguang 3.3
warlords 2.2, 11.4
Wenzhou County 13.6
"where the beautiful women live" 14.2
White Swan hotel 1.5
"Who Lost China?" 7.3
workers' compensation 9.6
workers protests 9.7
Wu Jiapu 3.1

X

Xiang River 10.4
Xu Yongguang 12.1, 12.4

Y

Yan'an 2.3, 2.4, 10.2
Yan'an Period 10.2

Yang, Dali 2.6
Yangtze river 1.2, 2.4
Yingpan village 2.1
Yonggui, Chen 3.2
Yunnan Province 1.5, 2.7, 12.3

Z

Zhang Suping 9.7
Zhangjiagang 1.3
Zhejiang. *See* provinces (China)
Zhejiang Province 13.6
Zhenhua Group 13.3
"zhiqing chaofan" [sent-down-youth
fried rice] 14.3
Zhongnanhai 2.5
Zhou Enlai 2.5, 10.2, 10.6
Zhou Guangshao 6.3
Zhouqing Town 4.8
Zhu De 2.6
Zhu Rongji 9.3, 14.1, 14.7
Zunyi 2.3, 10.6, 14.6
Zunyi City 10.1, 10.7
Zunyi Conference 2.3, 10.2, 10.3
Zunyi Conference museum 10.4
Zunyi District 10.7

INSTITUTE FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

Adam Smith Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. **[EUROPE/RUSSIA]**

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Paige Evans. A playwright and former Literary Manager of the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City, Paige is looking at Cuba through the lens of its performing arts. With a History/Literature B.A. from Harvard, she has served as counselor at the Buckhorn Children's Center in Buckhorn, Kentucky (1983-84), as Arts Editor of the International Courier in Rome, Italy (1985-86), and as an adjunct professor teaching a course in Contemporary American Playwrights at New York University. She joined the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1990. **[THE AMERICAS]**

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