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Topic: Change or Time

Anything Can Happen in China (Modified from my 1995 journal)

After 5 hours of waiting in the noisy, hot, crowded Guangzhou, China airport, Dave, my partner, Doug, a colleague, and I board a Boeing 727, not much different from the U.S. A bag of peanuts, take a nap, and you're in Atlanta - or in this case, Guiyang. Off the plane and to our surprise a large delegation: five colleagues from Michigan and many Chinese dignitaries greet us.

A 90 pound woman grabs my bag. "It's too heavy," I protest, but she drags it off, a clear prize of war. Another bit of a woman hefts the really big 55 pounders into a van and 12 of us zip off down a scenic tree-lined road winding among mountains. Our purveyor would do credit to a Grand Prix driver - he passes everything in sight, weaves among primitive conveyances and terrifies us. I mistake the word "expert" as in "he's an expert driver" for "accident" which shows you my state of mind. The air is cool and fresh, sweet and reviving. Suddenly we slow down and there *is* an accident! Traffic comes to a halt and there, bloody and likely dead in the the middle of the road lies a huge pig. The bystanders look sad and the air fills with monosyllabic exclamations.

We press through more country and then approach a densely built-up area. After nearly two days of travel we're finally in Guiyang! Down a narrow street along a river and through a guarded gate, into an open courtyard and back along the river, we approach two brand new, duplex style white tile apartments. A man accompanying us unlocks a steel jail-like door, explaining how the key works with pantomime and gesticulation. When the steel door is open, another locked

wooden door immediately adjoins it. With the proper key on a string, we're in. Behold! A living room with huge overstuffed naugahyde furniture, walnut veneer cabinets along the wall, and a river view through two windows. Bathroom on the right (white tub/shower, aqua toilet, coral sink), a closet-sized kitchen on the left and two bedrooms off the tiny hallway.

A drop frieze around the ceiling of the main room contains colored lights. A center light fixture of indescribable complexity and strangeness dominates the room. A switch on the wall allows us to bathe the room in deep red, blue, white or combined effects too odd for words. Bars guard the windows outside and plastic mini blinds provide privacy.

The 90 pound woman who says she's "Shelly" commands, "Sit down." People arrive. We stand. Shelly says, "Sit down." People are introduced. We stand, we smile, we shake hands. "Sit down." We sit. We stand. We sit. After yo-yoing up and down several times Shelly explains that we are the honored guests and we should stay seated. "This is the headmaster." This is the Dean of This. This is the Dean of That. It's all very confusing. It's late, we're tired, we're hungry, and many officials drop in to greet us. They are gracious and kind and immensely proud of our new quarters.

We've not eaten in many hours. A cook comes in, whips up dinner from scratch, and we eat pepper chicken and other good but unknown foods. It's been a day of wonders.

At some point late in the evening I announce, "I don't know about you, but I'm just going to sit here and wait for the next astounding thing to happen."

A pretty good plan when visiting China.