

# **My professional Adventures**

By **Robi Auscher**

## **China**

### **It's a communist country after all**

August 1991 was the date of my first travel to China. The visit was carried out during the hardliners' attempted coup against Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and in the shadow of Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989. I consulted for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) in Rome. The project was a most challenging and complex one covering five huge provinces of northwestern China: Gansu, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang. These are the less developed areas of the country and especially Gansu was hit by low agricultural production levels and even by famine in the 1980s. The project's primary focus was on Gansu, a province of 25 million inhabitants, with Lanzhou its capital city. The command area was a cold and arid high plateau of 2000 m, open to the cold winds blowing from Inner Mongolia, and a short cultivation period of no more than 6 months. The project envisaged massive resettlement of growers from the barren hilly areas in the newly irrigated valleys. These low-income growers, used to extensive rain-fed agriculture were expected to move to intensive irrigated production of vegetables, fruit crops and rearing of livestock. The engineering component of pumping water from the Yellow River (Huang He) and the housing were completed. FAO and the consultants were engaged in the training of the trainers in an attempt to upgrade their newly required production approaches and technologies.

Have been briefed on the project in Rome and reached Beijing via Frankfurt. It's been a long night flight. Ministry of Agriculture's liaison picked me up at the airport telling that they had difficulties to find a seat on the flights to Lanzhou and will probably have to wait for 3 days. Checked into a hotel and went to sleep. After a couple of hours the guy knocks on the door. They got a ticket. Off we go, but first to the bank. My US dollars had to be strictly changed at a government Bank dealing with foreigners to pay for the ticket and get some yuans.



*The Yellow River (Huang He) in Gansu*

He was kind and stood in line for me and after a lengthy procedure we ride to the airport. At the entrance my escort shows the ticket and says good bye. From that moment you're on your own. First day in China after a sleepless night. At security, a commanding tone tells that am late. Passed through nevertheless. Beijing's main airport looked more like a big bus terminal. No screens but squeaky loudspeakers spitting in Chinese and non-intelligible English the flight destinations. To me all names sounded the same gibberish: Anji, Banji, Hanji, Tanji or something like this. So had to go to a desk and ask each time a flight was announced. Finally, found a group of Canadians and two ladies from the FAO office in Beijin who were also headed to Lanzhou. What a relief. After the initial welcome telling that am late for the flight, had to wait for 8 hours. During the long waiting hours we were given once vouchers for a meal. Nibbled on some insipid food when an excited official came shouting: you're late and missing your flight. Rushed to the gate. It was late afternoon, we had to hand-carry all our luggage to a shabby bus and then to the plane. We all pushed our suitcases into the luggage department of the Antonov. It was dark when we took off and landed after less than two hours. We didn't reach our destination, Lanzhou, but landed somewhere due to mechanical failure. Took the luggage and towed it for 1 km until we reached a hotel or guesthouse. Didn't want to do anything else but to wash my teeth and go to bed. No water in the taps. Wake up call early in the morning. Same route to the airport where we got breakfast and saw an Antonov. Could never know whether it was the same one, fixed or replaced with another one. Took off again and landed in Lanzhou. The team who was waiting for me there had spent 24 hours at the

airport. They didn't get any info about the flight, its take off or expected landing. We got into a jeep and off for Baiyin, a one and half hour drive to the project site. A guesthouse was installed there recently for the consultants on a Ministry of Agriculture site.

Late in the evening all lights at the Ministry offices were still on. The young or not so young officials didn't have housing of their own and were living in their offices. They carried large rings with tens of keys since they were keeping all their belongings in drawers and closets. For the same reason most of the office rooms were locked day and night. Married couples obtained an apartment but were allocated jobs usually in two different townships. The women were staying in the houses while the husbands lived in the offices hundreds of km apart. Only after 5 or more years was a couple granted jobs in the same place. To enjoy this privilege they had to offer each holiday classy presents to their bosses. It's a communist country after all.

The overall scenery of this arid, cool high plateau reminds the desert-type Arava Valley in Israel with their brown, pink, yellow and black layers of rocks covering the slopes. And indeed both areas are rich in minerals. Baiyin was in fact a miners' township and they were better off than the agricultural producers. While visiting the remote and hilly areas of the Gansu province we were invited here and there to have lunch in farmers' houses. They were very modest. Lunch consisted of a large bowl of soup with grits and vegetables. They had meat once a week. Northwestern Chinese don't consume rice like the southerners but mainly cereals such as wheat, barley and millet. They are much taller. By and large their complexion is fair.



*Farmer in Gansu*

It's a very cold area. Nonetheless they begin heating the guesthouses not before November the 1st. While travelling there in the fall, I was literally freezing in the room. Electric heaters were usually broken. The only refuge while in a country guesthouse room was to stay in bed fully covered both day and night.

When we toured the townships, first visits went to the regional head of the Ministry of Agriculture and then to the Party secretary in charge of Agriculture. In this or reverse order. There was a power struggle between Party and Government with periodical ups and downs. These bosses had company cars and drivers. When I tried to drive for fun one of these heavy Russian jeeps, the Party boss was amazed. How come you can drive a car? It's a driver's job.

However, the real bosses of the field work were the drivers. Usually we visited fields in a convoy of vehicles with various officials attending the trip. During our field visiting drivers held busy meetings where the daily schedule was decided. Where and when to stop for tea break, lunch and even dinner, if it's been a long day. Everyone was pledged to their scheduling.

Once the driver I used to work with and used to pay for all his meals, picked me up at the guesthouse to take me to the airport. We sat down for lunch en route and 2-3 of his buddies joined us. It was clear that they were after this sucker to pick up the tab. Wanted to teach him a lesson and asked the waiter, through the driver's basic interpretation, to get me the check just for two. The driver and his buddies dropped the ball. Never seen them again.

I bought a short waves radio before the visit to China to stay in touch with the rest of the world. Once of a sudden, while on a field trip with a full entourage, I listen to the news that Gorbachev was overturned. What an earthquake. Been at limbo for a long time whether to tell them or not. Obviously local press didn't utter a word. My team seemed to be calm, unaware of any dramatic news. I didn't want to appear as a western agent who spreads rumors and might even get in trouble. On the other hand on the TV set at the hotel room in Beijin you could watch BBC. After lengthy and skittish hesitation, I unraveled them the news. And it struck a chord. These very political people, became extremely agitated and the only words I could discern from their indistinct loud and excited shouting was Gol-ba-chev, Gol-ba-chev, Gol-ba-chev in staccato. The news was brought by their media with a 3-day delay. They didn't thank me for the hint but I felt being from now onwards on a more equal footing. In fact, the interaction with western consultants is a ballgame of Chinese sense of superiority, on the verge of arrogance, which says that right now we do need your technologies. But wait, once adopted, we will rush forward and win the world hands down. This

was said thirty years ago. Not by a government spokesman in Beijing but by average Joe in the poor northwest. His vision is unfolding nowadays.

Consultants are usually nice and communicative people. Still some of them could be weird. On my first mission to China spent a few days with an Austrian seed specialist. We travelled together and attended a dinner with the locals. Since I fancy dumplings, had a crush on ground meat filled dumplings or Ghiao Ze in Chinese. When I finished my plate, the Austrian who has been several times in China before tells me that ground meat in China is one of the most dangerous foodstuffs. I wonder what was his teutonic brainbox after. To warn after and not before?

A Dutch consultant was a jogger. He used to jog a few times a week in and around the little desert town that we visited. The houses looked all the same being padded with mud. There were no street names or house numbers. One evening he got lost and couldn't find his way back to the hotel. He didn't speak any Chinese and unable to give an address. He spent the night somewhere and touched base with us only next day. Quite adventurous, on his way back to the Netherlands he took the Transsiberian. It takes this train two weeks to move between Beijing and Moscow.

The success of a consultant's mission in China depends very much on the quality and goodwill of his interpreter. My interpreter in the area was Mr. Ma or more precisely comrade Ma. On our very first common trip he chose for lunch a disgusting restaurant. Many of the countryside restaurants are poor while in the towns you could find very good ones. The waiter comes with a note. Mr. Ma lets me pay without winking. Found out later that all my meals were covered by the host unit and deducted at the end of the month. As of our first day together Mr. Ma let me pay twice. Mr. Ma wasn't only my interpreter but also my shadow. Wherever we travelled and stayed overnight, he took the room next to me. I couldn't leave the office area and go to town without his company. Apparently orders from above. One day we went to the bank in Lanzhou, a long drive to change money since I paid monthly from my per diem for lodging and food. The trip to Lanzhou gave the opportunity to go to the Central Post Office and book a phone call to home. Mr. Ma told me what's my monthly charge in yuans and I left that amount with him. After all he was my interpreter and go-between with local management. Next day, Ma went to a field trip with another team of consultants. Being at the end of my mission, stayed that day in the guesthouse office to work on the report. A young agronomist with command of English brought me an invoice from the treasurer's office. It contained my monthly bill with a full breakdown of all costs. The balance was lower than the one requested by Ma. I showed the paper to the lead consultant, an Irishman well-versed on China. It was clear to both of us that Ma cheated on me. The lead consultant took up the issue

with the Chinese project leader. Who went to Ma's room and found my intact envelope with the money in his drawer. I was reimbursed for the difference and Ma brushed down. The following days before departure haven't seen him anymore. At my next visit, I was struck. Mr. Ma interpreted for me again. When I asked about the young agronomist, I didn't get an answer first. Gradually found out that he was sidelined and exiled to some remote post. I've seen him some other time in the area but he was too spooked to get closer. In sum, Comrade Ma, well-positioned in the Party hierarchy was reprimanded but not suspended. Not even a slap on the wrist. He didn't have to eat his own cooking. The innocent youngster, got clobbered for an incident that he had nothing to do with. Apparently, he wasn't as devoted a Party member. It's a communist country after all.

Chinese fancy meals and parties especially if they are on company's dime. There were parties put up in my honor when we travelled and visited various area and local celebs. Right off the bat there are courtesies, talks, toasts. Gradually the locals detach themselves from the guest of honor and engage in heated discussions. The more they drink, the more agitated the discussions are. You expect your interpreter to keep you somehow in business, update you on the flow of topics and bounce back your reactions. Too often, immersed in the chatter, he prefers to please his boss and play an active role in the discussions. You're left on your own throughout the meal put up in your honor.

The most popular game in northwestern China is finger betting. You show a given number of your fingers and cry out a number. All this has to be in Chinese. No matter if you're a guest. Whenever the number and your opponent's fingers match, you win. In the evenings you can listen to the loud and rhythmic counting coming from almost every window. The loser has to gulp one sip of the omnipresent liquor. It's a multiple-distilled very strong booze, clear and clean. A foreign guest, has to drink in both cases, when he wins and when he loses. That's the game changer. In one long evening I both won and lost. Had to drink with each game. This strong booze knocks you out without any early warning. Next morning found out why the Irish project leader didn't play but as kibitzer. They carried me, the prey, apparently unconscious to my room. Woke up in the morning, fine and dandy. Lying dressed in bed. No hangover, no headache. The clean liquor, devoid of any auxiliary ingredients, knocks you out but it doesn't contain any hangover-inducing toxins.



Baiyin township's agricultural leaders were Messrs. Liu and Wang. Two elder, level-headed administrators who ran quite a large set up of professionals encompassing a very large area. Traditionally clad in Mao suits and cap. Topped off with work all day long, they spent all their evenings with finger betting and were real smart at it. Their main preoccupation was a refrigerating facility where fruits and vegetables grown in the area's state farms were processed and marketed off season at higher prices. Obviously it was their way to make both a fast buck and ends meet.





*Trainees and training session in Gansu*

Our project had a local project leader and a deputy manager. The project manager's wife was the guesthouse's housekeeper while the deputy's wife, our cook. The latter was a chubby, jovial auntie. Without any English. Every morning she asked each consultant what he would like for lunch and cooked accordingly. Her kitchen had neither running water nor a refrigerator. There was a tap in the courtyard where she washed the dish. She went daily to the market schlepping back two full and heavy baskets. She knew by now that I fancy Chinese dumplings and cooked them with great pleasure. She even taught me how to prepare them, the ones filled with vegetables and freshly ground beef.



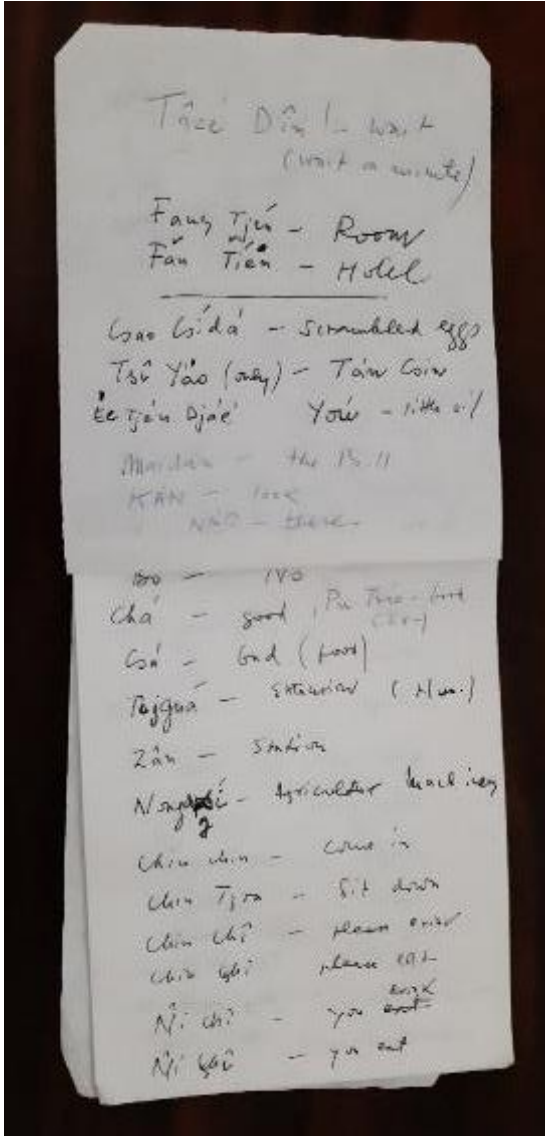


At the end of one mission, left for Beijing to catch a plane home. Was taken by jeep from Baiyin to Lanzhou seen off by a few local colleagues. Big mayhem at the airport. The flight to Beijing seemed to be overbooked. Waited at the airport for hours. In the nick of time, my team found a Chinese friend in the line. They asked him to take care of me. This became a mutual deal. His seat was now secured since he acted as my interpreter while I had support pushing my way through the crowd. However, "my interpreter" was a real pushy guy and in half an hour he was at the front of the line while I was still at its back. They let him through the gate as he presented himself as the interpreter of an important foreigner while I was still squeezed between tens of voyagers. After another hour have reached the gate and even the plane. My interpreter, all relaxed, was sitting with stretched out legs in the 2nd and wide row while I, on the ropes, in the last and crowded one. Finally, the noisy Tupolev took off and landed in heavy rain in Beijing. We got into the bus. Rain was so heavy that the bus didn't stop at the various hotels as usual but rushed straight to the end terminal. Spotted somehow a taxi. Being very late my buddy wasn't sure whether his state guesthouse is still open and wanted to spend the night in my hotel room. No way. Still I was ready to take his suitcase to my room. Paid the taxi to take him to his place. Got to bed at around 3 am. Phone call at 7. The guy wakes me up just to tell that he'll pick up his suitcase at 11.

At the end of another mission, flew again from Lanzhou to Beijing. Upon landing took a taxi from the airport line. After getting to the hotel in town the cabbie removed my two suitcases from the car. The fare: 40 yuan. I stepped out of the car and handed him a 100 yuan banknote. He smelled an opportunity. The guy looks around to see whether the ground is safe and steps on it. With my generous change. Checked in fuming of rage. On top of it they didn't have vacancies. Was about to crack down on the clerk on duty. The concierge who witnessed the cabbie sailing down the river, rushed in to calm us both. Only then did they offer me a drink, a seat and a smile. After much back and forth, got a suite. Next day, two colleagues from the Beijing FAO team came to visit with me to work on some papers. They watched with awe my snazzy two-storey suite with all the VIP paraphernalia. It wasn't a free upgrade, after all have paid 60 yuan for the grandeur. And after all, it's a communist country.

Young Chinese are eager to learn English. This opens up doors, promises jobs and promotions. While I stayed at the guesthouse, every evening a few young agronomists working on the project came to my room to practice with me their English. I offered them a deal. We speak English for half an hour and then they teach me Chinese for the next half. Being a tonal language like many other far eastern languages, it is utmost unfamiliar to our ears. I suggested to begin with words that I have heard them already a

few times so I got used to them and they could explain then their meaning and polish my pronunciation. To catch and digest one single word and brush it up so that an average Chinese would understand me, took usually a two weeks cycle. I found the biggest difficulty jotting down the exact phonetics of



the words. The commonest vowel in Chinese seems to be one which resides somewhere between a Romanian "â" and "ă", with spillover to a Hungarian short "ö" or long "ő". As for consonants, you hear mainly that Hungarian-sounding "cs" or Romanian "ci" and "ț". In this context Romanian and Hungarian were highly helpful, otherwise wouldn't have been able to repeat a word without the accent signs which were close but never the real thing. After a lengthy effort, and taking notes of frequently repeated words or expressions, have reached a command of approximately 120 words which were helpful when being on your own in a cab or in a restaurant with no English menu. Or when you wanted to brag, especially when giving a talk or so. At that time, talks were supported with overhead projectors and transparencies. Have asked my interpreter to put my transparencies into Chinese. Since this was Chinese to me and unable to read it while lecturing, have inserted signs to know when to turn the page/transparency.



*The Shaanxi team*

Travelling from Shaanxi back to Gansu, was hit by a bad flu. My team looked for a medical doctor but during the weekend couldn't find one. Willy-nilly we landed in a military hospital. The doctor, a lieutenant colonel, smiled with courtesy and said: "Sit down, please". I was happy, almost half cured to find an English-speaking MD. However, these three words were the only ones in his English vocabulary. Then came a lengthy debate among my team members which didn't lead us too far. They checked me into a hotel which seemed to be too expensive for them and they were gone in no time leaving me in the hands of an English-speaking young receptionist woman who was then solemnly appointed as my liaison person. Withdrew to my room, feeling bottomed out. Asked my liaison for just a little bit of chicken soup. After half an hour, a waiter appears with a huge bowl. Took off its lid and in a big pool of steaming soup a whole fat chicken was floating with its neck and head in place.

Hotels in provincial capitals such as Lanzhou have a policy of their own. You check in but you don't get a key just a room number. Now you go to the respective floor. At the end of the hall sits an elderly matron who holds the keys. She is unfriendly, shapeless and mustachioed. Reminding of the restroom ladies in the underground public pissoirs of Paris. When you get back tired at the end of the day, then it takes you time to find her. When a woman cleans your room while you're in it, the door has to be propped open, *de rigueur*.



*Dinner with the governor of Gansu Province*

While working in the province of Shaanxi, not far from Xian, have stayed at the guesthouse of the Agricultural University in Taigu. It wasn't a bad building, but its upkeep just awful. The rags were all dusty and stinking, the power wires were hanging out from their plugs and the water flow, capricious. Breakfasts consisted of a bowl of fish soup, followed by salted, smoked or other kind of foul-smelling fish. No bread, no coffee. Got thrashed after two such appalling breakfasts. Happy only after having found at the entrance gate of the University a little kiosk where eggs, bread and coffee could be found. Despite the language barrier could get a more or less decent breakfast. In this part of China no one drinks non boiled water. Everyone carries to work a jar of green tea with its leaves floating inside. As they drink, they fill up the jar with more boiled water. I brought a can of instant coffee and they made me a cup of coffee. Deeming coffee to tea, as I drank more coffee, they rushed to fill the cup with more water.

I had a bathroom but taking a bath was a mission impossible. The hose leading water to the showerhead came off the socket and the water flow stopped in the middle of the process. Always asked for a technician, who came, fixed the socket which lasted then for one whole day. Was fed up with this. Have been invited by the rector to attend a dinner in my honor. He came to pick me up from the guesthouse. I had to bring to his attention the way the university guests are being treated. Put everything on the line asking him to join me in the bathroom. Showed him the shaky hose, socket, taps, wires and the fact that his guest of honor was unable to take a decent

shower. A technician was dispatched in half an hour and he fixed the stuff which worked flawless for the next three days.

Mostly these people didn't have bathrooms in their homes. While working in the FAO offices in Beijing, have realized that at lunch break you couldn't use the restrooms. They were all taken and locked for a couple of hours. The secretaries didn't have bathrooms in their homes and were showering in the office at noon time. By the way, FAO Representative in Beijing was Pakistani. We got along pretty well.

While in Beijing, used to stay at the same hotel and take the meals across the road. The restaurant had English menus and decent food. Aquaria with fish were spread out in the main hall. Customers pointed at a given fish which was then cooked for them. One day a waiter brings with stretched out arms a huge wagging snake to the table next to me to present it before cooking. To steer clear of such an experience have moved to another restaurant. At the official meals you could find all sort of oddities, fried worms, cold donkey meat, camel paw, just to name a few. I indulged in frog legs, a known French delicacy and the cold donkey slices which looked and tasted as pastrami.

The students were living in packed dorms. These were not appropriate for studying and apparently the library space was also limited. Have seen hundreds of them strolling up and down in the campus park with open books or copybooks, reading silently but mainly loud. Getting ready for tests.

Have visited with many researchers and lecturers at the university. Briefed them on our project and tried to involve them in its professional support. The idea was well-received as well as the gesture of a foreign consultant to update them, asking for their opinion and collaboration. I came across two researchers who survived Mao's cultural revolution. At the time of my first visit to China in 1991, we were just 15 years after the end of this most cruel period in China's history (1966-1976) causing the brutal death of 20 million people. One of the professors, educated in the UK, passed five choppy years of the revolution hiding in his mother's country house. He was disconnected of his professional career throughout this period. Far from his spouse and children. He spent years in harsh conditions and lost not only five years of his career path but couldn't keep a cool head and unable to get back to cutting edge research. And if you're not there, you're out of business. At the time of our meeting he was a deeply disappointed person who lost hope to make up for the lost years. Another researcher was deported and spent years building terraces on the barren hills of northwestern China. Hardest physical work spent among his intellectual peers in a forced labor camp. Neither did he have much left in the tank. Have seen in Ningxia slopes with all the abandoned and useless terraces built by millions of outcasts. This kind

of information could be gleaned only from people who spoke English and communication didn't require interpretation.



*Abandoned terraces in the barren hills of the northwest.*

The university in Taigu was at an hour's drive from the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Terracotta Army clay soldiers. Sculptures depicting the armies of Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China. It is a form of funerary art buried with the emperor with the purpose of protecting the emperor in his afterlife. The figures, dating from approximately the late third century BCE, were discovered in 1974 by local farmers outside Xian. The figures



include warriors, chariots and horses. It is estimated that the three pits containing the Terracotta Army held more than 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses, and 150 cavalry horses, the majority of which remained buried in the pits.



*Terracotta Army in Xian*

While walking in Taigu's main street leading to the university came across Uigurs. They are Muslim, coming from Xinjiang, the huge northwestern autonomous region of China. Xinjiang borders the countries of Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and India. They had their restaurants and shops in the main street. They spoke but basic Chinese although many of them were students. Were happy to talk English with a foreigner, invited me to their pubs. They always looked for an opportunity to gripe about the Chinese. And they couldn't care less about the fact that I came from Israel. On the contrary, were very friendly.

We travelled also to another project area, the much smaller autonomous region of Ningxia. It is inhabited by Muslim Chinese, ethnic Hui. Muslim men are easily recognizable, they all wear white caps. I liked their food. Matter-of-factish they don't eat pork but know their way with lamb. The main dish being a delicious lamb soup rich in vegetables. It's a high altitude, arid, desert-like region and the project's focus was on land reclamation and the massive development of canals and subsequent irrigation and improved water management.

Both on the way to the project area in the northwest and back, used to stop over Beijin. The capital's main avenues were filled with masses of gray Chinese men and women pedaling their bicycles. The only vehicles were trucks, buses, taxis and government cars. Ministry of Agriculture's Foreign Relations used to spoil me with sightseeing trips to the main attractions: the Wall, the Forbidden City, Temple of the Sun, Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace. The first McDonald's branch was opened and you couldn't get in. It's been swarmed for weeks. Used to pay visits to the Embassy of Israel. First, at the time when no full diplomatic relations have been declared yet. Prof. Yossi Shalhevet, the former Director of Agricultural Research, was the head of the representation. We used to get together whenever I visited Beijin.

Later, Dr. Yoav Sarig from Volcani Center, served as agricultural attache and we often exchanged experiences and ideas. On 4 November, 1995, have been invited to dinner in Yoav's home. Late in the evening, the news about Rabin's assassination reached us. We were all sure that it's the outcome of Muslim terror. Only in the morning got the awful news that the villain was Jewish. A new and sad page began in the history of Israel.

In the late 1980s, our book, J. Palti, R. Ausher: "Advisory Work in Crop Pest and Disease Management" was published by Springer, Berlin. Have received a letter from a young Chinese plant pathologist that he is keen on translating the book and asked us to come to grips with the publisher to authorize a Chinese version. I wrote him back that it's indeed a matter of the publisher and not of the authors but I will hit Beijing in several weeks and we could discuss the issue. We met at our Embassy in Beijing. I elaborated at length on the authorization procedure and its problematic when, he took out two books of his handbag. One for me and one for Dr. Palti. They were the printed copies of our book in Chinese. When walking through the famous Silk Market of Beijing, on display was all the knock off. Forged brand names of jeans, shirts, bags, accessories, etc. The same was true for disks containing pirate software. Under US pressure, police used to raid the market's streets to seize illegal pieces of software. When police appeared, vendors were long gone. They all had shelters, storage rooms in basements of the neighboring streets, where they kept their merchandise and could go underground until the storm was over.

Over the years, Israel's foreign aid installed 4 or 5 demonstration farms in various parts of China. They demonstrated technologies as drip irrigation, fertigation and water management; glass- or plastic house technologies of vegetables and flower crops; computerized management of dairy herds and others. Wherever have travelled in remotest northwestern provinces came always across researchers, technicians, farm advisors, officials and leaders of growers associations who have visited the Israeli demonstration farms. They were deeply impressed by the displayed technologies and eager to follow them. With a relatively low and cost-effective investment, Israel brought a significant contribution to Chinese agriculture. It created ample echo for itself, leaving behind a tangible impact. Chinese admire Jewish people for being smart. In fact their exposure to Jews was and is minimal. It's kind of an empathy nurtured between two peoples with a long history. The same applies to Israelis, admired for being non-conventional and leading in various technologies. While meeting with the governor of Gansu, the leading official of a province of 30 million inhabitants, he expressed strongly this view. He expected Israeli assistance to reach Gansu in many domains, even before diplomatic relations were established in 1992.



The anecdotes and insights brought up here date back to the years 1991 and 1996 when I used to work in China. Throughout this period, the change became evident. In the last years, Antonovs and Tupolevs were out, Boeings and Airbuses, in. Pilots got rid of their Mao suits to wear the habitual white short-sleeves. The swarms of bicycles on the main towns' streets were shoved aside by private cars and ensuing traffic jams. Chains of chic foreign shops replacing the outdated government stores.

China became the second largest economy of the world. I tend to believe that the aid of the international development agencies, putting the flesh on the bones of China's upgraded agricultural policy and technologies, played its share, catalyzing the giant's evolution.





*With party bosses of agriculture in Gansu and typical Gansu village*



*With Messrs. Liu (l) and Wang (r)*