Suite of Three Poems about Beijing: Natural and Cultural

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1. Natural and Cultural

Beijing greets you
With the vast wheat field in the downtown.
Farming work is one stone’s throw away
From banking business in high-rises.

Beijing welcomes you by the wide rice courts
At the foot of west mountains,
Where rich water supply, wet and fresh air
Shaped the tradition of rice farming centuries ago.

Beijing houses heritage gardens,
Old palaces for emperors’ families
And temples of beliefs
For Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim or Christian.

Beijing is home to historic sites
And modern buildings,
Where traditional wit meets the latest techniques,
Local operas are staged along
With foreign music performed.

Ground space interacts with
Aerial views above
And underground scenes below.

What a city of natural beauty and cultural richness!
2. Tradition and Fashion

I bike to find the best restaurants
In Beijing,
Be they retreated in mountain resorts,
Giving peace of mind by staying closer to nature
Or housed in modern skyscrapers,
Creating pleasure of sky dining.

Be they built with lake-view in sight
Or by waterfront pavilion,
Allowing visitors to savor food
And enjoy delightful views afar.

Traditional meals can be as simple as
Noodles with different flavored toppings,
Stir-fried rice with vegetables or meat,
And steamed buns with various fillings,
Or pancakes of multiple flavors and layers.

Reading the menus and thinking over
Translation and description of meals,
I find the rules that the higher charges
Of the dishes are correlated with
The more accurately translated names
In English.

Another evidence is spotted
For linguistic economics:
Language service adds value to goods
And proportionately,
High quality translation pays off.

Foods of delicacy are made by master chefs
With choice ingredients cooked by
Hand-on expertise.
Multiple cooking ways are used for
Diners’ likes: wok frying, simmering,
Steaming, roasting or grilling.

Unique tastes are catered for diverse preference:
Spicy and hot, or light and tender,
Sweet or salty, juicy or deep fried.
They are served in dining room with
The state-of-the-art settings.
Diners have a look at paintings
Of classical natural scenes,
Commenting on the calligraphy
Hung on the walls.
They toast with wine or liquor to
talk bigger, bolder and louder.

Male diners usually smoke while drinking
A mixing of alcohol, cigarette
Smoke and food makes
A strong and irritating smell.

So intense is the mixed smell
That one might step out
Instinctively,
The moment when reentering the room
After a brief absence.

Following a big drink, almost every will have
A sense of pleasure mentally.
But physically,
The unbearable irritation
To stomach might trigger vomiting.

Lazy mind and dizzy head mumble their talk
The self-inflicted pains force diners to swear:
‘NEVER have beer or liquor!’

But a few days later, another
Invitation for meal is more than welcome.
This is social dining culture.
Happy, noisy and dizzy.
C’est La Cuisine de La Chine!
3. Night Life in Beijing

A perfect night life in Beijing
Begins with viewing the sun setting
From the central top of the city,
Jingshan Park- standing to the north of
The Forbidden City.

I walk up the hill to catch
The views sketched by the setting sun
And the skylines at dusk.

By the west mountains
The descending sun makes
A view of serenity:
High-rises for resident and offices
Are bathed in the twilight
As lights are switched on
One after another.

The lantern tower standing tall afar
Is colored red of bright,
Denoting well-being and fortune.

The white pagoda of Buddhist
Sits on hill of a short distance away,
Radiating color of white and pure
Under autumn sky.
The Forbidden City stands

In the south and gives a sense
Of grandeur and pride.

As sun light dims
One can see the golden roof tiles
On arrays of royal houses
In pairs and symmetry
Fade in the dusk.

The national center for performing arts
In a shape of huge oval structure,
Are showing lights of varying colors
On a regular and continuous basis.

The Square is highlighted
By bright lights shot from
Lampposts rising high,
And spotlight of power
Shooting up to the clouds above.

The east view is dominated by
CBD high-rises with shiny glasses.

Lights are on.
The skyscrapers flicker
As busy traffic on the avenue run
Smoothly
Like a river flowing in quiet.
One can find the Olympic park
In the distance by
Looking northwards at the landmark buildings.
Of Olympic memory they remind me,
The Nails Tower, Radio and TV Tower
And the Stadium of ‘Bird Nest’
Catch your eyes with featured lights show.

I leave the central top overlook pavilion
And bike to the central lakes area,
A cluster of night bars for beer,
Music and la cuisine.

Chinese-style houses are lined
Along the waterfront,
Lights ornaments are mirrored
On the lake flat.

Busy, noisy and cheerful
Are the people going by.
Walking in leisure with the ones
They love or being loved by.

I walk by the bars to find
The piece of music of my favourite,
I rate the music and service through checking
The number of bar-goers who gather
Under the roof.

Cause I assume that better music
Appeals to more clients and visitors.

Those well-heeled visitors sit by
The candle lights,
Served with beer or wine of high prices:
Chatting with friends or chanting
To the live band lead singers.

They can be song of love
Or lyrics of cursing.
The melody can be blues of sadness
Or rock and roll of madness.

They can be traditional Chinese songs
Adapted from classic prose
Or in a style of country music or ballads
Performed by up-and-coming new stars.

Flower vendors keep walking door by door
For selling roses of fresh
Or fake with decorated lights on.

Not far from noisy bars,
There are homeless who ask for a change
To feed themselves.

There are instrument players
By the street corner,
Playing with emotion
And soliciting a help in money from passers-by.

As night clock runs to late hours,
The performances come to an end,
Visitors are dismissed.

Someone under influence by alcohol
Is yelling with hearty words
For being loved.
Another is shouting for longing to be loved.

What a night life of diversity!
A bird’s view of the Palace Museum from the central top of Beijing

A bar with live band music by the downtown lakes
About the Author

Mr. Shi Wenjie is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Central University of Finance and Economics, Beijing, China. He has a strong affection for poem and music, through which he shares his love and passion for life.

With heart-felt love for natural scenery and cultural heritages, he biked around Beijing in days of sunny or rainy, shooting the skylines over the west mountains or high-rises in downtown with his cell phone cameras. He wrote verses for memory of the sights and sounds he came across as the lights built up and faded away.