

THE 7 WONDERS OF BEIJING

by George Ding

Blue Sky Days

On a clear day Beijing might just be the best damn city in the world. There's nothing like waking up to a bright blue sky and the AQI in the low two-digits. Especially after a rainstorm, the city looks pristine, like it's been driven through a car wash.

When the sky's blue, all the mundane frustrations of life in the city—getting jostled on the subway, discovering I just ate gutter oil—lose their ability to annoy. As long as I can see the sky in its original color, I'll take all the gutter oil you've got.

McDonald's 24-Hour Delivery

It's great to know that if I never wanted to leave the house again and just live in my own filth, *hikikomori*-style, surrounded by mountains of Big Mac wrappers and used ketchup packets, I could.

Sure, McDonald's delivery isn't the cheapest service but hey, you're drunk and it's 4 o'clock in the morning and where the hell else are you going to get five boxes of McNuggets?

Taobao.com

It's Amazon, Wal-Mart and Etsy all rolled into one. For those who seriously never want to leave the house: McDonald's has you covered for food—Taobao's got you covered for everything else. The amount of crap that is sold on this site is staggering. But the great thing is: it's inexpensive crap that can be delivered to your doorstep within one to three days.

Ayis

When I find myself surrounded by Big Mac wrappers and used ketchup packets, I know just who to call.

Indeed, if there's one reason I've stayed in China so long, it's because I can't go back to cleaning my own room. Getting my first ayi was like getting my first computer—I don't know how I ever lived without one. Over the years I've been blessed with amazing ayis who remind me that my room has a floor and that things can be stacked and folded instead of dropped in a random location.

That's why, if I ever go back to the States, I'm bringing my ayi with me.

The Interchange at Huixinxijiankou

The Chinese might have built the Great Wall, but modern urban planners seem unable to build two subway stations on top of each other. The ones that are—like Fuxingmen, Hujialou and Haidianhuangzhuang—only have convenient transfers one way. The rest—like Sanyuanqiao, Dongdan and Guomao—should offer shuttle bus service between platforms.

Compared to the Penrose steps of Jianguomen and the rat maze that is Xizhimen, the Huixinxijiankou station is nothing less than an architectural miracle. Not to mention, how many letters are in Huixinxijiankou?

Recycling Loads

It is a breathtaking sight to stumble upon one of these engineering marvels: bags of empty plastic bottles on bundles of polystyrene on a thick

cushion of cardboard, all lashed to a pattering trike. It's what Santa's sled might look like when he sets out from the North Pole—if Santa dealt in recyclables.

Like an ant lifting 50 times its own weight, these vehicles carry a gravity-defying burden. Their riders are even more incredible—not only do they make up for an appalling lack of recycling awareness and infrastructure; they've found a way to make some money off it. Bravo.

An Empty Seat at Rush Hour

In a city of 20 million, finding an empty seat on public transportation at rush hour is like finding a needle in the Orion Nebula. But sometimes, after a long day of work and faced with a 50-minute commute, the person sitting in front of you simply gets up. It's the urban equivalent of spotting an oasis after days in the desert. And just like an oasis, it can very well disappear before you get there.

But if you do get that seat and you look out the window and happen to see a few white clouds over a clear, autumn, azure sky? Well, that might just be as close as you ever get to heaven.

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