

Writer Perspective: An Interview by Guizhou Metropolitan Daily

Guizhou Metropolitan Daily: What is your background and experience in China? What are some of the cities you visited, and what were some of your impressions?

Lowell Bennett: In January of 2005 I accepted a position as an editorial consultant with China International Publishing Group and relocated from San Francisco to Beijing. I remained with CIPG until mid 2009. The primary publication with which I worked was *China Pictorial*. I traveled a great deal on my own and in the course of representing both the magazine and the publishing house, visiting about 60 to 70 varying locations around the nation, including Tibet and far west Xinjiang. And so as part of my work I produced the photo sites www.SeeTibet.net and www.SeeXinjiang.com. And all the places I have been in China, or almost all, are represented in images at www.SeePRC.com.



It would be difficult to put forth a single or even a few impressions of the varying places I have visited because the nation is so vast and the land and the people are so diverse. But, I guess, if I had to reference one common trait I observed everywhere I went I would say that no matter where I was in China, north, south, east and west; big city, small town, remote village and distant hinterlands, people were friendly and welcoming. You'll see me reference that aspect a lot in my writings on the varying regions. Many of those articles in English and Chinese versions are linked via what I call my Hub Site, www.LowellBennett.com.

GMD: What brought you to Guiyang and how long did you stay in the city? Which places did you visit and appreciate during your stay and, from the perspective of a photographer, what was your impression of those places and Guiyang in general? For instance, which place did you consider to be the most beautiful?

LB: I came to Guiyang pursuant a contracted assignment with the Beijing-based Foreign Languages Press, a division of China International Publishing Group. During my three weeks in the city my task was to shoot photos, gather data and conduct interviews so that I could produce a book of text and images on the modern city of Guiyang. The overall idea was that I would do so from a *Western perspective*.

It would be difficult to designate any single place as being the “most beautiful.” There are many beautiful spots in and around the city – many. And each has its own particular charm and attraction. There is the historic and friendly cultural charm of Qingyan Ancient Town, the gentle welcoming beauty of Huaxi National Wetland Park, the majestic and awe-inspiring mountain range of Kaiyang County and the quaint village charm of Baigong Village. The same goes for Du Village, Wanggang Village and Gaopo in the highlands. The city parks of Qianling, with its mountain, and Guanshan and its lake are really green gems of Guiyang.

Then there is the special sort of manmade natural beauty of the agriculture. Several times I found myself alongside or in the crops belonging to a village, for instance when I was on a silent trail surrounded by corn and fully bloomed sunflowers, and I would stop taking photos and stand there. I just had to pause to take in the lush and fertile beauty of it all... I could go on and on, but you get the idea. Guiyang and its countryside, collectively, is a very beautiful place, indeed.

GMD: During your stay, did you make friends with local Guiyang people? What was your overall impression of the people you met?

LB: I was very, very busy while in the city. So I did not have much time to establish what you would call friendships. But I would like to think that the acquaintances I made enjoyed my company as I enjoyed theirs. Of course, the employees of the Guiyang Information Office who escorted me around were great people – very kind, helpful and patient.

And, in particular, I would say the evenings I spent wining and dining with the artists of Urban Parts Art Studio were good times. They are creative, fun and intelligent people. And the guys really know how to drink their Moutai. Especially the founder of the studio, Dong Zhong. He's a great host and a talented *baijiu* drinker.

GMD: You mentioned “wining and dining”; so what did you think of the dining and nightlife in Guiyang?

LB: Besides Guiyang’s natural beauty and the proximity to some genuinely fascinating countryside and the quaint and venerable villages therein, downtown is great for partying and eating some of the best food on the planet... Of course, you have to like spice.



GMD: What did you think was most special about Guiyang, based on your experience? Any negative impression of the city?

LB: I’ve lived in several places around the world, including Beijing and several cities and islands in Southeast Asia. Guiyang, to me, has a special sort of uniqueness. It is certainly an increasingly modern and growing metropolis, but the closeness to nature and the incorporation of natural beauty, what are now known as urban “green belts,” is quite extraordinary. Of course, due to the favorable geographic position, the air is clean and the climate cool.

The climate reminds me of my US home, San Francisco. That city is surrounded on three sides by the ocean and the bay, so the air currents provide a sort of natural air conditioning. It is never too hot, never too cold and the air is always fresh and nice to breath. Same goes for Guiyang.

Now that you asked about what is “special” I feel I should say more about the food and how that is another quality-of-life factor shared with San Francisco – a city known around the world as a great place to eat. Fruits, vegetables and seafood, in particular, are fresh and robust in that part of Northern California. And because many Chinese-Americans call San Francisco their home, some for many generations and some recently arrived, the varied cuisines of China are available across the city. Guiyang, like San Francisco, is abundant with fabulous produce, fruits and meats. Some of the best anywhere – or anywhere I have been, anyway.

And here I am being 100% honest: The Guiyang style of Chinese cuisine is now my favorite. Before my visit, because I enjoy peppers and spicy food, Sichuan was my favorite Chinese cuisine. Indeed, it was one of my favorite styles of food on the planet. Now my favorite is the food of Guiyang. Really, really, really great food in your city. Here now, thinking about the fried peppers, the pepper sauces and all the great dishes that go along with them, my mouth is watering.

You ask if I have any negative impression of Guiyang... Let me think... Yes, one in particular: The women are too attractive and the city is too far away – for now.



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