

**INTERVIEWING CHINESE PEOPLE:
FROM HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS TO THE UNEMPLOYED**

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I fondly recall my maiden venture in walking and talking 'in the field.' It was November 1979 and--having completed a dissertation some five years earlier that had relied entirely on old Chinese newspapers stashed in an American library--I had been hard at work on a book on Chinese socialist commerce for about two years. I knew the lingo of shops, retailing, and bureaucratic purchasing from interviews with former commercial workers that I had conducted in Hong Kong and from a reading of massive stacks of journal and newspaper articles from China.

But I was not yet equipped to put together the intricate relationships among sales agents and their superiors. I was aware that there were issues involved with rationing--but had not realized that at that present moment all sorts of connivances were enabling people who were not meant to have access to grain coupons to obtain them nonetheless. I had no idea precisely what the mechanics were when a middleman from a northern city arrives in the south to find that the structure of state companies varies with the nature of local output.

What was the hierarchy of authority and the internal organization in an ordinary state-owned hardware shop? How open were vegetable markets in the interior in the first year after the famous Eleventh Central Committee's Third Plenum of 1978? All these tidbits seemed delicious, forbidden secrets to me, and I was uneasy not knowing how much trouble I could cause anyone by asking about them. In the end I got my answers, but by no means did I acquire all the information by asking directly. I peered along city walls and noted circulars, eavesdropped in stores at talk among cadres, and snuck around open markets to observe the paltry wares on sale, all the while noting the guarded, suspicious looks on the faces of the sellers. On that trip I just could not pluck up the courage to put potential interlocutors on the spot, but I left the country with some morsels of data, and, even more, with a sense of the excitement one can feel just knowing that real people existed who could bring my research to life.

It was nearly another four years before I tried again. But by May 1983, when I first set foot on the streets of Wuhan--the town that was quickly to become my Chinese laojia [old home]--the scene had switched immensely: The people were friendly and open, the markets lush with produce, and no signs against wrong marketing practices preached menacingly from the city's signboards. By then the only warning posted consisted of rules for out-of-towners who needed licenses for doing their business in town. That time and during my following two visits (May 1984, autumn 1984) my subject was industrial policy, however, and it would not be enough just to stroll about and scrutinize covertly.

I needed to speak with officials in the city--in the comprehensive economic organs and the sectoral bureaus and also in the enterprises--in order to find out how central policy was interpreted and implemented, and, ideally, to understand how different bureaus each adopted their own distinctive strategies in accord with their sector's place in the national plan of the time. It helped, I should note, that the policy I was there to study was one that was finished--an effort at 'economic readjustment' from 1979 to 1982 aimed at shifting industrial investment from the heavy to the light sectors. By 1984 there was much less reticence about discussing failed tactics, though by no means was there total frankness, either. Still, it definitely helped to be able to relate my queries to the past and not the present.

Thereafter, having tasted the treat of informal exchanges with local leaders, in subsequent years throughout the 1980s I took an interest in many aspects of the then evolving local economic policies of reform and their execution. I wanted to explore everything from government-managed bankruptcies and state-arranged mergers to Wuhan's quarrels with Hubei province (of which it is the capital) to regional planning along the Yangzi. Again, only local bureaucrats and factory managers could fill me in, though I also got to meet with scholars in

their capacity as members of the official policy consultation committee that had been just created by Wuhan's mayor, then (now-Politburo member) Wu Guanzheng.

My next project in some ways broke very new ground for me. In investigating the treatment and plight of the 'floating population' [liudong renkou]--the nickname bestowed on farmers migrating into the municipalities--it was necessary for me to converse with local officials again, but this would be insufficient. This time I would have to confront and win the confidence of the newly urbanizing mobile farmers themselves, those who had left their country homes and were sojourning in cities to make their livelihood. This, of course, would require the acquisition and development of a new set of contacts and skills, and was in many ways the most exciting and involving of the interviews I had conducted up to that time.

Finally, over the past six years my current project has concerned the ongoing process of laying off state-employed workers. This is a program that has been advocated by the central state since 1996 in the course of its effort to modernize China's enterprise system by winnowing out the weaker workers and plants. Again, as in my last project, relevant informants have had to include both those responsible for carrying out the basic contours of this undertaking in the localities, but also the targets themselves, the xiagang [literally, off-post] workers and staff. I even had occasion during this piece of work to meet with leaders in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in Beijing, along with many top scholars. In all of my last three researches Wuhan was always my most comfortable, accessible base, but I made forays into Harbin, Shenyang, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Beijing, Lanzhou, and Shanghai on various occasions to check out the variations.

A number of questions attend this array of disparate settings, topics, and types of interview subjects. In what follows I discuss the larger issues of preparation and access (chiefly, getting permission to perform the work); finding and connecting with subjects; and gaining

assistance. I go on to describe how I have teased out data and attitude from my conversation partners when I sense the speakers are unlikely to provide such material voluntarily or readily. I also recount some of the strategies I have used when problems in these areas became insurmountable; and, finally, address matters of sensitivity and secrecy, including how I have figured out that such ethical issues are present, and how I have attempted to handle them.

Preparation and Access

Two institutions in particular were absolutely essential to my research over the years. The first of these was the foreign office of Wuhan city. My ability to appeal for its staff's assistance began in a special way: in 1982, at the suggestion of my university's then-expert on Chinese geography, Pittsburgh approached Wuhan to institute 'sister city' relations between the two cities and their two home universities. A delegation that included the sister-in-law of one of China's very highest officials was then the head of Wuhan's foreign office and led the group, a person with a keen interest in anything 'abroad.' With the way paved by this bond, I found a hearty and genial reception in the city for my early research in China, and the tie has almost always been available for me to draw upon ever since.

Preceding every one of my visits from 1983 through 1992 (of which there were eight), I simply announced that I was coming to China, the nature of the research I hoped to conduct, the bureaus at which I wished to meet with officials, and the questions I intended to put to them, and the deed was granted. In the years since 1992 the personnel in the foreign office has been altered several times, but in my eight subsequent visits I continued to be assisted there more times than not. In 1994 I was engaged in a consultancy with the World Bank to study the contribution of urban governments to economic growth. For a reason never explained to me the Wuhan foreign office, after first agreeing to help, later declined to be of service. I quickly realized, however, that the Bank's bureaucracy within China surely had a resident office in Wuhan, and indeed that organ was able to arrange all the interviews I required.

The other institution was the organization set up to intermediate scholarly exchanges between China and the U.S., then called the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC). Both in 1984 and in 1992 this association granted me fellowships, along with which came valuable connections and permissions to do my work from responsible bureaucracies in cities where I had no contacts of my own. Other introductions came, twice, from the U.S. government's consular officials in Shenyang, and once from two China studies colleagues who had previously conducted research in Tianjin and who had retained friendships with scholars at the Social Science Academy there. Over the past decade, however, most of my trips have been preceded by communications with Chinese scholars working on topics close to my own, or with personnel at the Ford Foundation who had contacts in the cities I planned to visit. As a general statement, I have always preceded any research journey by first contacting people who can talk with me or who can introduce me to others more deeply involved in the issues of my concern.

Much more difficult, however, was my venture in Harbin in 1991. Although the CSCPRC had carefully negotiated a placement for me with the city's foreign office and its social science academy, the timing was poor. Harbin was at the time a particularly conservative place, hostile to Americans in the wake of the post-Tiananmen campaign to cut off the efforts of the U.S. in triggering a 'peaceful evolution' of China toward democracy. Bureaucrats in these units were also loath to impart what the city leaders considered classified or covert information of any kind. While I was scheduled to spend a month in the city, at least half of that time had to be given over to complex negotiations over my questionnaire, my purposes, and the identity of the bureaus I would be allowed to visit. Throughout this period of haggling--and, indeed, after it too, for all efforts at discussion failed totally--I availed myself daily of the city library, where I discovered and perused a wealth of journals I had never seen or heard about before.

Similarly, in Guangzhou in 1998, when university professors whose names I had been given by a colleague failed upon my arrival to make good on their earlier promises of help, I turned instead to the giant 'book city' the city then boasted and spent my days reading at my hotel desk instead of putting questions to cadres. The moral here is to be as prepared as possible, but to be able to adapt quickly, if need be, once on the scene, in order to lose as little time while in the field as possible.

Another maxim is to try to draw upon any relationship with a person willing to be of help to meet potential subjects. A former undergraduate student of mine spent two years at Nanjing University when I was working on the floating population. Because she was there, I decided to do field work on the migrants in that city, knowing she could ask her classmates, many of whom were familiar with local dialects, to accompany me on my street interviews and interpret the generally non-Mandarin speaking peasants for me. Four young college students provided invaluable help for me that way.

A similar stroke of luck befell me in February 1992, as I prepared for my time in the field to study the migrants. At that point a professor I had met while working on Wuhan's market reform policies in the mid-1980s had agreed to select two graduate students to act as my assistants in Wuhan. A few months later, when conservative politicians were blocking Deng Xiaoping's program of opening up and marketization, the professor changed his mind and declined to see me. One of the students, however, met me secretly and we carried out the work.

Retaining old contacts, however trivial they may seem, has worked to my favor. In 1999 when I wanted to meet with recently discharged former workers, I made contact with all the people with whom I had developed any sort of personal connection in Wuhan over a period of, by then, more than a decade and a half. Through these people I was able to meet the wife of a

colleague of a colleague, the laid-off co-workers of my former hotel waitress, the poverty-stricken wards being helped by the work unit of a local researcher I had met in 1990, the neighbors of a friend of a UC Irvine graduate student, and the housemaid of a novelist I knew, among others.

There was a trick many foreign scholars employed in the 1980s and early 1990s when they set about seeking permission for undertaking their research projects: This was to describe one's projects and one's interests in the most benign terms possible--without, of course, thereby shutting off the opportunity to meet the people most in a position to provide the material one needed. Thus, when commencing my inquiry into industrial policy I explained that my then-hometown, Pittsburgh, had many similar problems of industrial restructuring as did industrial cities in China, and that I wanted to learn about China's positive experiences. When I set out to examine the situation of the movement of rural people into the municipalities, I praised the Chinese for, as of the late 1980s when I started the project, having so few homeless people living on the streets, in contrast to many American cities. My purposes on both these occasions must have seemed to the Chinese who had to approve my project to be harmless and even flattering; perhaps for reasons such as this I never had trouble obtaining permission to engage in any of my research projects.

The Interview Itself

I have never gone into the 'field' without having done a great deal of prior reading. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, reading of all sorts helps one put the issue at hand into a larger context, whether historical, comparative, theoretical or in terms of the jargon, practices and purposes current and germane to the topic one hopes to investigate. If one knows, for instance, that a particular meeting was held at which critical decisions were taken, that specific bureaucracies or geographical entities or echelons of administration have experienced tensions or controversies among themselves in the past, or that city officials

believe that certain tasks are especially irksome, one is then in a position to uncover more information than if one is forced to put vague, generalized inquiries to one's subject.

Secondly, most of the times when I went to China to do research through formal channels a city waiban [foreign office] would instruct me ahead of time to present him or her with a set of the questions I planned to ask. In order to organize such a list I needed to know a great many of the relevant details of my research subject, especially its intricacies and potential pitfalls. Were I not able to convince my future informants that I already knew some of what they knew, they would probably have brought fewer pieces of data to our meeting.

Here I recall having read about the Wuhan machinery bureau's quandary in the early 1980s' campaign to 'readjust the economy' away from its habitual emphasis on heavy industry. The factories under the management of this bureau were told to cut back on their production and were given greatly reduced investment; many had even to learn how to turn out products entirely different from those they had been fashioning for several decades. In my interview with the bureau chiefs, however, no one dared to bring up the topic of recalcitrance. The ice broke rapidly when I went through my notes and referred to a specific conference called by the city's party committee at which machine-building bureau heads were chastised for their evasive tactics. So warm became the temperature that I almost imagined one or two of my informants might break out in tears, as they explained to me how very difficult it had been to corral the firms' cadres into compliance and how much they all had suffered under pressures from the bureaucrats over their heads fundamentally to transform their production techniques.

On another, later occasion when I was studying the migrants, I spent nearly two hours feigning patience, while I heard of all of the proper, official procedures and bureaucratic agencies involved in dealing with issues of birth control in the city. Obviously, it seemed, the members of this bureau sent to talk with me had no intention of discussing my subject, the problems

entailed in handling the city's migrant population. Just at the very end of the interview, I remember saying, with compassion if out of the blue, 'If only it weren't for the floating population, your work would be much easier.' That released the floodgates that had blocked off the anger and frustration that was attending my informants' daily work. And with that, everyone present chimed in together to relate one annoying incident or obstacle after another that got in the way of their job. So I used the understanding about the difficulties of this agency's responsibilities that I had already acquired from reading Chinese newspapers and journals to offer a sympathetic comment that led to an opening.

In 1987, I conducted interviews aimed at finding out from the city's reform commission about Wuhan's behavior as the newly significant marketing and transport 'central city of Central China' once economic reforms had restored its old, pre-takeover historical role as an entrepot. Before arriving, I was already cognizant of the stresses that characterized its competitive, often even insubordinate liaison with Hubei, the province of which it was the capital city, and also of its rivalrous relations with another major metropolis in the interior, Chongqing. These bits of information were at the forefront of my mind as I queried local scholars and officials about how Wuhan's post-1984 status as a 'jihua danlie' [separate line item within the central plan] city was working out, and about the difficulties of establishing a central Yangzi cooperation zone. Officials seemed to feel they were talking to an insider and became remarkably frank.

One last example illustrating this technique comes from my interview with four officials at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (an interview arranged for me by an applicant to our graduate program at UC Irvine who had offered in his application to assist me in any way he could¹). As per usual, I was treated to platitudinous accounts of the work of the Ministry and

¹He was not admitted to the program but nonetheless was willing to be of help.

how it was proceeding to address all the problems of China's working people. Suddenly I commented on how arduous the task of building up a brand-new social security framework must be. 'We can't even hope to solve that one before the year 2020,' one of them admitted in reply. 'And that's only if Zhu Rongji could remain our Premier,' he went on to allow. And that was when the interview finally got down to business.

In these and many similar incidents people felt much freer to speak frankly to me so long as I appeared already to be privy to their private matters. Informants could see that I knew enough to ask the telling questions and in such instances were more often than not willing to give at least part of the answer. Thus, one can clearly enhance the interview by being well informed ahead of time; such prior knowledge forms a springboard for diving much deeper.

On the other hand, when further details were what I needed, I suddenly shifted my stance: then I became ignorant, naive and obtuse, putting query after query to my interviewees, until all the trifles of the matter, the methods, and the numbers involved were clearly laid out before me. Indeed, during my open-ended interview sessions, it often has seemed as if every response I am given leads me to inquire more intensely about additional behind-the-scenes mechanisms and strategies. In this way I often leave an interview having discovered data I had never known existed when I began the meeting. In sum, as a shorthand formula, my tactic has always been what one might describe as a Daoist-type dictum: appear at once knowledgeable but ignorant, knowing and not knowing.

Finding and Connecting with Subjects--and What to Do When You Can't

Both my current and my previous projects have employed a sort of selection process once termed 'guerrilla interviewing' by Thomas Gold, a form of picking subjects by engaging people

at work on the street in seemingly idle conversation.² It was easy to identify the rural migrants on the city sidewalks, and most of them, grateful to be resident in an urban area, were proud of their new lives and happy to explain it. In several months in 1992 and 1994 I spent many hours along the streets of a number of cities speaking to people I recognized--either by their occupations, their accents, or their clothing--to be from the countryside.

Later, in my yearly visits to Chinese cities beginning in 1998 while at work on my project on unemployment I sought out middle-aged, generally downcast labourers along the road who appeared to be urban residents and encouraged them to explain how they had landed on the pavement. Occasionally--especially after the U.S. bombing of the Belgrade embassy in 1999--some of these manual workers were afraid or unwilling to talk to a foreign face. But on the whole, my show of empathy and support for their position softened their reserve. On one occasion, two jobless workers thanked me most profusely for caring enough about them to want to know their stories, since, as they felt, 'The Party and the government and the trade union didn't ask about us about our situation.'³

An obvious question that might arise in the reader's mind at this point concerns getting such people to talk with me. In the current project, when I have met my subjects through mutual acquaintances reserve melts quickly; moreover, when our site for communication is someone's home or the restaurant of my hotel, the feeling of relative safety rapidly loosens the tongue. I usually began such interviews by referring to our common friend or associate, and what I had learned about the subject ahead of time. When the setting is such as to permit a longish talk,

²Thomas B. Gold, 'Guerrilla interviewing among the getihu,' in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 175-192.

³Interview in Wuhan, 18 August 2002.

I 'shoot the breeze' for awhile bringing up topics such as how I know their friend or relative or how I learned about the person I am addressing. If I already knew that the informant had a special situation of some sort, I took the conversation around to that.

If, on the other hand--and, as was much more frequently the case--I encountered the person or persons at work on the street, either selling trinkets or doing repairs, driving in a taxicab or in the course of mounting a pedicab, or hawking at a market stall, the point of entry into the conversation had to be different. On the occasions when I intervened in a person's work, I would generally begin with a query such as, 'May I speak with you?' or 'Excuse me, do you have a few minutes to talk now?' I then would explain what my interest was and, ideally, present the person with my name card to demonstrate that I was a scholar. Following such an establishment of trust, it then became possible to ask simple questions, such as 'are you from the countryside?' or 'are you a laid-off worker?', 'where are you from,' 'how long have you been here,' etc. Soon the words flowed more or less naturally, as I appeared unassuming, sympathetic and genuinely interested and supportive. When in Wuhan, I usually would let the interviewee know how often I have been in Wuhan, over how many years and how much I like the city. I also made certain those speaking with me understood the nature of my interest in learning from them--i.e., that I am a professor and that my research project is about such-and-such, dispelling immediately any fears that I might be planning to write news articles on their plight or, worse yet, inform on them to either their or my own government (indeed, such were the fears of some of my subjects). On those occasions when I can calculate ahead of time that it is likely that informants (especially those from the rural areas) will be using a local dialect, I have engaged local, educated Chinese to accompany me. I then pose my questions to my partner, who then translates my Mandarin into the local dialect. Following the interview, my assistant and I would go off somewhere and quickly share what we both recalled from the conversation and I would write the words into my notes.

Speaking with scholars and officials is, of course, a different matter. There the issue is to find out the nature of their own work, and quickly to establish my credentials. Exchanging name cards is de rigeur; in addition, I try to bring along recently published articles of my own to distribute, especially if I have any that might be of interest to them. Time has passed since the days in the early 1980s when ball point pens were a far better gift--trying to distribute something I had written to the older cadres sent to meet with me back then at least on one occasion led to the recipient awkwardly attempting to determine which way to hold up the thing! Once our mutual authority has been thus cemented, I proceed to describe the nature of my current research, as soon as possible letting them know how knowledgeable I already am on the topic so that they understand what the starting point in their own speech should be. As they speak, I frequently stop them, raising every small question that comes to mind, for two reasons. First, there are many things they will take for granted that are unknown to me unless I ask; and second I try to keep in mind the inevitable backward looks as I review my notes after the meeting, when there is no longer any chance to fill in the blanks.

During all of my interviews, I never used tape recorders, but only wrote notes. When the speaker used a word I did not know, I would ask that s/he write it down for me. I often ask for repetition if I think I may have missed something important. I believe strongly that I must understand and catch every word and thought on the spot. Listening to a transcript later on will not help me if I have not understood the first time something was spoken, I reason. I have consequently always asked my interlocutors from the start if they would mind my taking notes. No one has refused to date, especially when the people on the streets remain nameless. In the case of scholars, I inquire as to whether or not they would mind my quoting them directly, and whether or not I may use their name if I do.

**Sensitivity and Secrecy: Handling Ethical Issues and
Listening Between the Sounds**

One of my largest concerns when interviewing is that I not make my informants feel uncomfortable. For this reason I do not try to compel them to give me information that runs directly contrary to Party policy or government directive, nor have I bluntly asked questions that would put them on the spot. Instead, I push, but only so far as it appears they are willing to go. When I am convinced that the subject is truly out of bounds for that speaker (or more generally out of line), I let it pass. Sometimes the very discovery that the answer will not be given can alert one to the sensitivity of the issue, and, later and in a different setting with a new informant, the initial lack of reply might form the basis for further inquiries. Perhaps this stance has won confidence for me such that I have never had trouble staying on in or returning to a place, nor has anyone I have spoken with in the past ever refrained from meeting again with me.

Even without pushing the interlocutor one may glean concealed fragments of information through careful watching and listening. During my study of industrial policy, I noticed that several different speakers alluded to one plant in particular where, in the course of shifting its output from boilers to electroplating bicycles, there had been some sort of awful outcome, eventuating in zero production for a full two years. I only learned of the extent of the disaster by following tiny leads and particles of the picture from one interview to another, expanding my knowledge of the events bit by bit as I let each later subject see how much I already knew.⁴

On another occasion, in 2000 I was intent upon figuring out the total number of laid-off workers in Wuhan, and also in determining the extent to which functionaries on the ground trusted the

⁴Dorothy J. Solinger, *From Lathes to Looms: China's Industrial Policy in Comparative Perspective, 1979-1982* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 182-183. My interview began with the machine-building bureau, and the first bureau of light industry in Wuhan in November 1984. The city Economic Commission filled in further details, including the hitherto unrevealed name of the hapless firm. It was not until the following May when I requested to talk to people at the plant in question that I was given the whole story.

totals being spewed out by official statisticians. Paying close attention when a trade union cadre answered my queries as to how many people had lost their jobs, I observed him quietly but emphatically qualify his answer: When he carefully preceded his reply with the words 'According to government statistics,' and a pregnant glance, I decided that he probably had reason to wonder if the count were fully accurate. Tours of models' successful ventures also has afforded me many a chance to pry into the intricate inside stories about how the heroes were selected and by whom, and about the types of assistance they received--and from whence--in order to achieve their marvels.

Ethical concerns enter especially in holding conversations with people who may be the subjects of sorry tales about which they are uncertain whether it is permitted to talk with foreigners--such as migrants operating without licenses or laid-off workers complaining of the corrupt or arbitrary behavior of their factory managers. In such cases I have met with the individuals in neutral, unidentifiable settings, such as a coffee shop or a park, and have assured them that I do not know nor wish to know their names. Ironically enough, one of my frankest interviews ever was held at night in the empty building of the local party committee's editorial offices, where a friend of mine worked by day. Perhaps in such a seemingly protected setting the men being questioned had abandoned their fears.

Interviewing scholars is often one of the best ways to uncover popular reactions and sticking points in the implementation of difficult programs. But here especially one must ascertain whether or not the scholar is willing to have his/her name in the notes. Bringing along papers of one's own frequently leads to an exchange of research output, and, having acquired a Chinese scholar's work, further correspondence about its content can lead to new opportunities for asking questions and gaining data. One more way of breaking through the invisible walls of secrecy that surrounds much Chinese material is to tease out what the speaker feels he can reveal. On several occasions when I knew that certain types of data were neibu [internal], I

found that subjects felt uncomfortable orally reciting the pertinent figures, but instead were willing to have me copy down information in their own notebooks. Whether this was because the room we used was bugged was never explained to me.

I have also learned, from my own error, that some city officials, no matter how well disposed, trusting, and of like mind with one they may seem to be, will not conduct a formal interview in which policy issues are discussed unless the city foreign office has arranged it. It was clearly for this reason that even inviting trade union officials of this type into the privacy of my hotel room did not yield any information of value.

Conclusion

Some may wonder about the research value of such random chats, with the subjects somewhat haphazardly selected; others may question how many of such interviews is sufficient to amount to a project completed. My own feeling is that one ought to employ as many different sorts of research material and data one can, including statistical data from yearbooks and specialized volumes, as well as that found in survey research by others reported in Chinese journals; official documents; internal journals; daily newspapers from China in both Chinese and English, whether official, semi-official, or the product of 'reportage literature'; and Western media reports, in addition to secondary sources and interviews in China.

As for the amount of such conversations to seek, the more the better! On numerous occasions I have gained insights and a sense of how things operate from talking informally to dozens of people of all strata in China; almost always these insights have informed my reading of other kinds of data and/or have been confirmed as I review material of different sorts. Most importantly, the nuances I have obtained from such encounters have helped me to uncover and assess subterfuge and euphemisms on the printed page.

Speaking directly with individuals whose daily business carries with it the knowledge we seek but can find in no other place must be one of the truly exhilarating aspects of doing research on China. But to get the maximum payoff from the venture, it has been my own experience that a number of fundamental rules should be followed: arrange appropriate approval for one's project--and the necessary access--if officials are to be your subjects, before entering the country, but stay flexible once on the spot; keep track of all the friendly people you meet, for one never knows in advance who might later be able to introduce suitable subjects; and, in the course of the interview, seem to be both aware and uninitiated, first to appear to be an insider but then to make certain of all the fine points. Finally, keep the subject's safety at the center of your consciousness.