
I am a Statistician

-Sidelights on the Celebration of the Second World Statistics Day in Xi'an, China

On October 22nd, we embarked on a journey back home from Xi'an North Station towards Beijing South Station on train G88, after saying goodbye to co-workers from the Education Center of Statistics Bureau of Shaanxi Province and stepping out of the Xi'an Renmin Square.

As the train slowly started and then accelerated, our 5-hour long trip began. All of my colleagues had a unique way to keep themselves busy, with some reading a book, some playing cards, and others playing with their smart phones. Nevertheless we all shared a sense of exhaustion and fulfillment after consecutive days' hard work.

As our bullet train steadily moved forward, the mist-wreathed silhouette of mountains and scenery flying past the window, near and far, brought me back to the three exciting events we've just attended: Celebration of the Second World Statistics Day; Statistics Conference of Countries Along the Silk Road and the International Seminar on World Statistics : Sustainable Data for Sustainable Development. Still, they filled me with mixed feelings. As I was having a conversation with Ms. Zhang Liying, Deputy Director-General of the Education Center of National Bureau of Statistics, who was sitting right next to me, a light bulb moment came. Opening the laptop, I moved my fingers across the keyboard while listening to her. As my fingertips danced, a line of words appeared on the screen...

“Be at Your Service” and “Optional Exercises”

On October 17th, we and other colleagues in charge of these events made an advance arrival to the city of Xi'an, where we met our partners from Statistics Bureau of Shaanxi Province. After several tough days, their exhausted faces still beamed with excitement and expectations.

It evoked the memory two months ago, the last time when we had come here for inspection and discussion about the meetings, they'd impressed me with “Be at Your Service”, a simple expression that delivered the very strong passion to get everything done. And it also inspired me to write an article back in Beijing named as “Be at Your Service” on China Information, in which I said: “Behind the words ‘at your service’ is a huge load of work that requires assiduous attention. Our Shaanxi friends certainly know the devil's in the detail. And every little step lays the foundation for success. As for the site selection for this brilliant international affair, they deem it as an honor for Xi'an, bestowed by higher authority out of trust. Also, they've made it a top priority in the next half of the year.” A Shaanxi colleague told me he'd read my article in China Information many times and got a tremendous lift from it. It seems obvious to me that from this moment, “at your service” represents larger service staff with the upper tier and the lower one joined together, and the “service” we provide will be based on different needs, with some of which already known, while others not clear. All this calls for more passion, carefulness and dedication, and a stronger sense of responsibility.

Our Shaanxi friends have not only actively responded to the command “at your service” by National Bureau of Statistics of China, but also built numerous “optional exercises” on practical conditions. To improve reception service, they've organized an educational tour to Shaanxi Municipal Tourism Administration, Customs, Euro-Asia Economic Forum and so on. They especially hired teachers from tourism schools to give lessons about Shaanxi's history, customs

and reception etiquettes to personnel. To enhance efficiency, they've broke new ground to introduce the Wechat service, offering attendees another access to details related to the meeting on scanning a 2-D barcode.

The entry into their Wechat surface proves to be a satisfactory experience with pleasing music and scene, and detailed service information about the two meetings. All of this is a showcase of their considerate thoughts. The welcoming line on the front page also exhibits their warmth and pride as a host: "Distinguished guests, it is a great honor to have all of you here. 2000 years ago, Zhang Qian, an official traveler from the ancient Han dynasty started his voyage from Xi'an, known as the ancient capital of Chang'an at that time. He traveled through Western Regions, and across Asia and European on a Silk Route that extends thousands upon thousands of miles away..."

Inside each room, the bedside table was plastered with gentle reminders printed by Statistics Bureau of Shaanxi Province and Shaanxi Survey Office of National Bureau of Statistics. One-on-one individualized service team was also set up, in a bid to provide premium service for participants at any time on any demand.

We once met a busy couple during the service. One was Mr. Wang Shunqiang, Director of Education Center of Statistics Bureau of Shanxi Province, and the other was Ms. Tan Jingchi, Director of Division of Comprehensive Statistics of NBS Survey Office in Shaanxi. While the former one headed the reception team, the latter was in charge of the Secretary team. They seemed destined to be husband and wife, always so agreeable and amiable whenever someone came up to them. Despite working in the same station, they could hardly talk to each other for one word or two owing to their business. But they both enjoyed it.

Another Joint Rehearsal

On October 19th at 8:00 pm, the night before the Second World Statistics Day celebrations, participants had nearly rested after a long day's conference. But in the quiet courtyard of the hotel, a few of them could still be seen wandering in twos and threes.

And we began the highly intense preparations for tomorrow's meeting.

Again, it reminded me of the same night around 5 years ago, when we were having a joint rehearsal before the First World Statistics celebrations inside the United Nations Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo, on October 19th, 2010. That memory stayed fresh in my mind.

That day, as the night fell and crowds of Expo visitors gradually dispersed, our rehearsal finally started. While the entire video and audio playback, live video recording and the ribbon cutting ceremony should be managed properly, "a joint rehearsal" was also needed to assure everything was well under way. That was to say, we had to go through all needed procedures in case of potential failure.

It was nearly midnight, but all my colleagues from the Education Center were sparing no efforts to work for a perfect statistics event and the glory of China's statistics.

And right now, we were repeating the same process. It went without saying that chance favored only the prepared mind. As the clock ticked into the late night, we were racing against time to finish our work, testing and debugging microphones, laying lines, retrieving video and playing music...at last is the "joint rehearsal". Although we were the only ones on-site but it seems as if all representatives were already well seated.

A call of "go" brought all of our focus and energy together. It was obvious that one minute on

the stage really required ten years' hardworking, which was just a timeless truth that always penetrated into the very core.

In the end, all was ready. All of us were confident. Weeping sweat off the face, we treaded into the darker night, and the autumn breeze felt so pleasingly cool...

The Impressive Beijing Opera

On October 20th, the Second World Statistics Day celebrations kicked off. Facing a huge LED display 16meters east-west and 4meters north-south was the U-shaped center auditorium with statistical professionals across the world and distinguished guests from all quarters of society.

"Hand in hand, heart to heart; you and me, for the World Statistics Day; what a harvest festival with joy; we recall all the past achievements and press forward for a new ground..."

As the warm-up song *statistics links you and me* built a specially made song for the First World Statistics Day, representatives took their seats in the auditorium. The familiar tune and novel scene for this celebration day caught the ear and eye of Mr. Paul Cheung, former Director of United Nations Statistics Division and the current Senior Consultant of National Bureau of Statistics of China, that he said with an excited tone: "this is great!"

Celebrations got started while the Western Net began live coverage simultaneously. Leaders from National Bureau of Statistics of China, the UN and People's Government of Shaanxi Province gave their congratulatory speeches in succession, followed by our specially crafted Beijing opera medley MV dubbed as *I Am a Statistician*. The instant my colleagues Du Xiaolin and Yan Yunliang dimmed the lights, the whole atmosphere changed. As the cheerful opera melody sounded in the air rhythmically loud, two lines of subtitles in English and Chinese appeared on the LED display:

"Beijing opera is the essence of traditional Chinese culture. The following opera medley represents a good wish of bringing statisticians worldwide together for statistics festival celebration. Now, please welcome the Beijing opera *I Am a Statistician* performed by famous actors from Beijing Opera House and other institutions."

A random glimpse of one side of the auditorium showed the silhouettes of attendees staring at the LED screen, inspiring the thought of "all in one". On the large LED display, white clouds drifted across the blue sky, seemingly so fast and grand right before the eyes. The music *I Am a Statistician* was also very exhilarating that I suddenly felt a sense of great ambition. It's true that statisticians are doing the ordinary thing, but we all have our pride and "can-do" spirit.

But why the Beijing opera show? We'd been considering what to feed our fellow statisticians on world celebration for a long time, finally, the idea of Beijing Opera dawned on us as "What's unique for a nation is also precious for the world". When we were planning the First World Statistics Day celebration, we drew enlightenments from the Beijing Olympics song *You and I*, which had created a brilliant impression, therefore we decided to combine music and statistics to achieve the same effect, and also to live up to expectation of the UN. Now, since China was entitled to another opportunity of hosting the second celebration—fairly attributed to the preceding success, how should we continue to achieve more without totally sticking to the beaten track? In response, we started the opera medley *I Am a Statistician*.

"The Beijing opera features strong emotional implications in its tune and melody," And it

was an unprecedented practice to join elements from Beijing opera and statistics into one. As the old saying goes, the first step is always the hardest; the first problem we encountered was the lyrics. They had to be fit for singing out while in accordance with relevant rhythm rules. Fortunately, Chen Junjie, a national leading Hualian (a male character with a painted face in Beijing opera) player and actor, gave us a helping hand in composition. Among others were Laosheng (an old gentleman in the Beijing opera) performer Du Ji and Laodan (an old lady in the Beijing opera) actress Shen Wenli. Their passionate dedication towards opera performance and promotion was really awe-inspiring. The Qingyi (the main female character in an opera) actress was a “police queen”, Major of the Guard Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security. She displayed her killer app *the Drunken Concubine* as a guest appearance for free and even gained compliments from Paul Cheung, former Director of the United Nations Statistics Division that “This sounds so beautiful! I like it!”

Immersed in the opera atmosphere and the memory back into its creation, my mind wandered off to unrestrained and enthusiastic thoughts. Unexpectedly, I received a “command” from the host Mr. Du Weiqun (also in charge of the Department of International Cooperation of National Bureau of Statistics of China) to get on the stage at the end of the performance.

With sudden brightness and applause, the opera came to a close. It turned out that another ceremony was newly added to formally introduce the main composition staff into the audience. Accordingly, Mr. Xia Rongpo and I were honored with the opportunity to make a curtain call.

As the host repeated words like “brilliant, brilliant”, another wave of applause was unleashed. For me, this embodied the bold spirit as a statistician and praise for the traditional Chinese opera. In the meantime, I also perceived the pride and responsibility inside every lecturer on these international meetings and each one of my coworkers behind. They were a shining example of hard work and statistical devotion.

Trivial details magnify the personality

On the night of October 20, a friend told us about some related news reports on CCTV that morning, and then another one suggested playing them at tomorrow’s meeting, so as to make participants feel the attention from media, China and the rest of the world.

Mr. Xia Rongpo, Director-General of the Education and Training Center of NBS of China, conveyed an order to some of my partners the instant he was informed of the suggestion. However, it was nearly middle night, and we even couldn’t be sure about its fulfillment as we had to download the source news and translate them into English version among others.

When the clock struck 12, our CISTC Wechat group had a buzz, from which I knew our new task was about to begin, and we were somewhat asking for trouble. The next morning, when I put the chatting records together in accordance with time, a list was born:

01:23——Wang Ying should translate the audio transcript into Chinese

01:39——Zhao Xinru is classifying the recordings in room 2165. Please ask Wang Ying to translate them into Chinese later.

01:51——Meng Huanlin, please remind your division chief of picking up a phone call. It is emergent!

02:11——Hong Zhen, Yun Liang, and Li Xiang are downloading news in room 2165.

05:40——Wei Dong, is my laptop in your room?

06:49——Done! Submit it for review and approval at 8:00 am in the conference hall.

Obviously, many of my colleagues had worked through the whole night for this troublesome deed.

I was impressed by their dedication and self-determination, and was also influenced by such spirits. Besides, we also made some last-minute adjustments in the opera video *I am a statistician*, right before it was played out, adding new scenes in to reinforce its timeliness without betraying the flavor of lyrics. At first we hesitated for one moment or two due to the tight schedule. But at last, we decided to throw all the worries away only to create a perfect opera video for our audience. Therefore we restarted to work on it.

Later, one of my co-workers sent a message in the Wechat group: “I think it does justice to our team by using the old motto ‘never escape when difficulty comes, and taking on responsibilities shows good virtue’.” Indeed, the team spirit always determined the performance of the given team. Without it to play a coordinating role, all trivial things behind the stage show would be ignored and neglected, as the most important part of all ——such as arrangements and service, is always hidden in the unnoticed corner. The devil is in the detail and trivial details always magnify the personality. What we do might sound ordinary, but it bears witness to sheer professionalism which is purifying and shining ——not brightly, but warmly.

Working brings out beauty, as Bai Yansong, a famous host in CCTV puts it, “a mix of pain and joy”, and I couldn’t agree with him any more. Interpersonal friction is evitable during all this intense and trivial work. I’ve once seen a senior worker shout at his young fellow due to a burst of temper and later apologize, and fierce quarrels among red-necked colleagues, all in favor of their own opinion. And I have also experienced strong embarrassment myself when a younger fellow criticized that I was “making trouble”. Nevertheless, all was forgotten when handling the whole situation. Because there’s nothing personal of us, and what we did was only for work.

At the end of the meeting, the blonde Ms. Lidija Kostovska, Director-General of State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, asked for a chance to play the piano while singing a song, in an attempt to express her thanks as a statistician to all that had contributed to this activity. Although we couldn’t understand the lyrics as she elegantly started her performance, but music shared one similarity with statistics, that was to establish bonds among different people. Her request certainly added luster to this event. I seemed to capture the true feelings of a statistician from it: *“I am a statistician, devoted to the digital world. Dealing with data; providing service for the public, and all is done towards perfection. We are a unique sight to the world, with accuracy and authenticity as our soul. I am a statistician, keen to explore the depth of science. All those big data requires our genuine dedication to make the most of...”*

The second World Statistics Day and two other international conferences ended. As all the distinguished guests went on a trip back home, we were finally able to gather for a while. A leader from the Education and Training Center rose happily to speak, yet only standing choked in tears...

This might go well beyond many people’s comprehension, but for us, it’s totally understandable after all the toil and sweat during the very 3 days in Xi’an. Despite such a short time, we had developed a natural response to these tears and sobs owing to memories like group planning, on-site inspection in searing heat, mixed sentiments in implementing everything, and all the twists and turns during coordination and communication. At this moment, silence spoke more

than we could.

Time flew so fast when I was tapping the keyboard and talking. As the train arrived, we received a message in the CISTC Wechat group from Paul Cheung, former Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, said: “The conclusion of one period or cycle also means the beginning of a second one”. Although the Xi’an World Statistics Day and two other international meeting are over, now here comes the preparation for international workshop in Shanghai.

Indeed, everything is advancing with time, and ending represents a new beginning, just like the first World Statistics Day and the second one. From them, every participant will harvest a universally memorable experience and unique sights, sounds and sensations.

A friend in charge of picking up foreign guests told me, every time he sent a number of foreigners to the airport, they would talk about the “Beijing Opera”, and some even tried to sing *I am a statistician*, making him think of lyrics in the Beijing Opera Facial Masks, “they called it the Peking Opera and brushed these unseen colorful paints on face. When they made appearance as the gongs and drums struck up, oh, all was so brilliant and wonderful...”

Really, what it must feel like for our fellow statisticians worldwide on a journey back home, with the opera song I am a statistician still echoing around the ear...

As my fingertips kept dancing on the keyboard, the last part of *I am a statistician* appears on the screen. Let’s just take it as the full point of this essay or the front page of every statistician’s new journey: I am a statistician, with an ambitious dream in the data world. We write essays, always looking towards the future. A celebration is also a source of inspiration. We aim to bring shyness to society, like the spring brings color the world. All my fellows all around the world share the same feeling, to be a devoted, diligent and happy statistician.