

Mblem

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## The 2008 Olympics Shiangtai Tuan

The 2008 Olympic is now over. Looking back it was quite an exciting couple of weeks.

The anticipation: For Chinese, especially the government, I am sure the anticipation lasted the past seven years. For the athletes, I am sure the it lasted the past umpteen years. For us lay people, or say, lazy couch potatoes like me who get news from TV, Olympics gradually turned from background noise to something real only in the last month and only from snide remarks like: “the American athletes should wear masks”, “the American athletes will live in American ships moored at sea and be airlifted to the events just before the starting gun”, “athletes from third world countries had an advantage because they have been conditioned in polluted environment.”

Then it happened. Most of the people I talked to said the opening was very impressive. They said it presented Chinese culture well, not just the usual party line of praising the communist leaders. As events after events proceeded, people started to be more and more captured by the positive spirit. Pollution talk was gradually replaced by gold medals. Of course, it did help the announcers’ mood when the Americans started to win medals.

During those days, I put a blank DVD in the recorder whenever I could. Whatever I missed, I hope it will be recorded. I have never watched NBC or MSNBC so much before, because there was no other choice. From what I have seen, I don’t think I would watch NBC again. I don’t see why the broadcast right of the Olympics has to be sold to only one company exclusively. It was a public event after all! Can you imagine if only NBC can tell you about the Democratic Convention and CBC has the exclusive right to the Republican Convention? I can understand if only one company is hired to broadcast one football bowl. I suppose it is as if I pay one garage to fix my car or pay one plumber to do my bathroom. However, to broadcast a public event is for the benefit of the public who wants to watch the event. The better the presentation the more they get commercials. That should be the competition. I think “the event” such as the Olympic should be allowed to have more than one sponsor. FCC surely has funny rules. Well, back to the NBC broadcast, other than the opening

ceremony, they only show the events if the Americans are sure to win, if the Americans have a potential to win, it is an American favorite game, or if there are a lot of skins. Well, basket ball and softball are Americans favorite games but because American teams were eliminated early, no more shows. Women’s beach volleyball, volley ball, and gymnastic all had more than one reason so they dominate the American TV screen. Additionally, they replay the scenes of Americans winning repeatedly. The scene of American swim relay beating French at the last hundredth of a second and Mike Phelps’ shouting must have been replayed gazillion times a day. The two young women gymnasts’ winning routines too. There were also hours used to show profiles of American athletes. They are interesting but not at the cost of the precious limited time for the actual events. It would be understandable if NBC is worried about competition. In that case, they would have to spend as much time as possible to please the audience – the American people – by showing what they want to see. However, as I pointed out, they have bought the exclusive right to the Olympics. There is no competition. I would think they should have the obligation to serve the Olympics by showing a wider spectrum of activities. Besides, it is their duty to show Americans a wide spectrum so as to bring up their interests. Why do you think Americans can win gold in women’s gymnastics? Do you think Americans have the physique for it? No, since the Romanian born gymnast won the gold for us, it became popular. Thousands if not millions of girls every year practice gymnastics. Out of the competition from that many, some have to be good. If they show more fencing, archery ... maybe the Americans would put more time in other fields and dominate all fields in four or eight years! I wish some TV program could promote math, reading/writing, geography ... so some more young men and women can be inspired in those fields.

Looking back after the games, we see a tremendous record shattering year. Mike Phelps is definitely a very special talented person. However, he was not the only one who broke many records when he won the eight gold medals. In some races, even the second or the third place broke the old record. Many records in many other fields were also broken.

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Really nothing interesting in this issue*
- *Write your own article*
- *Write about your life*
- *Write about your dog(s)*
- *Write a puzzle*
- *Write your opinion(s)*
- *Make discussion on the articles here*
- *Show you disagree with some of the writings in here.*
- *Write your letter to the editor*
- *Tell the editor why he is wrong*
- *Tell the editor how he is wrong*
- *Just tell the editor he is wrong*

## Water, Ice, Temperature

### Shiangtai Tuan

When you order an ice drink, they will fill up your glass with ice and fill it up with whatever you order, be it tea or Coke. This way, they sell you a glass of mostly ice. Say, maybe you are lucky this time. Ice cubes in your drink do not reach the bottom. Now, leave it there and help me do an experiment. See the top pieces sticking up above the water surface? Do you think the water level is to rise after all ice cubes melt? "Of course not," you say, "don't be arrogant like some politicians. I have been through high school too." You are perfectly right. The water level is not going to change. Let's do it in a larger, easier to observe scale. Put, say, 5 gallons of water in a large bucket. Put in a wooden log that weighs exactly one pound and mark the water level. Take the log out and put in exactly one pound of water, mark the water level. Take one pound of water out and then put in a huge chunk or cube of ice that weighs exactly one pound. Mark the level. Wait until the ice melts and make a mark of the water level again.

You will see all four marks are at the same height. You had better believe it. That was what Archimedes yelled "Eureka" for. If you have a toy boat that weighs exactly one pound, it will cause the water go up to the same height. It is the "displacement", or the tonnage, of the boat.

Similarly, icebergs on the sea behaves the same way. The huge piece of ice you see is only the tip. The majority is below the water level, just like the ice cube in your cup. In the meanwhile, the ice cap in the Arctic Ocean around North Pole is nothing but a huge piece of ice.

Whether it is in ice form or liquid form is not going to change the sea level by an iota. Of course, ice on land is a different story. If you throw your ice cube in the sea while you are standing on land, not in a boat, I am sure it will increase the sea level, though by a very small amount (more than the amount if the north pole ice cap is melted.) I do believe there will be a sea level change if ice on high mountains, Greenland, or Antarctica would melt.

In the last paragraph, I ignored the minute expansion of water due to temperature. It is so little you should not see the difference with the naked eye for a few degrees of change in temperature. Talking about temperature, if two bodies are at rest next to each other, so long the dividing wall is not heat insulating like a double window or a firewall, heat will "transfer" from the side of higher temperature to the other side. In a crude sense, it is almost analogous to water flowing from the side of higher level to the other. The amount of heat transfer can also be measured. We define the unit of heat as the amount of heat that cause the increase of a unit of water by one degree in temperature (in cgs or centimeter-gram-second system of units the unit of heat is a calorie). The interesting fact is that it takes 80 times as much heat transfer to change a unit of water to ice or vice versa. That means if

you have a lot of ice in your iced tea, you would have to pump in 80 times as much heat to melt the ice as you would to increase it by one degree before the tea would start to increase temperature. Say, you have a lake near your house where you go ice-skating in the winter. Say, the lake has a sunny beach where the sands get to be a few degrees above freezing under the sun. Also assume the other side of the lake is in the shade under some trees.

Imaging the day when the shady side has started to freeze. This is a miniature "eco system" in equilibrium. When the sun is stronger, some ice will melt but the water temperature cannot rise before all ice melts. When the sun is lower and the wind picks up, some more ice will form. The ice covering, therefore, serves as a reservoir of heat energy.

It may absorb some energy, may lose some energy at times but the water stays at approximately the same temperature. There is of course a slight difference now and then, from here to there because the heat transfer is not very fast. When the outside supplier provides less heat, say, in the winter, the whole lake freezes and the temperature of equilibrium start to lower. (Yes, ice skating time!!) Earth too, being at this specific distance from the Sun for a long, long time, receiving energy from Sun's radiation and losing energy from her own radiation, has reached equilibrium. All conditions being equal (same size, same amount of land mass and ocean size ... ) the closer a planet to the sun the higher a temperature range it maintains in this equilibrium. Like the lake, Earth has the North Pole ice cap as a heat reservoir. It keeps the temperature within a few degrees even though there is a lot of heat gain or loss.

When there is a lot more energy radiated from earth than she receives, the ice cap grows bigger into an ice age for a few billion years. When she receives more than radiates, the ice age ends for a while and lives gets to prosper for a while -- a few billion years\*.

When you read up to this point, those of you who think people caused a greenhouse effect probably think I am making an excuse for human beings and those who do not think people are responsible for the earth warming probably think I am making just such a claim. But no. I am not endorsing either side here. Don't have to quickly take me as the enemy no matter which side you are on. I merely wish people would learn a little fundamental knowledge before making scary predictions. To say the temperature is to rise wildly before the ice cap melts or to say the North Pole ice cap is to melt which would cause the water level to rise 70 feet in New York city only show the ignorance if not stupidity of the speaker. Besides, it is counter productive. Now that a big portion of the ice cap is gone and there is still not a visible rise of water level in New York Harbor, people would disregard the entire talk and ignore the warning, whether it is valid or not.

\* Assuming there had been four major ice ages and the earliest one being 2.7 billion years ago. Who knows, maybe you can find some other evidence to support some other theory. It is your assignment.

(Conti. From P. 1, Olympics)

That was definitely not expected when the broadcasters were busy making fun of the "polluted Beijing air" before the game. In fact, many experts attributed the success to the facilities. Most important of all, the swimming pool is three meters deep instead of two. It is also two lanes wider than the required minimum. This structure eliminates the wave reflected from the bottom and the side. The improved lane dividers also helped. The, the shape of the "bird nest" stadium helped the wind and climate control. The running lane surface also attributed. The water at the rowing event was always mirror calm. Other than the slight polluted air in the first couple of days before a rain, the rest of the time had ideal weather. Well, maybe not ideal but better than expected in any large city on earth. The conditions for the games in those few days were rated the best ever and probably better than any in the next few Olympics, at least the next one in London. Well, speculations again. Who knows. UK might come up with \$50 billion and beat this 2008 record.

Why do you think the facility in Beijing was so good and why do you think I mentioned \$50 billion? It was because the Chinese government spent estimated \$44 billion for this project. Why do you think they wanted to spend so much money for "just a game"? They want to use this occasion to show the world that China is not a backward country as many think. Being the "best host" itself was a gold medal. In addition to the facilities, in those few days, they closed down the factories in the neighborhood and ordered less (I think it is half) auto traffic into the city to reduce pollution. For the past few years, they required taxi drivers to learn some basic English. They put traffic checkpoints at many intersections in Beijing and ordered Beijing citizens not to go on streets unless necessary. They succeeded even with the horrible earthquake happening just before the games. From all that, I can see many positive and many negative sides. Let me present what I see as negative first.

It is hard for me to imagine what \$44 billion is. The buying power is probably four or five times in China than here in the US. Therefore, it is like spending \$160 billion in the US. The population in China is probably one billion now. So, it is like taking \$41 from each person. The average Chinese is poor. It might be a month's earning out of every Chinese. Of course, they have got no time to squeeze \$41 out of each poor Chinese. The "government" had it. It is a dictatorship government. It can spend on any thing they like. Two years ago, I took a tour in the four famous cities south of Shanghai.

## Troy, New Orleans, and Taipei Shiangtai Tuan

Whenever there is a hurricane in the news, it always reminded me of Katrina and my days in Taipei. I lived in Taipei, Taiwan with my parents for eleven years. Taiwan is a large island at the west side of the Pacific Ocean barely north of the Tropic of Cancer. It fairly similar to the position of Florida in relation to Atlantic Ocean. In hurricane season, tropical disturbances form in Pacific just like those in Atlantic. They would travel west towards land and turn north to closely follow the coast line. The coast line and the land mass structure in that part of

Asia is quite similar to that of America too. We Carolinians are quite familiar with it. Outside of the land, there is a body of shallow water. Outside of this patch of shallow water, there are the Outer Banks, which is a string of islands, marking the edge of the continent because the continental shelf is right beyond that, going straight down miles into the ocean floor. The Asian continent is like that too. The China coast is like the American coast, looking like the cheek of a fat baby. Outside of that is a patch of shallow water and outside of that is a string of islands with the continental shelf just beyond. Only the scale is larger. The patch of shallow water happens to be the East Sea.

The roads between the cities were wider and better than I-40 and there were many road bridges indicating many side roads. Do you remember how many years it took to finish I-85 from Durham to Greensboro, around Durham, US 501 south of Chapel hill ...? If it were in China, it would have taken at most six month. On the other hand, the Chinese government does not think the people's living condition, health condition ... to be important. So, it does nothing about it. The general population is still poor even though the "communist government" claim to "share" the wealth. Another thing, does it not scare you to think they can pull out \$44 billion any time they want to? What if they decide to buy \$44 billion worth of weapons or spend \$44 billion on a war. Look at the discipline of the hundreds of players in the opening ceremony. Think of the power the government have in requiring the factories to close down for a period of a time. What if they impose such power in a war? I have always learned that a democratic system is slow but safe while a dictatorship is very efficient, no matter when it decide to do good or evil. We just saw a very clear demonstration.

Now about the positive side: First of all, I am glad the Chinese government decided to show its power in a friendly way. From a friend, I heard of two encouraging news items. One is that they let the Taipei team in the Olympics only requiring them to be called the Zhong Hwa Tai Bei team. The off shot is that the leader, Mr. Hu, said he was not interested in taking over Taiwan by force but wishes Taiwan "to join China" even if that requires him to change the name of the nation or change the national flag. I do not know what other people think. Personally, I think it is a step forward towards peace. Another item I heard was that the Swiss architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron first submitted the design of the stadium an artist supported it strongly. He happened to be one of them banned for not following the party line. The fact that the authority valued his opinion showed the openness of the government, a great improvement from before. Talking about openness, after the Sichuan earth quake, the authority let all Western reporters in, completely reversing the old closed door policy. I think it was great. What is there to hide? OK, China is poor. Everybody knows that. After the reports went out about the poor conditions and the bravery of the rescue mission, it earned more sympathy than blame. Help and cooperation poured in. I think that encouraged the authorities to trust the Western reporters.

Any way, it was a good start. I hope more friendship, cooperation and peace follow.

(This is the Chinese name. Throughout history, you don't see Chinese name anything "Chinese." They could be East Bandits for the thieves from the East, Northern barbarians if they were from the north ... etc. This particular sea is called China sea on maps printed in America or Europe, called Japan Sea on maps printed in Japan.) The string of islands just inside the continental shelf, marking the edge of the continent consists of Japan, Ryukyu, and Taiwan. However, hurricanes do not know the depth of water. They only go close to the land and turn. In the mean while, Taiwan is a longish island lying north and south with the northern end  
(Conti. To P. 4. Troy)

## Desert, Tel Aviv, Beijing, Seoul At Large Column Shiangtai Tuan

Once at a party, I overheard a comment claiming that pollution in Beijing, China was so severe that it gave Seoul the smog. I said to blame Beijing for smog in Seoul is like to blame New Orleans for pollution in Tampa, Florida. The distances and bodies of water between those pairs are quite similar. Besides, why wouldn't whole Korea be covered by this "Beijing smog". The pollution particles must all be highly intelligent. After they cross Yellow Sea, they all decide to navigate towards Seoul and have a party there. Maybe Korean Mensa could invite them, those particles, to join the club.

Well, being a scientist, I did not want to simply wave my hand and keep on talking over my head. Like all modern day coach potatoes, I did some Googling. Apparently, there are two kinds of pollution in Seoul. One is the kind that is well known in many large cities, caused by local auto traffic and near by industries. Presumably, in recently years, the proud Seoul citizens can tell you that they have been very successfully combating it. They can take leisure walks in the parks again and the stream in the park is again clear. The other kind of "pollution" is caused by sand from Gobi desert blown in by the trade wind. Yes, I have heard of the sand wind. In Beijing, there is a "sand season" every year when wind from the North West carries Gobi sand and dry air to town. Everything, sofa, dining table, TV set ... is then covered with

## Sigh of Relief MEditor Column Shiangtai

It was August 23, Wednesday afternoon when I got the combined print-out of the last issue of Mblem and our directory. Before that, the June issue of Mblem was lost and the printer printed it again free of charge and delivered to me. It was late for the month anyway, so it was sitting in my living room, waiting to be combined with this new printout. After I got back from a rehearsal that evening at about 10 PM, I started to put the two together. That is, I will pick up a piece of already folded of the newly printed Mblem and directory combination from one pile and a piece of the June issue from another pile, put them together

and put it into a third pile. I thought it would be done in no time. However, when I finished the boxes, it was four o'clock in the morning.

Waking up at about 8:30, I was eager to finish the job. So, at 9 AM, after a cereal breakfast, I started to staple the newly combined issues. To my utter disappointment, my automatic, electric stapler was not able to drive the staples through. It was only then I realized that the stapler was for 20 sheets only and our combination had 28 sheets to punch through. My hand stapler banded the staples too. In desperation, I was considering driving to Kinko's to ask them to do the stapling. Then I remembered that I had some more hand staplers I have not use for years. I dug all five of them out and tried each one. Three worked

all right if I was careful. Two of them failed every time. It was a great test to weed out weak staplers. So, I quickly threw the two "bad" ones away. It took me to 12:30 PM to finish stapling but I think it was still faster than driving to Kinko's, waiting for them to do it (who knows, in a few hours or in a day or two) and driving back.

My fastest time in labeling was about hour and a half. This time, the condition was not ideal. A phone call to the Post Office let me know that the bulk mail office stayed open till 7 PM. This encouraged me to carry on. When labeling, sorting to post office were all done it was 6 PM. A big sigh of relief, now it is time for the next issue, time to write four or five articles to fill the pages.

(Conti. From P, 3 Troy)  
slightly tilted towards the east, that is, parallel to the coast line. As a result, the hurricanes either traverse the total length or miss it barely on either side. That is why hurricanes are called Taiphon, or Taifen (Tai wind) in Chinese.

In any case, every year, whenever a hurricane formed, we would wish it pass by on either side of the island. Four or five of the ten to twenty hurricanes would hit us every year. Every time we would have to clean the yard afterwards. Luckily, our house was not damaged often. However, the fence between us and our next door neighbor often fell over. Mr. Jiang, our neighbor, worked in a

sand. I did not know this effect actually reached Korea. According to Seoul Travel Guide put out by VirtualTourist.com:

"Also, in the Spring (especially May) there is "Yellow Wind". This toxic breeze comes from the Gobi desert where it is pretty tame stuff--but after flying over the moist West Sea it grows fungus and bacteria in its clouds and by the time it gets to Seoul it could be dangerous for kids and old folks. (This is one reason why some kids sport the Hello Kitty face masks.) I haven't noticed anything, and I see people jogging in it, but when the wind is at its worst the city gets a bombed-out look to it (haze and fewer people in the streets)."

Apparently, for a less informed person, especially if he/she is in a "blame everything on China" mood, the two kinds of pollution can easily be unintentionally (or, intentionally) mixed together to create a seemingly impressive claim.

This kind of "sand wind" exists not only in Asia. When I was in Germany, a German young lady told me that there was a season when the south wind came in from Sahara and would make the air dry. She said she, and many others, would have dry skin or even worse health problems such as asthma. There was a name for it but unfortunately I don't remember it\* and could not find anything about it on Internet. Someone please help. I did find, however, a study done in Israel on the effect of Sahara sand. If you are member of AGU or have access to Journal of Geophysical Research, read this article: "Dust and pollution aerosols over the Negev desert, Israel: Properties, transport, and radiative effect". You can find the abstract at

<http://www.agu.org/pubs/crossref/2006/2005JD006549.shtml>.

\* Our knowledgeable friend/member, Ed, told me it was "Sirocco."

big company. Their company usually paid for the repairing. How lucky could we be! In our economic condition, if it had been left for us, we would have simply left it there till the next season. In fact, I do remember the time the fence leaned on one of our trees for months.

After the near total destruction of New Orleans three years ago, everybody was enthusiastically talking about rebuilding the city. I made myself unpopular by suggesting \*not\* to rebuild the old city (my message to the menc-forum list). Some other Mensans had different idea. Let me present my case here again.

(Conti. to P. 5, Troy)

(Conti. From P. 4 Troy ) Hope it will initiate some discussion. In fact, if you wish to make discussion on any of the articles by me or by anyone else, please feel free. We \*needed\* that.

Most cities started from an unexpected origin at, say, intersections of trade routes, junctions of rivers, mouths of rivers, fishing villages ... etc. Cities also vanish either slowly or suddenly. For instance, many cities along the Silk route simply disappeared. Hundreds or even thousands of years later they were discovered by archeologists by digging them out under the sand in the Middle East. Several booming towns east of Hillsborough along the north-south trading routes are now reduced to little villages or ghost towns after the routes changed in the past century. The most famous disappeared city was probably Troy. According to Homer, Troy was one of the most prominent city-states. After the Trojan war, it simply vanished until the ruin was recently identified by some archeologists. If the natural condition does not allow, there is no need to use feeding tubes to sustain the life, even though that can be a very painful decision for close relatives. Cities are the same. It has to be looked at case by case though. For New Orleans, it started as a fishing village. Unfortunately, it was surrounded by lower plains. When it started to expend, it had to use that low ground. To fight yearly floods of Mississippi,

they just had to built more and more levees. Eventually most of the city was in "flood plains protected by levees." It is like my roof. It gets more and more leaks and all I do is to put more and more buckets under them. One day either the roof is to burst open or I may trip over a bucket and I would have a horrible situation in front of me. Katrina showed the weakness in New Orleans. Now, I mean, three years ago, we had a lot of death and a lot of people who lost homes, water inside the levee and houses under water. So, people started talking about rebuilding New Orleans. What does that mean? To most outsiders, it is to be able to go to French Quarter for Mardi Gras again. For the residents there it means to return to the old way. That means to pump the water out, rebuild the levee, and rebuild all the houses. Since practically none of the people there could afford to do that, who is to pay for it? Besides, as it was shown later, it would be a terribly messy job to take down every house, move the trash away and build one just like what it was before. Even if that were done, it would be to restore New Orleans back into the "time bomb" condition, waiting for the next Katrina to kill more people and send more into homelessness. Or, they can design a better evacuation plan so before every hurricane, the city is to be sent on the road. Isn't that what is just happening now? As soon as a big hurricane is on the radar, people are ordered to evacuate. Well, maybe

they should not build houses for people. They should issue a house boat for every family.

Then there was the high tech talk. The suggestion was to build a super duper sea-wall surrounding the city so no damage could ever be done to the citizens there. "The Dutch can do it, why can't we?" "We have the best technology in the world." "We can go to the moon, of course, we can build a little dam for a city." "The Chinese can build a Bird Nest and a Water Cube for the Olympics, why can't we build a bigger nest to protect New Orleans against water?" Well, first of all, US is not under a dictatorship. The government cannot do anything until all agree, that will be 2090 and the agreement may be "don't do it". Talking about the Holland situation, the Dutch have absolutely nowhere to go but to die if they do not have the sea wall. They have to have it. Do you want to pay for a super duper sea wall just so someone else can live there, creating poverty problems, gang problems and drug problems? Would you pay for the wall and all the problem just so you can enjoy Mardi Gras once or twice in your life time? I say, let nature take its course. If some one needs to live there, let them find their dry ground. If there need to have a city at the mouth of Mississippi, a city will spring up sooner or later. There is no point to claim land from the sea as the Dutch did because we do not need the land. We have got plenty.