



April 2007

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Abstract

During the Cold War (1945-1990), many western travelers visited countries in the Socialist bloc despite the tension between the capitalist and socialist camps. Different visitors have different rationale in visiting the communist world: some are "fellow travellers" who consider the socialist bloc as a place for political and intellectual pilgrimage, some are trying to seek dialogue and exchange with the communist authorities, while some were just seeking to understand more about the culture and the people. Yet regardless of their rationale, traveling to this "semi-secretive" part of the world was always an exciting experience given the differences in the social, cultural and political atmosphere. On the other hand, western travelers were also important for the communist authorities: besides being a good source of foreign exchange, the journeys of western tourists could also be good opportunities for the authorities to publicize the "achievements of socialist construction" and instill in them an impression that the socialist bloc is strong and prosperous.

Comments

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National Variations of a Socialist Bloc Symbol
Foreigners-Only Facilities in Four Cold War Era
Communist Capitals

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2006-2007 Penn Humanities Forum on Travel
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Final Project Paper
April 2007

**National Variations of a Socialist Bloc Symbol: Foreigners-Only Facilities in
Four Cold War Era Communist Capitals**

Leonard K. Tso

During the Cold War (1945-1990), many western travelers visited countries in the Socialist bloc despite the tension between the capitalist and socialist camps. Different visitors have different rationale in visiting the communist world: some are “fellow-travellers” who consider the socialist bloc as a place for political and intellectual pilgrimage, some are trying to seek dialogue and exchange with the communist authorities, while some were just seeking to understand more about the culture and the people. Yet regardless of their rationale, traveling to this “semi-secretive” part of the world was always an exciting experience given the differences in the social, cultural and political atmosphere. On the other hand, western travelers were also important for the communist authorities: besides being a good source of foreign exchange, the journeys of western tourists could also be good opportunities for the authorities to publicize the “achievements of socialist construction” and instill in them an impression that the socialist bloc is strong and prosperous. On the other way round, however, the authorities were afraid that incoming western tourists could “contaminate” the thoughts of the local population through mutual interaction. Under such a background, western tourists to communist countries during the Cold War would only be shown what the authorities wished them to see and were prevented from having direct communication with members of the local populace, except those pre-arranged ones who were trained to repeat the official line to the visitors. As a result, “foreigners-only” facilities, such as hotels, shops and restaurants, were set up in socialist countries since the 1920s to deal with western tourism to the communist world, separate the visitors from the local population, and to

earn convertible, commonly known as “hard” currency. While these facilities share the identical *raison d’être* among all countries in the bloc, there existed also distinct country-by-country features in terms of architecture, policy towards tourists, and some other areas. These would be related to the policy of national governments, and other factors as well.

The Evolution of “Foreigners-Only” Facilities

The entire history of foreigners-only facilities started in the late 1920s, when the Soviet government decided to set up three organizations. The first one was the State Tourist Company named *Intourist* in 1929.¹ *Intourist* was authorized to attract foreign tourists to the USSR by selling tours to western tourists, and to organize their accommodation, transportation and other arrangements inside the Soviet Union. In 1933, *Intourist* merged with another state-owned company named VAO and became in charge of running hotels for foreign tourists, namely *National*, *Metropole* and *Savoy* in Moscow.² The second one, also established in 1929, was *Torgsin* (All-Union Company for Trade with Foreigners). As time went by, especially after 1931 when the Soviet government banned incoming packages of food for individuals, *Torgsin* had developed into a network of shops around the country that customers could only buy goods with “hard” convertible currencies such as US dollars and Pound Sterling.³ It served two purposes. First of all, it supplied goods and provisions to foreigners and to foreign steamers entering the Soviet Union, and also accept orders for Russian antiques and souvenirs.⁴ On the other hand, *Torgsin* also sold food to the Soviet people at an inflated price for convertible currency (*valuta*), gold, silver and diamonds.⁵ The third one, which was far less well-known than *Intourist* and *Torgsin*, was *Ins nab* (Supply of Foreigners)

shops which provided supplies solely for foreign experts in Soviet Union who received better rations than their Soviet colleagues.⁶ The reason for the Soviet authorities to set up these three bodies was largely economic. During the 1930s, Stalin launched a massive program of industrialization in his five-year plans. As a result, foreign exchange was in extreme necessity for importing foreign machinery.⁷ *Torgsin* was liquidated in 1936, yet *Intourist* stayed on, and would become a must-know for all western tourists to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The *Torgsin* and *Insnab* stores would be transformed in the early 1960s into *Berizoka* stores.

With the spread of communism after the Second World War, numerous communist regimes were set up in Eastern Europe and East Asia, spanning from Germany to the Pacific Coast. Once the new communist governments were set up, they recognized the need to provide facilities to accommodate foreign visitors, then mainly in political, trade and cultural delegations. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, under the influence of de-Stalinization and increasing interaction between the socialist and capitalist camps, more western travelers visited socialist bloc countries. As a result, the number of “foreigners-only” hotels and shops quickly increased. All national authorities in the socialist bloc would like to set up such facilities to attract foreign exchange, accommodate foreign visitors, provide them with an officially preferred image, and to separate them from the general populace. However, the features of such facilities actually differ country by country. For illustration, four communist capital cities: Moscow (Soviet Union), East Berlin (East Germany), Beijing (China) and Pyongyang (North Korea) are selected for further comparison and analysis. Three types of metrics will be used in this

comparison: the architectural and decorative features of such facilities, services provided, and the degree of control on tourists.

Moscow

Before the Second World War, there were few tourists to the Soviet Union, usually several thousands per year. The situation remained the same during the early years of the Cold War, when the world gradually became divided into two camps. Visiting tourists at that time usually came as official delegations or tour groups organized by “friendly” groups. With Stalin’s death in 1953 and the rise of Khrushchev who promoted “Peaceful Co-existence”, more attempts were made to promote exchange between the Soviet Union and the western world. For example, academic exchange programmes were held in 1958 for American exchange students to study in Leningrad.⁸ Besides, journalists were allowed to visit the Soviet Union and visit even the inner cities.⁹ By the early 1960s, the Soviet authorities have loosened its control on western tourists slightly by imposing two policies. First, around 1960 *Intourist* launched a new travel option named the Pension Plan.¹⁰ Instead of providing an all-inclusive package, this new plan only included hotel accommodation, transportation from the hotel and the airport, at least one meal every day with breakfast being the minimum, and at least one *Intourist*-arranged excursion in every stop of the route.¹¹ Second, foreign tourists were allowed to take cars of their own across land border crossings, in particular the Finnish-Soviet Border. This method of traveling was actually publicized by the Soviet authorities with the publication of a few travel guides specifically for motorists traveling on Soviet highways in 1968. In a 1972 publication, the Soviet authorities stated that “motoring is becoming the most popular type of tourism in the USSR.”¹² Although more options of

individual travel in the USSR were provided, yet restrictions remained. Tourists were still required to stick to pre-arranged routes and stay at hotels and campgrounds administered by *Intourist*.¹³ With the increase of western travelers to the Soviet Union, the system of foreigners-only facilities also developed as well. In the 1930s till the early 1960s, *Intourist* only administered 3 hotels in Moscow.¹⁴ By the 1970s, it owned 14 hotels and 2 camping grounds in the Moscow region.¹⁵ With the hosting of the 1980 Olympics, the amount of foreigners-only hotels continued to increase. “Hard currency stores” for foreign tourists, named *Beriozka* (Birch Tree) stores, were established in 1965.¹⁶

The architectural characteristics of *Intourist* hotels in Moscow were very diverse. However, they could be divided into three types. The first type was those built before the Russian Revolution in 1917. Examples include the *Metropole* Hotel, completed in 1903, which was a piece of *style moderne* architecture.¹⁷ Another example is the *National* Hotel, also completed in 1903. Once the seat of the Soviet government and the residence of Lenin, the *National* is a Victorian building, with a ceiling fresco and a collection of antiques inside.¹⁸ The second type consisted of the hotels built between the 1930s and 1950s. Examples include the *Moskva* Hotel, completed in 1935 and most notably the *Leningradskaya* and *Ukraina* hotels, completed in 1954 and 1957 respectively. All of them were representatives of Stalinist architecture, with the *Leningradskaya* and *Ukraina* being members of the famous set of Stalinist Skyscrapers known as the “Seven Sisters”.¹⁹ The third type was those built after the Stalinist period, such as the *Rossiia* Hotel (1967) and the *Intourist* hotel (1970). These hotels were built in Soviet terms “simple, modern structure”, or in western terms “soulless architectural façade” which consisted of simply blocks of concrete with large squares of glass. The evolution of the architectural

characteristics of such hotels actually corresponded to the development of Soviet architecture as a whole.

In terms of services provided, the Soviet *Beriozka* stores, which accepted hard currency only, sold foreign imported goods as well as Soviet souvenirs. Hotels and restaurants in Moscow provided services similar in kind to the west. However, service in the Soviet Union was notoriously inefficient. One famous example was the elevator operator, who was always away from her work, taking a rest or having a cup of tea. A visitor once commented that the waiting time for an elevator in the *Ukraina* as “interminable”.²⁰ Service in Moscow’s restaurants was also another issue. There was no systematic reservation system and most foreign visitors to Moscow had to face “the Great Wait” at least once during their visit which tourists had to wait for an extended period of time for either the food or the bill to come.²¹ However, since Moscow was the capital of the USSR, all the Soviet Republics had a restaurant in the city, which made Moscow the center of all kinds of cuisines, ranging from the renowned Georgian wine to Uzbek *shashlik* (lamb on a spit cooked in Uzbek style). Besides, some restaurants had political connotations as well. For example, *Mir* (Peace) was a restaurant catering the delegates of the COMECON, the economic cooperation body of the Soviet Bloc, but was also open to the public. Plaques along the wall depicted the capital cities of the COMECON’s member states.²² Furthermore, the *Mir* had a number of dishes from other socialist countries. Another one is *Pekin*, which was originally a gift by the newly established Chinese communist government during the heyday of Sino-Soviet friendship. During that period of time, chefs, wines and ingredients were all flown in from China. However, after the Sino-Soviet split the Chinese staff returned to China and Muscovites stopped going to the

restaurant.²³ Even some of the dishes have “political” names, for example, the “Chinese Friendship Assortment” was a gelatin made of fish and cabbage with other garniture.

In terms of control on tourists, despite a slight relaxation of policy towards foreign tourism in the early 1960s, the Soviet authorities had imposed tough control measures to ensure that tourists would travel in permitted areas and their actions could be tracked down. The corridors on every floor of every hotel was guarded by a lady named *dezhurnaya* who would collect the keys of residents as they left the hotel and return them when they came back.²⁴ Besides, among the West German tourists especially, Hotel *Berlin* (formerly *Savoy*) in Moscow had the reputation of a “KGB-hotel” with electronic spying devices.²⁵ However, the answer was more complex when dealing with the question of whether western tourists could see the general populace. In hotels, the answer is “no”: Soviet citizens were not allowed to stay in foreigners-only hotels, and some of these hotels, like the *Rossiya*, had special identification cards for residents so that the local populace could not get in.²⁶ The authorities were in particular very cautious about any contact between foreign visitors and Russians. For example, one Russian émigré who stayed in the *Rossiya* in 1971 and drinking in the hotel bar was brought away by plainclothes police, searched and detained for a few hours simply because an American visitor sitting next to him made his elbow wet and the visitor offered him a drink.²⁷ The situation, however, was a little bit relaxed in *Beriozka* shops and restaurants. A small group of Soviet citizens with convertible currencies were actually able to use their foreign exchange certificates to buy goods and hence foreign tourists could see them. The situation was even more open in restaurants. With the exception of a few *valuta* restaurants and bars primarily serving western tourists with hard currency, western

tourists were actually able to dine in restaurants where Muscovites went to. There were no strictly “Foreigners-Only” restaurants. As a result, they were actually able to see ordinary Soviet citizens in restaurants instead of eating in an environment surrounded by other foreign tourists, which was the case in North Korea and China. One British traveler once wrote that “At the most expensive restaurant in Moscow, the *Praga*, where decorations are comparable with those in Mayfair and prices three times as high, the clientele looked like lorry drivers who had been on the road all night and were breaking their fast at a pull-up.”²⁸ While this was an attack on the atmosphere of Soviet restaurants, it was also clear evidence that visitors were actually able to see ordinary citizens.

East Berlin

In contrast with Moscow, East Berlin’s scenario was very different. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), commonly known as East Germany, was not open to western visitors of most kinds in the 1950s and even during the first few years of the 1960s while the communist regime was still consolidating power. Besides, de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union and the corresponding thaw in relations with the west came slowly in East Germany. Until the early 1960s, requests from American journalists to visit the country were never responded by the authorities.²⁹ Western tourism in East Germany started during the 1960s and continued to develop, in particular since the 1970s when détente started and the Basic Treaty between East and West Germany was signed in 1973 which both sides agreed to recognize each other’s sovereignty. This led to an increase in East Germany’s interaction with both West Germany and the wider international community. During the 1970s between 5 and 7 million West Germans and

West Berliners visited East Germany each year.³⁰ The geographical proximity to the western world and the relatively open policy to the west would be largely affecting the features of “Foreigners-Only” facilities in East Berlin.

In the aspects of architectural and decorative features, the dividing line had to be drawn in 1965, when the *Interhotel* group, the chain of hotels for western tourists, was established.³¹ A tourist guide of East Germany printed in 1962 provided a list of hotels in East Berlin for tourists. The list consisted of some old hotels, including the famous Hotel *Adlon*, opened in 1907.³² However, after 1965 most foreign tourists would stay in properties of the *Interhotel* group. A striking feature of *Interhotel* properties in East Berlin in the 1960s and 1970s was that they were all “modern” structures. In fact, most Interhotels in East German cities were all constructed in the “modern structure” of concrete plus glass. One example would be *Hotel Stadt Berlin*, completed in 1970 right next to the TV tower in Alexanderplatz, the city center of East Berlin. With 40 floors and 2000 beds, it was the tallest hotel in Europe and the second-largest, only surpassed by the *Rossiya* in Moscow.³³ Since the 1970s, some *Interhotel* properties were built in western standards, many of them built actually by foreign firms, including the *Metropole* (opened 1977) and the *Palast* (opened 1979) hotels.³⁴ In terms of architecture, there were no distinct German national characteristics. The rationale for building hotels that were up to standards was to attract hard currency from western tourists.

Based on a similar line, service provided in “Foreigners-Only” facilities in East Berlin was largely “modern”. Publicity materials published by the *Interhotel* group emphasized on how advanced their service was for visitors by stating that “our research bureau is constantly gathering information on the latest gastronomical developments in

Moscow, Warsaw, Budapest, Sofia, Helsinki, Stockholm, Vienna, Paris and other cities”.³⁵ Besides, they also took initiatives to improve every minute detail of their service. For example, the restaurant manager and chef at *Interhotel Unter der Linden* called the kitchen staff and apprentices for a competition to set up a best dining experience for children aged 6 to 8. This included table arrangements, taste of the dishes and nutritional value of the food. The comfort of the young diners was also cared about by providing them with cushions so that they could reach the dining table easily.³⁶ This showed an apparent emphasis by the *Interhotel* authorities in providing service along western standards to attract tourists with hard currency. In their hard currency stores, known as *Intershops* and established in 1955, the products sold were largely imports from western countries.

East Germany seemed to be more lenient in her policy of control towards western tourists. First of all, GDR citizens were actually allowed to stay in *Interhotels*. By the late 1970s, four-fifths of the customers staying in *Interhotels* were actually GDR citizens.³⁷ According to 1986 statistics, more than a third of the nights demanded for *Interhotels* all across East Germany were actually from GDR guests.³⁸ Besides, East German citizens were allowed to go into *Intershops*, the “hard currency stores”. With the exception of those who hold hard currency or Forum checks, which were exchange certificates converted from hard currencies, East German citizens were not allowed to buy goods. However, with the decriminalization of the possession of Western currency in 1974, they were also officially open to East Germans, and quickly became a source for East Germans to buy goods of higher quality.³⁹ By 1976, as much as 85 percent of the revenue of *Intershops* came from East Germans.⁴⁰ Ironically these shops and hotels, originally

intended for the use of visiting foreigners, became the breeding ground of consumerism in East Germany.

Beijing

The reception of foreign visitors to the People's Republic of China started in 1954, when China established her equivalent of the *Intourist*, the China International Travel Service (CITS). Westerners have continued to visit China since the 1950s. However, there were very few western travelers for leisure purposes: most of them were government officials, journalists, writers and academics who came to China on official business or cultural exchange. The majority of "leisure" tourists were Overseas Chinese returning to see their homeland and meet members of the family. As a result, the role of instilling an officially favored impression of the country through these facilities, especially hotels, was more important than attracting hard currency.

In terms of architectural and decorative features, hotels in Beijing stroke a huge contrast in comparison with that in Moscow and East Berlin. Chinese cultural characteristics were clearly incorporated into the architecture and décor of the buildings. Before China opened up in 1978, western visitors were usually arranged to stay in either the *Beijing (Peking) Hotel* or the *Hsin Chiao (Xin Qiao) Hotel*.⁴¹ The *Beijing Hotel* was usually allocated to visiting delegations, while the *Hsin Chiao* was the residence for visiting writers and journalists. The *Beijing Hotel*, founded by two Frenchmen in 1900, had three wings which represented different styles of architecture. The old wing was completed in 1907 and was a traditional European-style building.⁴² The west wing was completed in 1954 according to the "Polish Modern" style.⁴³ The east wing was completed in 1974 and was a glass-and-concrete structure.⁴⁴ Despite its western external

façade, the interior décor of the hotel was full of Chinese characteristics. For example, the front lobby of the west wing resembled a Chinese palace: large pillars with lotus-shaped carvings in the hall and Chinese-style chandeliers on the ceiling, yet the carpet and the marble floor made one remember that this was a modern hotel.⁴⁵ Besides, the entire hotel compound was decorated with paintings of Chinese scenery and paintings, including those of famous painters such as Qi Baishi and Xu Beihong. Not even one single painting in the hotel was made by a non-Chinese painter. Rooms in both *Beijing* and *Hsin Chiao* hotels were decorated in Chinese style. In short, foreigners-only hotels in Beijing were built in a style that mixed Chinese and western features.

In terms of the services provided, the foreigners-only store system in Beijing was more comprehensive than those in Moscow and East Berlin. The Friendship store, which was the foreigners-only shop in Beijing, was a fully equipped three-storey department store and supermarket.⁴⁶ It had a wide range of services including cleaning service, watch repair service, shipping office, bank, florist, tropical fish section and tailoring department.⁴⁷ Rooms were spacious, clean and well-lit. It also sold foodstuff not available in local stores such as German-style cold cuts and even caviar.⁴⁸ Besides the food collection, Chinese souvenirs, scrolls and carpets were also available.⁴⁹ While the Friendship store was similar to the Soviet *Beriozka* stores or the East German *Intershops*, the most distinct part of the Chinese store system was on the fact that another group of stores were also made “foreigners-only” in addition to the official hard-currency stores. The most famous examples were the Chinese antique shops on the famous cultural street *liulichang*.⁵⁰ Besides, even some restaurants were made “foreigners-only”. For example, the *Fangshan* restaurant in Beihai Park, which was renowned for its Qing dynasty

imperial cuisine, was open only to foreign visitors and visiting Overseas Chinese.⁵¹ In short, many of the best restaurants in Beijing were made “foreigners-only”. Another example of this policy was *tanjiacai*, one of the most renowned cuisine served in the *Beijing* hotel. It originated from a small restaurant in Beijing. In 1958, Premier Zhou En-lai visited the restaurant and was amazed at the food. He then instructed that the restaurant be moved to *Beijing* Hotel so that while on one hand the chefs would have a more comfortable environment, the food could also be served to foreign guests.⁵²

In comparison with East Germany and even the Soviet Union, the control on tourists was far stricter in China. First of all, there were very few examples which the tourists were allowed to explore the streets of Beijing on their own. Local residents were banned from entering the foreigners-only hotels. As one visitor to Beijing mentioned the situation in the *Beijing* Hotel, “The foreigners live in splendid isolation.”⁵³ Unlike the previously mentioned cities, Chinese were banned from entering “foreigners-only” facilities regardless of whether they had hard currency or not, though it was hugely difficult to get hard currency in China, in comparison with East Germany or the USSR.

Pyongyang

With the opening of China in 1978 and the end of the Cold War in 1990, foreigners-only facilities ceased to exist in Soviet Bloc countries and China. However, till today North Korea, or in her full name the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), still retained the entire “Foreigners-Only” system and has imposed tight control over tourists. Although the State Bureau of Tourism was established in 1953 and the first International Hotel, the *Taedonggang*, was completed in the 1960s or earlier, yet there were extremely few tourists from non-socialist countries, and all visitors came in the

format of official visits or friendly delegations.⁵⁴ The very first non-Communist Americans who visited North Korea were New York Times journalist Harrison Salisbury and his staff who visited Pyongyang in 1972.⁵⁵ By the end of the 1970s, however, North Korea tried to open up herself, first by holding the World Table Tennis Championships in 1979, then by trying to co-host the 1988 Olympics with Seoul, South Korea. When the attempt failed, Pyongyang decided to respond by holding the World Festival of Youth and Students, the youth fiesta of the communist bloc, in 1989. As a result, more tourist facilities were built during the late 1980s, most famously the *Koryo* hotel, completed in 1985 and still remained as the top hotel in North Korea today. Leisure travel was allowed starting in the 1990s, both as attempts of propaganda and source of hard currency.

The architecture of most foreigners-only hotels was “modern” structure which was simply a combination of white-colored concrete with pieces of glass. The *Koryo* hotel was slightly different, being a brownish red-color twin-tower structure. The internal décor of Hotel *Koryo* was quite different from that in China: there were no distinct Korean national characteristics, yet there were paintings of Korean landscape, Kim Il Sung, former leader of North Korea, and his son Kim Jong Il. The pictures of *Kimilsungia* and *Kimjongilia*, both flowers glorifying the two leaders, could be found in the decorations of the *Koryo* hotel.⁵⁶ Besides these pictures, however, there was no incorporation of any traditional Korean cultural characteristics into the architecture, which was unusual when compared to other important buildings in the city.

In terms of service, the distinctive feature of the hotels in Pyongyang was the Japanese influence on hotel services and facilities. Hotel *Koryo* used a lot of Japanese electrical appliances, including lights by National, elevators and TV made by Hitachi,

and toilet facilities by Toto, all famous Japanese brands.⁵⁷ Furthermore, surprisingly there were karaoke bars, pachinko machines and even slot machines in Hotel *Koryo* – these three were all absent in Moscow, East Berlin and Beijing.⁵⁸ Pachinko parlor actually appeared in North Korea since the late 1980s, when the first one was opened in *Chongnyon* (Youth) hotel.⁵⁹ This strong Japanese impact on the hospitality given at foreigners-only hotels, in particular the *Koryo*, was ironic since North Korea always portrayed Japan as her arch-enemy in official propaganda.

North Korea imposed extremely strict control on incoming tourists. Tourists were not allowed to walk alone outside the hotel and would be tailed by plainclothes police very soon after leaving the hotel.⁶⁰ Some hotels were even designed to prevent visitors from launching their own unauthorized visits. For example, the *Yanggakdo* International Hotel, completed in 1995, was built on an island right outside the city center. While the tourists were free to walk on the island which the hotel was built, they were not allowed, and would be difficult to walk to the city center. North Koreans were not allowed to go into the foreigners-only hotels unless with official business.

Conclusions

Based on the comparison made above, several conclusions could be made. First, while both attracting western tourists with hard currency and controlling the actions of tourists were both *raison d'être* of such “foreigners-only” facilities, East Germany clearly concerned more on the economic prospect of these “foreigners-only” hotels and shops in collecting hard currency from not just foreigners, but also East German citizens who had hard currencies, especially West German Mark. As a result, instead of prohibiting interaction between East German citizens and western tourists, the East German

authorities adopted a freer policy that enabled East German citizens with hard currency to buy goods at *Intershops* and stay in *Interhotels*. In fact, at a more fundamental level, East Germany seemed to value the monetary benefits over the propagandistic value of western travelers coming to East Germany. When East Germany started opening to western visitors in the 1960s, one tourist official said wistfully, “We didn’t build enough new hotels as the Yugoslavs and Hungarians did, who now earn a lot of West money from tourism.”⁶¹ The GDR authorities actually tried to attract visitors by portraying the country as a place where tourists can enjoy the rich historical heritage and relax – showing the “socialist achievements” was not a focus. In short, western tourists were welcomed mostly for the sake of hard currency, not necessarily for propaganda, while all the so-called “foreigners-only” shops and hotels were for attracting hard currency, not segregation between the visitors and the local population.

In contrast, China and North Korea seemed to value more on the importance of control than hard currency. China, in particular, banned all local citizens, regardless of whether they had hard currency or not, from entering Friendship stores. Restrictions on interaction between visitors and local population were strict. One visitor stated, “one is hardly in China in the *Peking* Hotel.”⁶² This could again be linked to whether a western tourist was considered a source of hard currency or a recipient of propaganda. In China, and to quite an extent North Korea, the propagandistic prospect was more important. During those days, a typical itinerary to China must include visits to revolutionary monuments and people’s communes in addition to the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. Besides, in the English-language Guide to Beijing printed by the travel service in the 1970s, the number of pages describing the monuments built after 1958 exceeds that

describing the Forbidden City.⁶³ These all show the apparent emphasis on the propagandistic value of western tourism by the authorities. For this “propaganda journey” to take effect, however, the separation between the tourist and the real situation of the society was very important.

The role of “foreigners-only” facilities in the Chinese propaganda machine, however, was not just an agent insulating the western tourists from the local populace. Instead, such facilities were instilling an image on foreign tourists as well. *Beijing Hotel* was one perfect example. In the hotel compound, elements of Chinese culture could be found everywhere: Chinese architecture was incorporated into the structure of the building, painting by the best Chinese painters were on the walls of corridors and rooms, and Chinese food, made by specially selected chefs, were available in the restaurants. It was not just a hotel, it was also a mini-showcase of Chinese culture. This showcase gave an image of China filled with delicate cuisine, beautiful paintings and architecture, etc. However, the “China” shown through this showcase would be very different from what China actually was like during that period: instead of having delicate cuisine every day, ordinary citizens were suffering from hunger, while traditional art and architecture would be under increasing attack during the political movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, the characteristics of the foreigners-only hotels, the *Beijing Hotel* in particular, reflected the cultural policy of the Chinese authorities of promoting Chinese culture by combining Chinese cultural characteristics into a western form. For example, the internal décor of the *Beijing* and *Hsin Chiao* hotels would be similar to the ones in the “ten constructions”, the ten buildings completed in 1959 in celebration of the 10th

anniversary of communist rule. Other examples of this policy included the composition of symphonies and piano works with Chinese characteristics.

Last but not least, the foreigners-only facilities in North Korea presented a very bizarre and ironic picture. Writer Ian Buruma had once described Pyongyang as a huge stage set that was the closest thing to *Germania*, Hitler's grandiose and happily unrealized vision of the future Berlin.⁶⁴ In Pyongyang, buildings were quite uniform in terms of architectural styles: either a mixture of modern style and Korean traditional characteristics, or simply "soulless" skyscrapers. There is no alternative: the government spreads the message that the DPRK is modern and holds a Korean national identity through every public space in Pyongyang, including the buildings.⁶⁵ While the foreigners-only hotels look like typical skyscrapers in the cityscape, yet the atmosphere inside them are very different. The interior décor of the hotels, the *Koryo* hotel in particular, did not incorporate any Korean national characteristics except putting a few paintings of Korean landscape, which forms a deep contrast with other buildings. In terms of facilities and services, the pachinko machines and the karaoke bars could not be found elsewhere in the "socialist capital". Finally, the wide adoption of Japanese technology and Japanese-style entertainment, at least in the *Koryo*, contrasted drastically with the staunch anti-Japanese rhetoric of the government. In short, these foreigners-only hotels have become small enclaves of eccentricity in this large and homogeneous socialist capital.

Regardless of the various variations in different countries, "Foreigners-Only" facilities were important symbols of this significant era. The existence of such facilities were underpinned by the common political, economic and social characteristics of

Communist Bloc countries: unconvertible local currency and hence the necessity for foreign exchange to conduct foreign trade, authorities' desire to control all individuals in the country, including tourists, and the maintenance of authoritarian rule by blocking information of the outside world from the local populace. Generally speaking, controlling tourists, seeking hard currency and to a lesser extent propagandizing to visitors were the main goals of such facilities, with each country making their own choice on which goal to emphasize on. This choice would be vital in determining the features of the facilities, and again would reflect deeper policy positions of different nations.

Notes

¹ Inturist, *A Pocket Guide to the Soviet Union*, ed. L.A. Block (Moscow: Vneshtorgisdat, 1932), 581.

² Tatiana Nikolaevskaia, *The Art of Living in Moscow: The History of the National Hotel. 1993-2003* (Moscow: Virtual Gallery & Publishing Russian Contemporary Art, 2003), 149.

³ "Sklar's Stores" Time November 9, 1931 [periodical online]; available from <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,742558-1,00.html>>; accessed 25 March 2007

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