

## DISPATCHES

*News and Notes From Around the World*



## Say Lychees!

On the nature of celebrity  
in the middle of nowhere

**CHINA** I'm standing in a soggy field in Hunan Province, surrounded by people in bright traditional costumes milling around at the end of a rain-soaked grape festival. Suddenly, I hear a shout in Mandarin. I look up from the puddles I've been unsuccessfully avoiding. A man stares at me for a second or two, then runs off across the field.

China is riddled with arcane social rules, but I'm pretty sure I haven't done anything to offend anyone, let alone scare them away. Moments later, the man returns with a small child, presumably his son. He thrusts the boy into my arms, then says something I have no hope of understanding. Juggling the child and an umbrella, I smile and deliver one of my five Mandarin words: "*Ni-hao*," or "hello."

By now, it's clear what's going on. International tourists are common in Shanghai, Beijing, and near Xi'an's terracotta warriors, but attract curiosity in many other parts of the country. **From noodle bars to rural festivals, foreigners, bewildered by their sudden celebrity, often find themselves being commandeered for photo-ops.**

No surprise, then, that a small crowd has gathered in this field, personal devices at the ready, to commemorate the presence of the Western woman with the muddy shoes. The kid, who seems to have been through this before, forms his fingers into the peace symbol and holds it next to his toothy grin.

Just then, the boy's father, looking over the shoulder of a woman capturing the moment on her phone, breaks into rapid-fire Mandarin and starts flapping his arms. I'm not sure if it's because he thinks I'm about to drop his son or if he just wants the boy to look at the camera. Finally, the man smiles, says "*Shyeb-shyeb*"—"thanks"—and reclaims his child. Camera clicks follow me all the way back to my bus. —JOHANNA READ

An advertisement for the board game 'Zombies!!! Jr.' The background is a dark red brick wall. At the top, it says 'TWILIGHT CREATIONS PRESENTS ZOMBIES!!! JR. Game Design by Todd and Kerry Breitenstein'. Below this are several cartoon zombie characters: a skull, a blue zombie with a yellow eye, a green zombie with a yellow eye, and a green zombie with glasses. In the center is a game board with various locations like 'Superhero', 'Narf Gun', 'Town Square', and 'Auto Shop'. At the bottom, there are icons for player count (2-6), play time (45), and age (8+). The Twilight Creations Inc. logo is at the bottom, along with the website 'twilightcreationsinc.com' and social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. Copyright information for 2016 is at the very bottom.