1. My first visit to China was in 1987. This was the time when I met Professor Cao XiHua. My travel to China was arranged by Professor Liu ShaoXue from BNU. I gave a series of lectures at Beijing, and the plan was that I should stay also for a week at ECNU. But I arrived at Shanghai later than expected. On the way from Beijing to Shanghai, I wanted to climb mount TaiShan, and I got stuck for 3 days at QuFu waiting to get a train ticket for the continuation (but in this way, I was at least able to see the former homes of KongZi and MengZi).

At Beijing, I had met Professor Tuan Hsio-Fu and now, at Shanghai, there was Professor Cao XiHua. It was very remarkable to see in this way that the spirit of Richard Brauer was really alive in China, and that there was a tremendous interest in the structure and representation theory of groups and algebras, despite the long isolation of the country.

2. At that time, I had started to work on Hall polynomials trying to understand the root combinatorics of representations of Dynkin quivers. Knowing that the interest at Shanghai included questions on Lie theory, I decided to lecture here on these Hall polynomials — it was my first presentation of this topic. As I remember, there were many fruitful discussions with Professor Cao and his collaborators. During my stay at Shanghai, I also got some more insight into Chinese life, I went to a Shanghai Opera and saw the emerging city life of Shanghai (at that time, Beijing was still “the largest village in the world”). My second visit to Shanghai was in 1998, and the changes were very drastic: There was now the Oriental Pearl Tower, there were already many high-rises and there was the perfectly renovated Bund.

3. What I found very impressive was that both Professor Liu and Professor Cao felt their responsibility to take care of the development of algebra in all of China, with Professor Liu surveying mainly northern China, and Professor Cao southern China. They were completely aware of young talents in all parts of China, arranging their study at Beijing or Shanghai (later
also in foreign countries), and asking them to participate for a while in the mathematical life of BNU and ECNU, before they were sent them back to their home universities in order to spread their knowledge. In this way, a unified mathematical culture was emerging across the country. In addition, both (Liu and Cao) were very eager to built up international contacts and to join the world-wide endeavor of creating the mathematical basis for understanding the universe.

4. There was also a thematic division: the interests of Professor Liu were focussed more on abstract ring and module theory, whereas those of Professor Cao were on group and Lie theory. The Hall algebra approach provides a relationship in-between, using the representations of quivers to get information an the structure of semi-simple Lie algebras. It should be stressed that nearly from the beginning, Chinese mathematicians got strongly involved in this topic and made remarkable contributions. As an important land mark, let me mention just the book by Deng, Du, Parshall and Wang.

I remember with great pleasure several conferences which were organized by ECNU, with exciting lectures (and often at very famous locations, say at Kunming or Lhasa). I should also mention numerous visits to Shanghai, partially by joint invitations by SJTU and ECNU. On the other hand, many mathematicians from China, in particular, from the ECNU-group, gave lectures at Bielefeld and made us aware of the progress achieved by them.

5. The conference Forty Years of Algebraic Groups, Algebraic Geometry, and Representation Theory in China will provide an overview of the history and the present state of the subject, and surely will outline future directions. I am certain that this conference will be a great success. Let me send all my best wishes for the conference, and the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Professor Cao’s birth, praising him for having started an exiting development.

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