

## Happy campers

SLG runs most of its camp cycles from Tsinghua University, where SLG rents dorm space.

The camp was housed in a new dormitory. Each unit had air conditioning, a TV, desk, private shower and toilet. But some rooms already had problems — ranging from mold to plumbing issues.

The campers were a friendly

mix of 30 mostly Chinese-American teens, many of them survivors of the ho-hum, community-based, after-school Chinese language classes that ABCs have endured for decades. In Beijing, they were placed in classes according to level of Chinese fluency.

While the SLG program made learning the language more fun, not all special activities were hits. My daughter liked the paper-cutting craft workshop, but was disappointed that Peking opera face painting wasn't a makeup session

— all they did was color in pictures of traditional masks with crayons.

Parents were invited to the field trips, which also varied on the pleasure scale. We enjoyed an acrobat performance and a Korean grilled dinner, but trudging in the heat at Beihai Park was exhausting.

When we rode in two-seater pedicabs to tour some *hutongs* — the centuries-old residential alleyways of Old Peking — one California teen sobbed over being shuttled by human laborers. Her reaction to Third World poverty

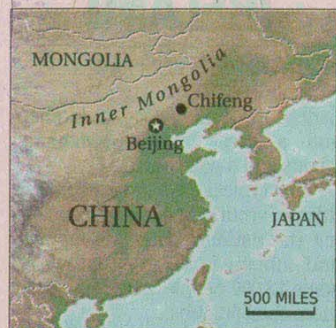
gave me an important chance to talk to my daughter about the suffering of China's masses.

SLG offers private tutoring. I signed up for four hour-long sessions, at a rate of \$12.50 per hour. I finally learned Pinyin, the phonetic system used to sound out Chinese, which is the planet's only major written language not based on an alphabet. I also learned how to use a dictionary to look up the dashes and strokes of the simplified Chinese characters that Mao introduced in order

to encourage literacy.

The camp costs, without airfare, ran about \$2,300 per student and \$1,600 per parent. SLG prices were about the same this past summer — although, the camp has now switched from the four-week camp format we participated in to a new, three-week format. (The road trip has been scaled back to four days.) Details are posted on [www.sinolanguage.com](http://www.sinolanguage.com). SLG's toll-free number is (866) 748-4754.

— Betty Ming Liu



THE STAR-LEDGER