## **Beijing Silk Market**

By DOMINICK A. MERLE



BEIJING---Although it's rarely mentioned in the city's official tourist guides, it's just as rare when a visitor skips Beijing's notorious Silk Street Market.

Yet it is neither a market nor does it deal exclusively in silk. In simple and blunt terms, it is probably the world's largest outlet containing both shoddy and quality imitations (knockoffs) of just about every designer product on the market.

The bustling enterprise actually started out about 25 years ago in an alley with a number of vendors specializing in silk products. More products were added, tourists began arriving and today the result is a six-story building with close to 2,000 business stalls and over 3,000 salespeople.

The stalls are often no bigger than a closet and the salespeople are mostly young and very aggressive. All of the offer half, you're already a loser. big designer brands are here in There are generally four grades copycat Vuitton, Hermes, North Face, good and best. Cartier. Prada etc.--despite And if you're not satisfied with prohibit the imitations.

imitations.

More than 20,000 shoppers visit in one of our rooms. the market weekdays and At the precise hour, the doorbell upwards of weekends. One shopping strategy is to buy a with two huge suitcases on knock-off suitcase with wheels wheels. In a blurring minute or upon entering, and then fill it with two, the beds and couches were your selections, just as you'd do neatly stacked with purses, in a supermarket.

These shoppers generally make and electronic goods. stop before check that can suitcase with the knock-off items to their destination.

If you're not good at bargaining or don't enjoy it, this is not the type catalogue featuring fakes place for you. Asking prices are

women---cute, friendly, clever often inflated sixfold so if you form---Rolex. Louis of imitations---poor, medium.

legal efforts from time to time to the best, there is an added Our guide said she wrinkle. Ironically, China also makes the could arrange for a private real things for some of these showing of "superior" imitations labels, so one often wonders if a in our hotel room later that day. few get mixed in with the Several of us on tour were interested and we set up a time

> 50,000 on rang (Avon Calling?), and in favorite came a young man and woman watches, scarves, sunglasses

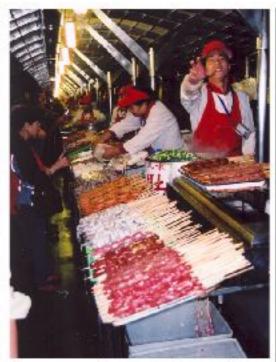
the Silk Street Market their last Then out came the piece de heading to the resistance---a glossy catalogue airport for their flights home, and containing other counterfeit knock-off items that we could order and delivered have that same evening. Think about that for a moment---a Sears & Roebuckyou can rely on.

We made a few purchases and just as quickly as they had set up shop they were packed and on their way, perhaps to another room or another hotel.

The next day we returned to the Silk Street Market for a final goaround. One can spend an entire day here. In addition to the shops there are snack bars and full restaurants featuring roast other duck and Chinese specialties, multinational coffee shops, pharmacies, barber shops, massage parlors, money changers and a communications center

Besides iewelry, electronics, watches, clothing, handbags and the like, the market now also offers Chinese handicraft. antiques and calligraphy---some good, some bad. Whatever you buy---deal or no deal---it will be experience not soon an forgotten.

The Silk Street Market operates located at the intersection of Director of Xiushui East Road Jianguomen Wai Road. But Assn. forget those jawbreaker names.



knows where it is. Everyone even if it never makes the official auidebooks.

Former President George H. Bush was able to find it, along with former Russian President Putin and 35 other heads of state during the recent Olympics. From princes to paupers, we all like a good buy.

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