THE GREAT CHINA MALL IN THE SKY

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With the "Buy American" language in the US economic stimulus package, US companies doing business with China have expressed concern about the possibility of growing trade restrictions on both sides of the pond—EVEN THOUGH China's Vice Minister of Commerce Jiang Zengwei explained that China won't practice "Buy China" and will treat domestic and foreign products equally as long as they are needed." An official "Don't worry, be happy!" response.

Hmmmm… right up there with "US export restrictions are a major cause of the US-China trade imbalance." Referring back to a previous China Linked Blog entry, the posturing will make sense if you read Lucien Pye's excellent book on *Chinese Negotiating Style*.

However, let's focus on the American side of things:

On a recent US domestic flight I paged through a copy of the robust *Sky Mall* catalog (FREE COPY—TAKE IT. WE'LL REPLACE IT!) It made me wonder:

1.   Who is buying this stuff? Seems like a lot of expensive, non-essential items.

2.   What have we come to as a society? (See statement number one.)

3.   How can we blame China for producing junk we import if they are filling American consumers' demand? Note: I make the assumption that a majority of *Sky Mall* products are produced in China and that someone in the US is buying it. If this is a bad assumption, let me know why...

For example, the "Over the Door Cat Climber" for $169. It allows cats to exercise indoors on a carpeted pole that attaches to a door. Or there's the "Bigfoot, the Garden Yeti" sculpture for $98.95… or the "Million Germ Eliminating Travel Toothbrush Sanitizer" at just under $30. The product names even sound like the direct translation from Chinese.

Maybe we should look at Vice Minister Jiang's statement in another light and reflect, not on the Buy America or Buy China part, but on what we really need as consumers... trying hard here not to pass judgment, but I'm just sayin'...