

Shanghai

This is a very preliminary writeup 11/07; to be edited and expanded.

Then we flew to Shanghai. It was during a national festival week so most people were not working. What a mob scene. We drove past a park (not sports park) to an acrobatic performance and there were an incredible number of people in the park and on the streets. The next day the newspaper said that there had been 40,000 people in that park alone the day before when we saw them. From Shanghai we flew to Hong Kong and then to San Francisco and on to Denver and back to nice and quiet Gunnison with just a few people.

(Don here:) Shanghai was beautiful, much more so than Beijing. It's a tribute to urban planning, we were shown a whole building for planners. The skyscrapers (more of them than the whole west US coast!) are required to be architecturally diverse, unlike Beijing with monotonous rows of somewhat Soviet-looking apartment towers. Both cities have put in a lot of greenery, boulevards and flower plantings. U.S. cities now look shabby by comparison, with neglected infrastructure. The Chinese do have an advantage with new infrastructure (like the "favor" we gave Europe of a new and very competitive steel industry by destroying the old one). No old cars on the streets! The traffic jams were horrific in Beijing, and most of the bicycles have disappeared since my last visit.

Back to Margaret

I was becoming rather tired by the time we got to Shanghai and didn't have much tolerance for the incredible heat and crowds of people. Shanghai has the largest collection of new and architecturally beautiful skyscrapers I've ever seen. The area across the river from the Bund was most spectacular. All of these huge buildings were outlined in lights or floodlit in colors, some with moving decorations on them. Of course this was in the evening and night. The last time we were in Shanghai there was only one building on the other side of the Huangpu River, now there was this exotic collection of them. The Bund which had few people strolling leisurely seventeen years ago was a mob scene – both day and night. Shanghai looked like a city which never slept.

At night we went to the Ming Dynasty Yu Garden in old Shanghai. It's amazing what the Chinese and Japanese can do in a small area. This area was surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people and buildings, but somehow seemed to be by itself, without all of the commotion and noise. It was filled with beautiful naturally carved rocks from the bottom of the lake in Wuxi and small ponds with bridges to various little buildings. Our city guide decided that we should take a group photo in this garden. So we all stood in front of one of the buildings and had the picture taken. There were also numerous other tourists there. They saw our group being photographed and decided that we must be some very special group so they also took photos of our group! This Yu Garden also had some marvelous Chinese dragons on the rooftops. Many photos were taken there.

The last day in Shanghai we went to the museum and saw some beautiful things and saw the throngs of people walking on the Bund and in the city in general. In the evening we went to a performance of the Chinese acrobats. They are truly spectacular. Such amazing balance and coordination. Actually, Don thought that the acrobatic performance we saw the last time we were in Shanghai was even better.

This was probably one of the best trips we've taken, (I seem to say that about every trip we've taken) but between the extreme heat and age, I was actually glad to get back to quiet Gunnison. I think that maybe I'd like a nice quiet cruise next trip.

This trip was made with Elderhostel. We just arranged our flights from Gunnison to San Francisco. The rest of the transportation (total of eight flights), hotels, guides and itinerary was arranged by Elderhostel. They did a marvelous job and all of our guides were excellent- especially our national guide who was with us every minute of the trip. This man (Lee) was only 27 years old, spoke fluent English, was masterful in every situation, was a college graduate with tremendous knowledge of his country – old and new, was a liberal and very optimistic about China's future. He spoke to the group and often to individuals or groups of individuals with great candor. Our group had 32 very congenial members which is the maximum size Elderhostel group to China – all of us over 55 years old. It was a well-educated group so there were many questions. In this country with masses of people, he managed to keep us all somewhat together and instill confidence in him.

One of the very interesting things I noticed on this trip is that we saw no old people and few people over the age of 40. The cities are teeming with young people living in all of these modern apartment buildings, all dressed in Western style clothing. They move fast, eat fast, drive fast – do everything very fast – and they are all slim! Lee said that this is due to the Chinese diet. The Chinese eat very little meat, eat mostly vegetables, little bread and rice and tofu, and no desserts. The meals we were served were usually typical of the city we were visiting – and they were very different from each other – and VERY different from the many Chinese meals we have eaten in the U.S. There was not one entree that was similar to anything I have ever eaten here. They use a lot of herbs in cooking and seem to have many dishes from which one just takes a taste for each meal.

There were many fewer bicycles in all of the cities than we saw on other trips. On the last trip which Don and I took, the Chinese were just beginning to build big highways and there were just a few of them. Now the streets are very wide with multiple lanes, one super highway after another going under, over and around each other. The goal of everyone seems to be to own a car. The traffic is unbelievable with all of these cars. Even in the older neighborhoods of the cities where the streets are very narrow, people have big cars and drive competing with bicycles, people, motorcycles, motor bikes and shops with wares in the street. Everybody passes with literally an inch or so to spare and in all directions.

Where did the old and middle-aged people go? They don't like the high rises, so don't live in the cities. I guess that they have moved into the suburbs or the countryside. They are considered the "old Chinese"

and live in little places and follow the old customs, the young city dwellers are a different breed. They often live and think Western. These young people make their own living arrangements and marriages, have one or no children, are very career oriented – but there is still a hint of the old customs in many of their lives. With the Old Chinese, the male is very dominant and the woman very submissive, not so with the young Chinese. The women seem to be equal to the men and the men treat them as equals. The young Chinese city children are taught in school, but both school and at home with parents actively teaching them how to get along in life. There are great differences between the Old and New Chinese, but age is always respected.