

Shanghai 2009 - 1

March 19, 2009

Made it to Shanghai! It was a little easier getting here this time because Delta now has a flight from Atlanta to Shanghai so I could depart from Melbourne rather than Orlando. On the other hand, the flight from Atlanta to Shanghai is 16 l-l-o-o-n-n-g-g-g-g hours. That's a LOT of time to spend on an airplane. The flight goes over the North Pole so most of the time is spent flying over Canada and Russia.

On the positive side, the flight was only about 2/3 full so every middle seat was empty and it looked like there were a few entirely empty rows at the back of the plane. I usually don't have the patience to sit through movies, but I caught up on 5 recent films during the flight – "Nights in Rodanthe," "Slum Dog Millionaire," "Doubt," "Eagle Eyes" and "Changeling." Also polished off two magazines during the flight and watched a documentary on the history of money. The Chinese guy in the window seat slept most of the flight but I just couldn't fall asleep. Worked out fine, though, because I think it helped me adjust better at this end. Slept from about 7 p.m. till 1 a.m., then 2:00 till 6 a.m. Now I feel like I'm on China time.

The Chinese could certainly give us and most other countries some lessons on processing incoming passengers. It felt like I just kept walking without standing in long lines anywhere. The plane got to the gate at 1:30 p.m. Everyone was still seated at that time. I got off the plane, from row 37, through immigration, got my bags and cleared customs, all in 22 minutes. Met the taxi driver waiting for me at 1:52. That's efficient processing! In most airports you're just making it to the end of the long processing line for immigration by that time. Shanghai just opened a new international terminal and it makes a big difference.

Although it's 180 degrees different from Melbourne, China just feels like home. As you drive into town all you see is an ocean of 30+ story apartment buildings. My apartment is on the 27th floor of one of them. There are some older, shorter buildings but those are being quickly demolished to make room for the tall new ones. It's noisy with busses, trucks, motorcycle horns and bicycle bells, but it somehow seems welcoming rather than noisy. The smog, though, is just as bad as Chengdu. I can only see about ½ mile from my apartment because of the smog. It always amazes me that many Chinese people live their entire lives and never see stars, rarely see the moon through the smog, and only occasionally see the sun in its full splendor. The smog here makes one appreciate the clear skies of Florida that much more.

My first day has been busy already. Went for my morning walk but only stayed out for about 1 hour since I don't yet have a Shanghai map or one of the cards with the apartment address to give to taxi drivers. Bought breakfast from one of the people on the street with a hot griddle. They spread out a thin crepe of pancake-like substance, then add an egg on top, then add extra ingredients and spices that you pick. I don't know what they are so I just ask for a little of everything. They then fold it up like a crepe, add a crunchy thing in the middle and serve it to you for 3 Yuan (about 45 cents). Pretty tasty and filling. Part of the experience here is experimenting with the food and hoping for the best.

There are people with little griddles and others selling dumplings and pastries all over the busy streets in the morning. I also saw a couple guys who set up a little stand on the side of the road to repair bicycles.

A woman from the university came at 9:30 to hook up the wireless internet connection, DVD player and satellite TV. Yea!!! Satellite TV! Haven't checked all the stations yet but have BBC on now. They get CNN and CNBC live so the morning shows here are the same live evening shows that people get in the U.S. It sure beats the 4-6 hours of daily programming available on the one English language station from China Central TV (CCTV). Something must have changed in the last 3 years because when I was here in 2006 the director of the program told me they were threatening to fine everyone in his building with satellite TV dishes. Now they can be seen on many apartments.

The woman then took me to the police station to register my residency here. Everyone staying anywhere but a hotel has to register with the police. The police gather passport information daily from the hotels.

Just got back from that and the director of the program called to say he was just finishing a meeting nearby and wanted to go to lunch. I'm always up for a free lunch. He offered to take me to a western restaurant but I told him the only time I eat at western restaurants in China was when he came to visit in Chengdu or when I had company visiting in Chengdu. He picked a nice casual noodle place nearby that's part of a chain. Apparently most of the visiting faculty prefer western food when they visit. It's good to get some input on nearby places. I usually pick the small mom & pop shops when out walking but it's nice to know some hopefully safer places. One thing I notice is that the chain restaurants emulate U.S. eateries with very large servings.

After we finished lunch I stopped at the supermarket to stock up on groceries and supplies. I know I read that China quit allowing plastic bags for customers but it didn't hit home until I went to check out and there was just a pile of my stuff, kind of like shopping at Sam's Club but without the available boxes. Finally determined that I could purchase bags for about 5 cents each so I got a couple and finally got my stuff home. They seem to have more western looking vegetables in the stores here (as opposed to Chengdu where nothing looked recognizable) so I got some apples, broccoli and zucchini (I think) to nuke later.

One thing about the government control in China is that they can quickly implement something like outlawing the plastic bags at stores. They make the rule and put it into effect and that's the end of thin plastic bags. When I returned to the apartment it also made sense why I didn't see any plastic bags lining the trash cans in the apartment. Made me wonder how much life would change in the U.S. if we didn't have those ubiquitous WalMart and Publix bags that are re-used for everything.

(I don't have Winn Dixie bags because I just don't like the shopper's card used there. There must be a bonus card for customers at the store where I shopped today because the woman behind me shouted something to the clerk before she started ringing up my order, then slid her card through the machine at the cash register. She kept telling me something which I presume was an explanation of the card benefits. I smiled, nodded and kept saying yes in Chinese. The more I did that, the more she talked and smiled even though I didn't understand a word she was saying.)

Tomorrow will be a busy day. They apparently have 11 students in from countries around the world for this class. Seems odd to refer to 'international students' when one is in China. Who knew people would fly in from around the world for me or anyone to teach Management Accounting? The classes here will be big with 35 students in each of two sections on Saturday and at least that many all day Sunday in Shenzhen (compared to typical classes of 25 students). Anyway, there is a meeting for the international students tomorrow and then a lunch so I will

attend those (never one to pass up a free lunch), then go to the university in the afternoon to check out the facilities. Have class all day Saturday and then they will have a taxi waiting to rush me to the airport to catch a 6:30 flight to Shenzhen where I will teach all day Sunday. I was thinking that I didn't have to go to Shenzhen until week 2 so that means I have a lot more preparing to do tomorrow (Friday) after the meetings.

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March 20, 2009

Went for a short walk last night and noticed that the grills that prepare dumplings and pastries in the morning are used to cook skewered foods at night. In Beijing those sellers tend to congregate on one street but here they are found 2 – 3 on each block in this area. The skewers have small chunks of meat, tiny land or aquatic animals and small body parts of animals (yes, use your imagination). I came home and made some scrambled eggs rather than risking the skewers. Maybe on a Monday night when I have a week to recover from any possible mal effects.

Discovered some new areas this morning, though not necessarily on purpose. Cut through a couple small neighborhoods and decided to follow a road next to a canal that took me back to my neighborhood yesterday. Turns out there are dozens of canals in this part of Shanghai. Oh well. I discovered some interesting new neighborhoods. Many of them have the small, old buildings with laundry hanging on bamboo poles outside like flagpoles adorned with underwear and shirts. Finally found a familiar looking street and made it back to my neighborhood.

On my way back I purposely decided to check out the neighborhood behind my apartment complex. The buildings are slowly being demolished and it was kind of apparent why. That neighborhood is not just in the past century, but perhaps a couple centuries behind. The roads are too narrow for motor vehicles but that didn't really matter because it didn't look like anyone had cars anyway. Saw a couple people brushing their teeth in the street outside their front door, women on the street doing the laundry in a bucket with an old-fashioned washing board, and several others carrying their chamber pots down to the neighborhood chamber pot dumping station. Apparently no indoor plumbing in the buildings. This neighborhood is right next to a development of 8 buildings over 30 stories high with the underground parking garages and outside areas packed with new autos. Makes one appreciate how much we have and marvel at the contrasts in China.

Friday Evening

The briefing for the international students was actually quite informative. After lunch they even got each student a card to use with the transit system (subway, bus or taxi) and took everyone to campus on the bus so they would know which bus to take and how to get to the classroom building when they get off the bus.

One thing I did learn as part of the briefing is that the accounting program at the university, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (SUFU), is rated #1 in all of China. No added pressure there. ;~)

After the meetings and tour of campus I had to come back to the apartment to finish preparing for classes. They did not have some of the materials I needed until I picked up the CD on

campus this afternoon so I had extra work to do today. Still have a bit more prep work then time to get a good night's sleep for two days of classes and flying to and from Shenzhen.

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March 23, 2009

Back from two long days of teaching. It was a good weekend for many reasons.

First, it is such a joy to teach here because the students are soooo enthusiastic and cheerful. I was a little worried that the international students might be more assertive and take over the class participation compared to the locals, but the Chinese students are just so enthusiastic about learning that there is no chance of that. The Chinese are not just attending classes to get the MBA, but also to absorb as much knowledge as they can and are so joyful and enthusiastic about it.

Second, having these two long days helped me get adjusted quickly to China time and get over jet lag. Traveling forced me to stay up until at least 10:30 each night and this morning I slept until 5 a.m. Yea!!! The thing about a 12 hour time difference and less than 3 hours of sleep per day is that it leaves you feeling as if somebody injected your entire body with Novocain leaving it numb all over. It's nice to have my body back and be on a regular schedule.

After classes Saturday they had a taxi waiting to whisk me to the airport. Checked in, cleared security and made it to the gate at 6:00 p.m., just as the plane was starting boarding for a 6:30 departure. Arrived in Shenzhen around 9:00, then had the taxi drive into the city, arriving at the hotel after 10:00. It's 800 miles away, about like traveling from Washington, DC to Melbourne. I fell into bed at 10:30 and slept until 4 a.m. After class on Sunday I took a taxi back to the airport for the return trip, fell into bed here around 10:30 and got a good night's sleep.

While days are warm in Shanghai, it can still be in the 40s at night and in the early morning. The low nighttime temperature in Shenzhen is around 75 degrees with daytime highs in the 90s. Shenzhen is on the mainland side, right next to Hong Kong. Was sweating when I left Shenzhen but had to pull my jacket out of the bag when I got back to Shanghai last night.

Had a big traditional lunch with the students in Shenzhen. The food is all tasty but it is always interesting to see some of the dishes and tastes in China. One of the dishes had a chicken that was apparently boiled. The whole chicken, including head, feet and everything but feathers, was put on the plate and chopped into pieces with a meat cleaver or large knife. The dish was clean by the end of the meal. There was another plate of what appeared to be deep fried fish, about the size and appearance of just coming out of someone's aquarium but with sharp prongs on the fins. That plate was also empty by the end of the meal. I'll try to get some pictures on the next trip. The other dishes were mostly delicious vegetable dishes and meat dishes.

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Just returned from the morning walk. Explored deeper into the short-building neighborhood behind my apartment building and found a whole market of fresh vegetables, animals, fish and eels, much like the neighborhood market near the apartment in Chengdu.

On the other side I found a huge park. People in China make good use of their parks. At 7:30 in the morning there were a couple groups doing ballroom dancing, some women exercising with

fans, another group doing karate exercises, hundreds of people doing simple body stretches and exercises on their own, old men flying kites high in the sky, other retired men who brought their caged birds to the park to sing to each other while the men talk, and various other activities. The Chinese people use their parks most of the day for exercise at all ages.

The walk was much longer than I anticipated due to a few unplanned exploratory turns. That's a positive spin on getting lost. I just enjoy wandering so it didn't really bother me. Finally decided to admit defeat after two hours and pulled out the card with the address of the apartment building. But when I got to the corner to hail a taxi, I noticed the park directly across the street! Backtracked through the park and finally made it home.

I feel like this is my first free minute since arriving. Seems like I've been swamped with the meetings, trips to the university and police station, last minute preparations, and then teaching all day and traveling. It feels nice to finally have a moment of free time. It is cold here today, though, with the high probably around 50 degrees. Good walking weather.

I uploaded some photos to: www.myspace.com/stanhelm

They are in the Shanghai 2009-1 album. You can double click on any photo to enlarge it.