

Shanghai 2009\_2

March 25, 2009

Quiet week here. After sending out the first update on Monday, I decided to lay down for a short nap. Slept from 3 p.m. till 3 a.m. Must have needed it.

After stopping by the university yesterday to drop off my receipts from the Shenzhen trip, I caught a cab to Old Town section at the far end of the Bund. Turns out the Bund is all torn up with construction on the street so it took about 20 minutes to do the last mile. Shanghai is hosting the World Expo next year so I'm guessing they are trying to get everything perfect before then in the tourist areas.

Old town is actually just a big area of shops selling tourist trinkets. In addition to the shops it seems like every other person who walks past you mutters in a furtive voice: "Hello. Buy a watch? Very cheap." The next person: "Hello. Buy a watch? Very cheap" and so on. I will shop later but went yesterday primarily for a little sightseeing and as a starting point for a 6 mile walk back to the apartment.

Stopped at the Bund's riverfront park on the way back to snap some pictures of the Pearl Tower and a couple having their wedding with the Pearl Tower as a backdrop. Each time I stopped to take pictures a guy would try to strike up a conversation in English. I hate being rude but started walking each time because every time a person tries to start an English conversation in a tourist area, it means they're up to something that will cost more than \$100 U.S. They typically want to stop to get coffee or a beer to converse and practice their English, but the places they take you charge several hundred RMB, typically more than \$100 USD for that cup of coffee or beer. It's usually young girls that do the luring but they must have been busy today because it was guys instead.

The Bund is a stretch of buildings and a park along the Huangpu River and is one of the major tourist sites in Shanghai. The buildings are from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, western architecture that formerly housed major banks and businesses from European countries.

The Pearl Tower is actually a 1500 foot tall TV and radio tower but has spherical bulbs at different levels with observation decks and a restaurant. There is a museum of Shanghai history at the base of the tower. It is one of the major tourist sites in Asia.

I was at first surprised to see so many Chinese tour groups at the Bund, but then it made sense. Shanghai to the Chinese is much like NYC is for Americans. The Bund and Pearl Tower are major landmarks so it makes sense that Chinese tour groups would be visiting the area.

Went out for a ½ hour walk last night that turned into a 2-hour walk instead due to some unplanned exploratory turns. A lot of curved streets in this part of Shanghai and it is easy to get turned around. I had made a note of a couple buildings with an ugly olive color when I started my exploring and thought I could use them to guide myself back. Couldn't find them (a)

because of all the other tall buildings that block the view, and (b) because they are painted white instead of olive green on the other two sides of the buildings. Who would think of looking over their shoulder to see if a 20-story building is different colors on the back sides? Oh well. It was an interesting walk. Now that I know how to get back from there I followed that road instead of the main road to get home from this morning's walk.

This morning I wandered down to a big discount shopping area for Chinese people that I read about in a magazine but which is not mentioned in any of the normal city guides. Only one store that sells American-sized clothes, or so I was told by a guy who followed me all the way down the block trying to get me into the store. I crossed the street at the end of the block, only to find his partner hounding me all the way back in the other direction. I wasn't looking for clothes. Just exploring.

Decided to stop for a haircut on my way back. Rather than stop at a place on the main street, I decided to seek out a barbershop on a side street near the apartment. Found a place with a barber pole and two chairs inside with a woman getting her hair cut in one so I knocked on the door and pointed toward my hair. The woman barber said something in Chinese that I did not understand so I motioned as to whether I should go or stay. She opened the door and pointed to the empty seat. In hindsight, I think she was telling me that she was working on the other customer and it would be about 30 minutes.

I sat patiently and looked around while she worked on the other customer. After being there a few minutes, I wasn't sure it looked like the cleanest place in town (was sure it was closer to the dirtiest, actually) and was wondering how obvious I would look if I picked up my jacket, slid by them and back out the door that I didn't know how to open. Decided to just stay.

Watched in the mirror as she was cutting the other woman's hair with a comb and straight-edged razor. Had never seen that before. When she finished cutting it, she pulled two large tubes out of a box. Squirted about 6 ounces of green goop into a bowl, and then about 6 ounces of white goop. Mixed them together with a comb to make light green goop. The stylist (can I call her that?) then put a couple plastic covers over the woman customer's ears, making her look like a Chinese Princess Leah, and then used a comb to work the light green goop thoroughly into the woman's hair. I tell you, this stop was worth it just for the entertainment value. From the ammonia-like smell of the goop I'm guessing it was hair coloring but the woman appeared to have Chinese Black hair before the goop was applied.

Then the barber decided to work on me while the goop was setting. It was time for the other woman to watch me in the mirror while the two of them talked. This was not the cleanest place I've ever been into, and certainly not up to U.S. standards, so I was a little worried she might use the same razor and goop covered comb on me. Instead, she pulled out other tools and gave me the best haircut I've ever gotten in China. Will have to go back for another before I return home. Cost 10 RMB, about \$1.35 U.S.D.

When I got back to the apartment the maid was here. Thank goodness because I was nearly out clean dishes, socks and underwear. Was going to work on the computer but then she started to mop the floor so I decided it was a good day to eat lunch out rather than have something here.

Went to the noodle place the guy showed me last week but had curry chicken and rice instead of noodles.

Was also running out of heavy shirts and layers to wear. The temp here is still high 30s to low 40s at night and about 50 – 55 during the day.

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March 26, 2009

The police paid me a visit last night while I was reading a book in the apartment. They didn't speak English but had a sheet of paper with a few lines in English to introduce themselves and identify what they wanted. Basically, they wanted the phone number here and wanted to know who I was working for and what kind of work I was doing. Fortunately, I had a business card from someone at the university with identification information in English on one side and Chinese on the other. I pulled out the text book and a few assignments to show him I was a professor. They seemed satisfied and left.

The people at the university told me that I should probably expect a visit as the police are tracking foreigners much more closely with the World Expo coming next year. Just the opposite of the U.S. where nobody tracks or cares about anyone after they pass through immigration at the airport.

When I turned off my computer last night I noticed that a couple fleeting messages as it shut down Internet Explorer. That was interesting since I always use Firefox as my browser rather than Internet Explorer. Made me wonder if the maid used the computer to check the internet when I went out to lunch. I have it set to clear all history as soon as the browser is closed so I could not tell which web sites were hit. Will have to turn off the computer or put it away on Wednesdays in the future. She also comes on Saturdays but I'll have the computer with me then for class.

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March 30, 2009

Early Monday morning. Tried to log onto the internet but no luck. Tried rebooting the computer and the wireless connection but still no connection. I'm guessing the broadband link is down for some reason.

Been colder than sin here the last few days. Glad I brought plenty of warm clothes. Lows in the 30s at night with highs rarely going over 50. That's freezing for a Florida boy. Friday it rained all day with some white snowflakes or sleet occasionally included. Chinese apartments and offices do not have the same type of heating as in the U.S. Instead, each room has its own heater and air conditioner unit (at least the rooms that have them have their own). You have to

keep the other rooms shut off to keep the heat from the one room's heater and they are not terribly effective. Accordingly, most people wear plenty of layers of clothes indoors on cold days.

Fortunately, I brought along plenty of books so I stayed in Friday to read and correct homework that students submitted via the internet. I do enjoy getting lost in another era and place in a good book. Reading Ken Follett's "World Without End" set in England in the 1300s now. Hmmmm. Something that just doesn't sound right about traveling all the way to Shanghai to get absorbed in a book to experience another time and place.

Before coming this time I was afraid that Shanghai might not be Chinese enough. In Chengdu, there were no other westerners at the end of town where the university is located but here there seem to be some other westerners in this building and the neighborhood, plus some Chinese people speak English at the many tourist sites in Shanghai. My fears were for naught, much to my chagrin sometimes.

I try to go out for a walk in a different direction every day to explore. The place is certainly Chinese, especially in the older neighborhoods. I was thinking of going this week to see a peach blossom festival in a rural area outside Shanghai. Read online that one must take the #2 tourist bus from the Tourist Bus Office at the Stadium. Took the #4 subway yesterday to the Shanghai Stadium. Found the #1,4,5 & 6 busses, but no #2 or #3. After circling the stadium three times I finally found the tour bus office under stairway #5. I was feeling successful until I went inside and found that everything, including all the routes, was written in Chinese. The signs referred to locations rather than bus numbers but I couldn't read a thing so I decided it was time to head back home for yesterday.

On the way back I decided to stop at a roadside pastry place about 8 blocks away that I came across the other day. People don't have ovens in China and don't bake so if you want anything baked you have to buy it from a bakery. This particular pastry stand was staffed by a young woman, around 18 – 20. When I stopped by last week she smiled and said, "Hello. How are you?" When I replied, "I am fine. How are you?" it became clear that her grasp of English was as extensive as my grasp of Chinese. She just knew the very basics.

I ordered a few items when I returned yesterday. I could see she wanted to tell me the amount in English so she was counting on her fingers while she softly murmured the English words up to 10. Then she froze. She did not know the numbers over 10. I handed her a 10 RMB bill which she took with one hand while her other hand remained frozen with her thumb on her index finger where she had stopped counting. She had a puzzled look on her face but did not know what to say, either in Chinese or English. I pulled some 1 RMB from my pocket so she smiled and held up two fingers. After completing our transaction she smiled and said "Thank you," and I replied "XieXie" and we were both very happy.

Must have been something in the pastries besides the good taste because I had more dreams last night than I've had any night since arriving. I do enjoy my night life.

Went to the Shanghai Museum this morning. Had two girl scamsters hit on me which made me feel better. I was beginning to fear that maybe I looked gay since only a couple guy scamsters hit on me at the Bund last week.

There's also a new twist with the scamsters that involves couples working together. A guy was taking a picture of a girl as I exited the museum and they asked me to take their picture together. As soon as I did the girl started hitting on me with the pre-scam conversation. I quickly left. I circled the building just out of curiosity. At the front side two girls and a guy were taking a picture, asked me to take one of the three of them, and then launched into the pre-scam banter. One asked me if I wanted to go to the museum so I told him I already had. He probably wanted to get me a discounted ticket, even though admission today was free. It's sad to be so wary, but if anyone starts talking English to you in a tourist area in Shanghai, you just have to presume there is a scam of some kind involved.

Also had a girl try to sell me watches after I left the photogenic group of three. Could have bought a Patek Phillip, Omega or Rolex. The price started at 300 RMB and quickly dropped to 100 RMB (about \$13.50 USD). I'd get one just because it's almost cheaper than replacing a battery on an old watch but Don got a couple Rolex's a couple years ago and as I recall neither one worked.

So much for the outside stuff. The museum was much better than the Beijing museum, which was kind of surprise. Even at that, there's not a lot of historic artwork in China, notwithstanding their long history. I don't know if they just weren't as artistic in some areas or if everything was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution in the late 60s.

They had some ceramic dishes and vases dating back to 618. Made me wonder how much, if any, of what we make now will be preserved and treated as artwork in 1,000 – 1,500 years. They had some calligraphy and a few paintings on scrolls. They made a note of the age of each artist and they all seemed to be between 50 and 80. Not like the west where many of the artists had their greatest accomplishments in their younger years. Some jade, furniture and old currencies from China and everywhere along the Silk Road. Not many sculptures and the ones they did have were primarily from Buddhist temples. It was a nice museum, nevertheless.

The museum is almost straight west and a little south. I was surprised when the taxi took me all the way south to the Bund and into that slow westward moving traffic jam, and then back north to the museum. I know from checking the map first and from walking back that there are shorter and much more direct routes. Oh well. I did notice that bus 123 which stops a few blocks from the apartment went very near there so I will probably take it next time.

Checked the meeting place for the Shanghai Rotary Club and see they have an evening meeting on Tuesdays near the Shanghai Stadium where I was yesterday. Sent the address to the university to have someone print it out for a taxi driver, but then checked my map and see I can take the No. 4 subway part of the way and then change to the No. 1 subway which stops just a couple blocks from the hotel where they meet.