

Shanghai 2009-3

April 1, 2009

Early morning here. Was going to check the internet but got cut off after a few minutes. I think they must work on the internet in the early morning because it seems to go out completely quite often when I'm trying to use the internet or talk on Skype. In the evening it stays on but is so slow because everyone seems to be using the network at that time. A little frustrating but part of living in China.

Funny to look outside at 4:30 or 5 a.m. and not see any lights on in this city of 15 million people. While some people have cars, most still rely on bicycles or public transportation of some kind. The busses and subways close down at night so the entire city comes to a screeching halt. It was the same way in Chengdu.

On the flip side, there is virtually no crime in Shanghai or most other Chinese cities. If you're on the street after 11:30 it's pretty clear that you're up to something. In China, the police would most likely stop and talk to anyone on the street at that time.

Living here is somewhat like Orwell's "1984" with cameras everywhere. Cameras on virtually every street corner, cameras in every elevator, guards for each building and at the entrance to the apartment complexes. It would be difficult for anyone to get away with much. Plus their penalties are rather harsh here. Last year the FDA director got in trouble for accepting bribes and allowing tainted food products to be exported. His sentence was a bullet to the head and his family received a bill for the cost of the bullet. As I recall, the arrest, trial, appeal and sentence all took less than 90 days.

Went to the Shanghai Rotary meeting last night. They have dinner, rather than lunch or breakfast meetings, which makes sense because traffic is so bad here. Between the traffic and distances between companies, it would be difficult to have anything other than evening meetings.

Chinese nationals are not allowed to participate in Rotary. The government frowns on citizens gathering together, especially with foreigners. Accordingly, the club is comprised of executives from many other nationalities around the world – Japanese, Korean, U.S., Canadian, German, Dutch, Australian, etc.

The meeting is held at a hotel at the other end of town that appears to be near all the foreign consulates from the map. Western companies must also be concentrated at that end of the city and I noticed the nearby shops all appeared to be western. The admin woman at the university told me that some American Chamber of Commerce events are conducted at the same hotel.

Since the meeting is a dinner meeting at a nice hotel, the price is a bit higher than our meetings back home – 230 RMB, or about \$35 USD. I see the receipt provided by the hotel employee is for 200 RMB so the other 30 must have been club dues. The receipt had two official seals stamped on it.

(As an aside that Don would love, there was an entire exhibit of seals at the Shanghai Museum dating back to several hundred years B.C. They do love their seals in China and apparently always have. Don kept commenting that he wished he had a seal making franchise in China because every receipt and document has to be stamped at least twice with a red-inked seal.)

The meeting format is basically the same, minus the pledge of allegiance and blessing. The 4-way test is done both in English and in Chinese. No 50-50 drawing but they raise money by auctioning items each week instead. Last night people brought a boomerang and bottles of wine and champagne to auction. China is not known for having good wine so imported wines have an audience here. They raised 5,300 RMB (about \$750 USD) with the few auction items and a few fines. Definitely bigger spenders here.

Met some friendly people in the social ½ hour before the meeting. When we sat down to eat the guy next to me asked me what I was doing in Shanghai and how long I'd be here. I replied that I was here for 8 weeks to teach a management accounting course in the MBA program at SUFE. He started his response by explaining he was a new assistant professor at a college back in 1970 but soon learned that his next door neighbor with a 10th grade education was making almost twice as much making cars and being a member of the UAW. Concluding that college professorship is a dead-end career, he quit after the first year of teaching to get a more lucrative and respectable job in sales. I didn't say a word. I swear.

He then spent the rest of the pre-meal conversation railing about how much he's grown to hate accountants over the years and how he especially despises anyone with an MBA. Nothing like making a fellow Rotarian feel welcome.

The speaker recently wrote a book and was founder of "That's Beijing" and "That's Shanghai" publications about all the things to do and places to go in each city. I remember seeing "That's Beijing" a few years ago so it could have been a very interesting presentation. Instead his presentation was: "me, me, me . . . (take a breath) me, me, me . . . (another breath) . . . what a great and well-known person I am, . . . me, me, me. By the way, I wrote a book about me and my life and will sell copies autographed by me after the meeting."

Interesting meeting. Next week is club business meeting so I'll skip it but I will try to make another meeting while I'm here and hopefully find someone else to sit next to next time. It was interesting to learn in the social gathering that the membership has dropped in recent months because foreign companies have reduced staff and called executives back home because of the slow economy. The Japanese and Koreans were first and the Europeans have recently been curtailing operations and recalling executives.



Exchanging banners at Shanghai Rotary meeting.

My maid is coming this morning so I took my walk early (6:30 – 8:00) so I could get changed and showered before she gets here.

Early morning walks are interesting. The shops are not open yet but many shop owners are out front brushing their teeth and holding a cup of water. Most streets in China are lined with shops that are 9 x 9 or sometimes 9 x 12 feet. In the oldest sections of town, many people live in these shops in addition to conducting their business in them. My hair stylist had a bed along the back of her 9 x 9 shop and I'm sure she lives there also. I enjoy occasionally working at home and seeing the ocean in the background, but I think it would be tough to live and work in such a small place 24 hours a day, probably six days a week. There's little if any running water or other sanitary facilities in many of the shops and I suppose that partially explains why there are so many tiny restaurants and roadside vendors to provide basic meals. In some of the older areas, it looks like water was added years after they were built, with the pipe running along the front of buildings and the only real plumbing being a sink outside each unit.

The roadside vendors are everywhere in the morning. I stopped at a construction site to get breakfast from a couple people with roadside grills. For 1 RMB (about 14 cents) I got a piece of fried flat bread with some spices on it. For 3 RMB I got 10 small dumplings with some kind of meat filling. There are also stands with the crepes I normally get for breakfast, boiled eggs, potato cakes, other dumplings, and fried breads and doughy things. They had some different street breakfast items in Chengdu that I think I liked better, but half of being here is experiencing what they have in different places.

The morning streets are a cacophony of busses starting and stopping, bicycle bells ringing, and car and motorcycle horns blaring. Unlike Chengdu where most of the scooters appeared to be battery powered, they appear to mostly be gas powered and noisy here. Many of the motorcyclists just hold their horns constantly and blast through any stoplight or group. Many Chinese drivers, especially motorcyclists, tend to view traffic signs and regulations the same way many people view the 10 Commandments – interesting suggestions that they hope other people observe.

On the softer side, children in their many uniforms are heading off to school and women are exercising in the courtyards of many apartment complexes. Some places have different groups for younger and older women and different exercise routines for each group.

While the children leave early for school, they put in long days studying. When I go into my kitchen at night I can often see the junior high or high school-aged boy in the next apartment studying at the dining room table for at least 3 hours each night.

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April 5, 2009

I just ended up with an extra day. Thought I was supposed to go to Shenzhen this Sunday so I packed my suitcase and took it along when I went to campus here yesterday. The admin woman told me that this is the Sunday when they have a national holiday so I will go next week instead.

Thought I'd celebrate for a change last night since I finally had a free Saturday evening. When I went across the street to buy some milk I also noticed there was a 4-ounce glass, about like a small juice glass, with a plastic cover and some kind of clear fluid in the liquor section for only 4.5 RMB (about 65 cents). The beer here gives me a ripping headache and the wine is terrible so I thought I'd try some of the clear stuff to see what it was like. When I got to the counter the clerk pointed at the glass of clear fluid, chortled a "Ho. Ho. Ho" and gave me a grin from ear to ear and a thumbs up symbol. I took that to mean the fluid was a type of clear rocket fuel. Decided to also buy some Sprite to cut it down. Sure enough, it tasted like one would expect rocket fuel to taste, made me sleep all night, and made my tongue completely numb for the first three hours this morning.

Decided to go for a walk early since I didn't have any other plans made for today. Covered a lot more territory than I normally do. I think that was partially because I now have an idea where I'm going and because the streets, unlike week days, are almost ghostly quiet on Sunday mornings. The crowds slow a person down a lot in all the market areas on week days, plus Chinese walkers tend to amble rather than walk so it is slower when I get behind them.

A drawback of early Sunday walks is that the crepe-makers and other breakfast servers are not out since there are no crowds to service. I had planned to buy breakfast a block or two away but had to walk 40 minutes before I finally found a crepe-maker in an old section of town where they were holding a vegetable market in the street.

On my way back I stopped at E-Mart which is a Chinese version of Super-WalMart. Sunday must be a celebratory day for dining in China because they had special sections set out with pig feet and fish heads. Fish heads are big for celebrating here. Hmmm. As I type this it makes sense that they'd have fish heads out today since it is supposed to be some national holiday. Fish heads here are the equivalent of our turkey in the U.S. I suppose that also explains the pigs' feet as their counterpart of our ham.

I've noticed when I've been out walking that people don't seem to smoke as much in Shanghai as they did in Chengdu. Also, they don't drink as much tea. In Chengdu, it seemed like almost everyone at work had a large glass nearby with hot water and tea leaves in the bottom. There were tea houses every few blocks where people would relax together and sip tea. I think I've only seen one tea house here, and I've covered several miles in my walks and taxi rides. And the tea that you do see here is brewed in American-style tea bags—a veritable sacrilege for China.

Walking might seem out of place and strange in the U.S. unless one was dressed in athletic gear and out purely for exercise. Here, the population is so concentrated and there are so few cars per person that it seems everyone walks. It's rare to be on a street where there are not several dozen to several hundred other people.

I enjoy getting out on the walks to experience the real China. Walking just a few blocks the neighborhoods can change from new 30-story apartment complexes of several buildings, to 7-10 story buildings from the mid to late 1900s, to 3-story buildings from who knows what century. Each neighborhood has its own personality to accompany its unique hustle and bustle. The oldest neighborhoods are slowly being torn down to make way for the new 30-story buildings, but it looks like construction has slowed a bit from when I was in Shanghai 3 years ago.

It took a lot longer to prepare for class on Friday. Most of the students submit homework via email. As I was reviewing them I noticed that several seemed to be exactly the same. Found 17 copied papers out of 80 students. So, in addition to reviewing each paper for completion and errors, I also had to keep opening multiple files simultaneously to see who copied whom.

Sharing and community, communal work is common here. I sent each of them an email notifying them that they would not get credit for the assignment. 4 different people who actually did the work all pleaded with me via email and again on Saturday to give them credit because they did the work and the other people supposedly copied them without their permission. I let them know that they are all equally guilty and I could not give credit to any of them. My primary objective was to make sure they don't even think of sharing with their friends again so they have to do their own homework for the rest of the course. The only way they're going to learn the subject matter is if they actually do the work.

I also let them know that I marked my grade sheet regarding each student that copied and would keep my eye on them in the future. They all came up and looked at my grade sheet at break time and did see the big "Copy" note I had next to each name, along with a cross-reference to the other students' name or number. That gets their attention here because nobody wants to be too noticed in this Orwellian "1984" environment. I don't think I'll have much more trouble with copying.

It actually gave us a good opportunity to discuss ethics a bit more. We discussed it in Chapter 1 but people usually don't pay much attention to it in any country. I've read that there are only 17,000 CPAs in all of China and it's not necessarily a sought-after field. People don't question people in authority here because to do so typically ends a career, so one doesn't aspire to be an auditor where you might be put in that situation. That's changing a bit as China moves away from state ownership of businesses and approves more companies to be listed on the stock exchange where they have to comply with U.S. generally accepted accounting principles or international financial reporting standards. I've always been a little cautious about using the case studies in the textbook because many of them focus on ethics and how to deal with situations where superiors want to cook the books. Rules are different here so one has to tread carefully.

Did my daily walks last week but didn't get out as much to explore other places. I wanted to finish Ken Follett's 1,014 page "World Without End" before leaving town (when I still thought I would be gone on Sunday). He's such a good writer but now my dreams at night seem to include English life in the 1300s. But I do enjoy my night life.

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April 6, 2009

Evening. Rode bus 123 today to Nanjing Road which is a main tourist attraction and shopping street in Shanghai. It is closed off to vehicle traffic and lined with western stores. Today the streets were lined with local residents since the holiday weekend extends from yesterday through tomorrow (Tuesday). I've never been able to figure out why the big interest in the area by westerners since it has many western stores and overpriced Chinese stores, but it's a tourist spot so I had to check it again just to see. One would think that visitors would want to get off the western streets and experience the Chinese neighborhoods and lifestyle if they came all the way to China. Oh well.

The watch sellers were out in force on Nanjing Road. "Buy a watch? Rolex. Cheap." and one girl who tried to first sell watches and then "massagee." They don't quite know what to do with that "e" at the end of words. She pointed down some dark side street for the massagee and I'm sure it was probably one that included a happy ending. I passed. I do wander off the main roads, but by my choice and not at the urging of someone else.

Tonight the building is redolent with the fragrant aromas of spices, herbs and vegetables. Many people must be having their holiday meal tonight. The street looks very quiet for a week night as I gaze out the window.

It gets dark here early. For now, the sun rises around 5:30 a.m. and sets around 6:15 p.m. China has only one time zone for the entire country so sunrise and sunset are about an hour later in Chengdu, 800 miles southwest.

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April 7, 2009

It's finally springtime here! Kind of. It got up to 67 yesterday and CNN Weather says it will hit 70 today and for the next week with lows in the 50s. Yea!!!

On the other hand, I just went to the supermarket and they were playing Christmas carols in the mall. Kind of surreal. It was instrumentals without the words so it sounded like elevator music. I wondered if they were playing it merely for the Muzak factor or if they were doing it for any western visitors, figuring Christmas and Easter music are pretty much all the same.

One of the things I was looking for was salt. Didn't find any with the regular spices but finally found some bags of UNICEF salt on the bottom shelf at the other end of the row. Isn't UNICEF salt supposed to be given free to needy countries? It's a different world in China.

I might have spoken too soon regarding elimination of copying by students. Received homework from some already, along with one that copied everything into the text of the email rather than sending a Word or Excel file. Is that supposed to be so I can't check "properties?" If

only they would work as hard on the homework as they do on trying to beat the system, but I thinking this environment they have more experience at trying to beat the system.