

## A Trip to Mainland China

In November of 2007, I and my wife Joanne went on a trip to Mainland China, something that would be very difficult to do today. The trip costs each of us 1700 dollars and included airfare to and from San Francisco, all transportation within China, all Hotel costs including meals and a guide for the entire trip. At the time, I did not realize what an incredible trip this would be -- a real eye-opener to the Chinese people and culture. This memoir will attempt to examine that.

Before leaving, we went to Bank of America to buy a sufficient amount of the local currency, known as the renminbi or yuan, to buy souvenirs and gifts. We packed our bags and flew to San Francisco Airport. Then, at 12:30 AM on November 6, we departed for Shanghai. Our flight took us over Japan, and I remember clearly seeing Mount Fuji, the tallest mountain in Japan and an active volcano, from the airplane window. This was an exciting way to start the trip! On November 7 at 5:30 PM local time, we landed in Shanghai. After clearing customs, we proceeded to the Hotel Royalton where we met our guide Stephen Liu.

During the next few days, we visited several interesting museums and enjoyed especially one delicious meal including duck stuffed with glutinous rice and other goodies. On November 9, we made an interesting visit to a silk carpet factory where we were given a talk about silkworms and watch ladies at work using different types of knots for different carpet designs. From silkworm to finish carpets, everything was done in this shop with great skill and artistry. Next, we went to a senior center where we were given a warm welcome by elderly ladies 4 of whom did an elegant dance. This was followed by a fashion show where we were told each lady made her own outfit. Finally acquire of the ladies sang for us. We all joined in at the end, singing in English "You Are My Sunshine." Finally, "The Dragon Dance" was performed, and I joined in. All of us felt a real cultural affinity with these ladies even though we did not speak their language. We then departed by bus to visit a Chinese household where a lady served lunch to seven of our group, including Joanne and me. There were other host families in the same apartment building who served other people in our group. It was a real feast with 15 dishes served, all delicious. The wonton soup was the best I have ever had with vegetable and pork stuffing. I couldn't believe a gourmet meal like that could come from such a small kitchen.

To sum up a few things that we had noticed so far: there are a lot of bicycles, motorbikes and very few pedestrians. In fact, most people use bicycles. There are very few women wearing skirts; virtually no obesity; very few children; very few people with pets are seen on the streets.

The next day, November 10, we begin a trip to Suzhou By taking a bus to the train station and boarding the bullet train which travels at speeds of up to 155 mph. We walked to the pier where we boarded boats. This town is surrounded by waterways like Venice, Italy. As we passed down the canals, we could see into the houses. It was as though people were living on the water!



The next day, November 11, he boarded buses to the Shanghai Airport for our flight to city of Xian. Immediately after boarding the airplane the plane, we were given scratch-off lottery tickets. I was surprised to discover that I was the only winner on the flight. I won a prize of 200 yuan. We landed at the Xian Airport after two hours in the air, we landed and went by bus to our hotel. The climate here was cold and damp with the wind blowing off of the Gobi Desert, a large area

of over a half million square miles. It is the home of the Bactrian camel which has two humps. It felt as though I were on another planet! I was excited about the next day because we would see the Terracotta Warriors.

The next day we went by bus to the site for the Terracotta Warriors which were discovered in 1974 by accident when a local farmer dug into the Earth. They were buried with the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang. Up there were no historical records of the site and no one knew they even existed. Each figure is unique, with its own facial features and hairstyle. The figures are arranged in military formation with infantry, archers, generals and cavalry. The figures vary in height according to their rank, with generals being the tallest. It is estimated that there are more than 8000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 620 horses and about 1150 Cavalry horses.



Next, we had the opportunity to visit a Village School which gave us a view of Education in China., the kids stood outside singing, clapping in rhythm and saying in English “Welcome to our school.” The inside the classroom each student stood and told about themselves in perfect English. Our group asked questions of the teacher and the students. Arrayed at the front of the cold dark classroom were pictures various communist figures, including Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Sun Yat-sen and Karl Marx. To sum up, I felt that the school was well-run and the morale was high.



Next we went to see the home of a local farmer and his family. In one room there was a living area with an old TV, a dining table and places to sleep. The kitchen was in the entryway and consisted of a small cabinet and a two burner stove. There was no refrigeration apparent and the floor was dirt. They had one child and the father-in-law lived with them. The lady had put out some bread she had made along with some oranges for the group to taste. The family the unknown caller seemed to be very happy and content with their life. They said that the farmers in the area worked to land leased to them by the government, and that they pay no fee for the lease. Also, they actually own their house. By the time we left, I felt we had a unique insight into the life of this Chinese family.

Next, we visited the Xi'an Muslim quarter, a unique part of the city. The history of the Xi'a Muslim Quarter can be traced back to the [Tang dynasty](#), when Muslim merchants came to and aggregated in [Chang'an](#), today's Xi'an, via the Silk Road. We learned that Muslim men wear caps. Women may or may not wear head covering. Prayer in the mosque is for men only. As I walked around in the quarter, it felt very relaxed and informal. No one seemed to pay much attention to me when I walked into the mosque and left a contribution in US dollars. There is a big Bazaar that is reminiscent of what you might find in Turkey..

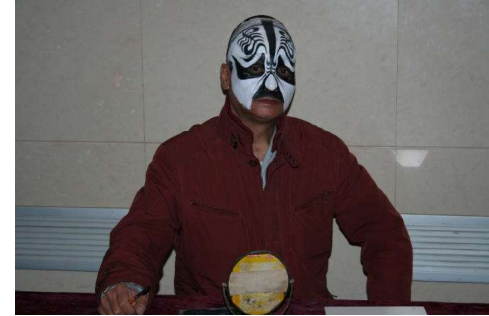


On November 14, many people in the group took ill from the luncheon on the previous day. We rested until the afternoon and then boarded our flight to Beijing arriving at 1 AM. I was glad to have recovered quickly and managed to make the flight.



In Beijing, the next day, November 15, we were dropped off by bus in Tiananmen Square, the site of the demonstrations in 1989. After walking a few blocks, we entered the Forbidden City which is the complex and the center of the Imperial application City in Beijing.. It was the residence of 24 Ming and Qing Dynasty Emperors and the center of political power in China for over 500 years, a stretching from from 1420 to 1924.

On November 16, our group visited a kung fu school for ages 6 to 20. They gave an incredible demonstration showing great skill. In China, kung fu is considered a profession, meaning a full-time occupation. That night we had the opportunity to attend the Peking Opera where we viewed the actors putting on their makeup before the performance. During the performance come up to the side, a viewing screen showed in English exactly what was happening on stage. It made it possible to follow the action June, and I thoroughly enjoyed the show. After the performance, I purchased a mask similar to the ones used in the performance.



The Great Wall of China is a series of fortifications built across the historical Northern borders of ancient Chinese States as protection against various nomadic groups from the Eurasian steppes. At the end toward the end of our trip, we had the opportunity to visit this incredible feat of engineering which runs for over 13,000 miles. We were dropped off at the base of the wall and climbed up many steps to get to the top. There was a cold wind blowing which added to the drama of the moment. To my surprise, a few Chinese tourists requested to have their pictures taken with us. I guess we looked important!



Our last stop on the trip was to visit the Ming mausoleum. There was an avenue leading to the mausoleum that was lined with beautiful statues of animals and men. The Ming Ancestors Mausoleum was the first imperial mausoleum complex of the [Ming dynasty](#), constructed at a site near the inlet of the [Huai River](#). It was constructed between 1386 and 1413 by [Zhu Yuanzhang](#), the emperor who founded the [Ming Dynasty](#) and his son Zhu Di.

Finally, it was time to depart China and leave behind the incredible things we had seen. I won't ever forget the many historical sites and the people of China as well. I am certain that I will never again have the opportunity to visit this the incredible country!

