

China Revisited

By: PDG Fred Houlton

After twenty years since being in the People's Republic of China, Virginia and I decided to return to see the changes and to visit some of our former students to whom we taught English at Dongbai University of Finance & Economics in northeast China in the city of Dalian in 1986-87.

On October 3rd we flew from Chicago direct to Shanghai (14 hour flight) to join 37 other members from the USA of a tour group for a two-week journey to some of the major cities of tourist interest.

Some of the major changes in Shanghai were a great number of increased skyscrapers and the private ownership of automobiles. Twenty years ago almost everyone used bicycles. The traffic problems of this 17 million population metropolis are very acute and adding to the pollution problems. As a measure to keep car ownership at a minimum, the government has attached a very high fee for car ownership.

We had a one-day train trip to the beautiful garden city of Suzhou. This 500-year-old city is noted as the fabled silk region with gardens and canals that inspired Marco Polo. The Grand Canal is crowded with strings of barges laden with fruits, vegetables, and construction materials and coal. This canal is second only to the Great Wall as a Chinese engineering feat that was begun 2400 years ago.

No visit to China would be complete without witnessing the outstanding Qin Terra Cotta Army in Xian, an exquisite and beautifully preserved symbol of an ancient era! More than 2,000 years ago, the Emperor Qin Shi Huang was buried in an earth mound along with 6400 life-sized terra cotta warriors, archers, and infantrymen, together with their horses and chariots, individually sculpted from live models. The discovery of this outstanding archeological attraction was in the early 1970s.

Every tourist visits the exciting capital city of Beijing in The People's Republic of China. The bustling city with a population of 16 million has many traffic problems with about three million vehicles adding to the daily pollution. Some of the popular attractions are Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, and the Great Wall of China. Visits to a Kung Fu School, a Chinese Jade Carving Factory, the Chinese Opera, and a Cloisonne workshop proved to be very interesting. There are currently 6,000 buildings under construction in Beijing, many of which are in readiness for the 2008 Summer Olympics. China is, indeed, becoming a very powerful nation with tremendous economic growth!

At the conclusion of the Beijing visit, the other 37 members of our tour group returned to the USA. Virginia and I remained another night as the Rotary club of Beijing was scheduled to meet the next day. There are only two Rotary clubs in China—Shanghai and Beijing. The Beijing club has 57 members, most of whom are business men and women from other countries; I noticed four Chinese natives in the group. There were 39 members in attendance with eleven visiting Rotarians. Four members are Ambassadors to China from various countries. The Ambassador from Denmark made a few remarks about his responsibilities of leadership to the Shanghai and Beijing clubs. There is no Rotary District in China and, of course, no Governor; this Ambassador is serving this purpose. The program, which was given in English, was presented by the Ambassador from Kuwait who spoke on "The Three Gulf Wars". Interesting speech but there was not any

suggestions for ending the present conflict. The fee for the makeup was \$25; there was a cocktail and social period of about 45 minutes prior to the meeting.

We took an overnight train to Dalian which has a population of 5 ½ million; it was 1 ½ million when we taught there 20 years ago. We had an exciting reunion with seven of our former students who are still in the Dalian area as well as a number of faculty members. We were treated like Royalty with special banquets, one of which was given by our students and another by the university. We were in the homes of faculty members and students. Our students also squirted us around the city area and also along the beautiful seaside area. We're so very proud of our students, all of whom are very successful business men and women. Probably the most successful from a financial point of view is William (they all had English names when we taught them). He is an exporter of the beautiful and long-lasting Chinese rugs to the USA and Canada. He had two rather new automobiles (a Toyota and a BMW) and had just recently purchased the building in which his business is located. Our students informed us that William is having a Villa built for his family residence. On our final night in Dalian we were treated to a most delicious dinner at the best restaurant in Dalian by William, his beautiful wife, and his eight-year-old son. All of our students helped to make our two-week stay pass very quickly!

On our return to Beijing for our flight back to the USA, we were met by another former student who resides in that city and is also a very successful business woman. We visited her place of work which is located on the 25th floor of a new high rise with a beautiful panoramic view of the city. We had a delicious lunch together and after showing us around the city, she took us to the airport for our thirteen-hour journey to Chicago on October 30th.

In all of those cities we visited we always saw many McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Pizza Huts. Also Starbucks Coffee outlets are beginning to make their presence. Of the 1.3 billion citizens of this vast country, there are sufficient successful entrepreneurs who can afford a \$3 cup of coffee!

This was just an outstanding trip which brought back many fond memories! We are hoping that some of our students will come to visit us in the near future.