

FEATURE

a JOURNEY in HISTORY

A travel journal highlights some of China's history

By Ruby Tsao

I recently accompanied my husband, George Tsao, on a trip to China where he had been invited to speak in the city of Changchun at the Global Economic Leaders' Summit. Herewith are notes from my travel journal that highlight some of China's history from the time of the Yellow Emperor to the present-day. Changchun was the capital of the last emperor, Puyi of the Qing Dynasty, during the war against Japan (1931-1945). His palace, now a museum, is nowhere near the size and splendor of the previous one, the Forbidden City.



Changchun

The meeting in Changchun was attended by 500 executives, government leaders, and professors from all parts of the world. They met to talk about the economy, new technologies, etc. Some of the highlights included: Monsanto's promotion of their drought-resistant seeds to help save fresh water. Today, 65% of fresh water in China is used for agriculture. Just 10% savings is enough to supply water for all household uses. John Deere has contributed to China's infrastructure, agriculture, and construction projects. Dell and many other high tech companies—Intel, Microsoft, Google, HP, Apple—all have a great presence in China. Swedish SKF Co. works on reducing friction—thus saving energy. Professors talked about global financial problems or new technologies.

George talked about his research on producing fuel from biomass.

After Changchun, about 50 of the attendees were flown to Yuncheng in Shanxi Province. This is a third tier inland city of 500,000 people, newly developed with industries in aluminum, wind power turbines, heavy trucks,



As Yuncheng in Shanxi Province is the birthplace of Guangong, there is a palatial Guandi Temple to honor the hero of the Three Kingdoms (220-280).

beer, etc. A bronze sculpture company showed many replicas of magnificent bronze ware of Shang (16th to 11th Century BCE) and Zhou (11th to 771 BCE). Major new bronze sculpture works are done here for cities all over China. As the birthplace of Guangong, there is a palatial Guandi Temple to honor the hero of the Three Kingdoms (220-280). "Yuncheng" means the "shipping city" of salt. A big salt lake there contributed 1/6 of the revenue for Tang Dynasty (618-907). Located near the center of China, the term "Middle Kingdom" originated here. The mausoleum of the ancient emperor, Shundi, is now a tourist attraction.

From Yuncheng, we took a three hour bus ride to Xian. Today Xian is a completely new city. Even the historical sites have undergone

renovations. The Banpo Museum displayed excavations of human dwellings 7,000 years ago with beautiful potteries. Rice grains have been found showing the early cultivation of rice. Changan, today's Xian, was a major capital in Chinese history, especially during the important Qin (221-206 BCE), Han (206 BCE-220AD) and Tang (618-907) dynasties. We made tour arrangements at the hotel for next day's tour.

We were picked up at the hotel to go to a meeting place and board a big bus that would take us to Li Shan, Huaqingchi (hot spring bath resort for imperial families of the Tang Dynasty). We visited the location of "Xian Incident" (December, 1936) when Chiang Kai Shek was kidnapped in order to force the Nationalists and the Communists to unite in the war against Japan. Nearby the Qin terra-cotta warriors were discovered there in 1974, when farmers were digging a well. The Qin terra-cotta museum has new construction with three buildings. The tomb of the First Emperor of Qin who united China in 221 BCE has not been excavated so it can be better preserved.

We did not schedule a tour for the next day. By ourselves we visited the city wall and Bell and Drum Towers at our own pace. The Wall of 13.7 kilometers, constructed during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), is the only well-preserved ancient wall in existence today. From the south exit, we followed the underground signs to the



Bell and Drum Tower

Bell Tower. There was a giant bell on the terrace. We were happy to run into a performance at 4 pm.

The performers danced and played Chinese music and sang Western songs with replicas of the bronze bells and qing—stone blocks, unearthed in a 2,000 year old tomb. The discovery of the 2,000 year old bells and qing rewrote the history of musical instruments. In ancient times it required great technology to cast the bronze bells, each with 2 precise tones to play music. We took a short walk to the Drum Tower, just in time for the 4.30 pm performance of drums. There were big drums on the terrace and an exhibit of ancient drums inside.

We got up early the next day for a tour of the mausoleums of Han Wudi (157-87 BCE), Tang Dynasty Empress Wu Zetian (624-705) and her son. We did not have time to visit other tombs of the Han and Tang Dynasties. Han Wudi sent Zhang Qian to foreign lands in the West, which was the start of the Silk Road trade route more than 2,100 years ago. The great capital Changan was connected by this route all the way to Rome. Silk was coveted by Romans—it was as precious as gold. The Silk Road was also important for cultural exchanges between the East and the West. Han Wudi also sent his generals to defeat the Huns in the north, who had escaped to become terror of Europe. Paper was invented in the latter part of Han Dynasty. Indeed, the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 AD) was most important in history.

The Tang Dynasty (618-907) saw the flowering of poetry, art, music, and theater. Changan was the biggest and most splendid international city in the world with many people from foreign lands. Japan sent thousands of



the imperial temple of the Tang Dynasty in Famen

students who spread Chinese culture to Japan and later Korea. After lunch, it was a drive of some distance to Famensi—the imperial temple of the Tang Dynasty. A finger bone of Buddha and many imperial treasures were secretly buried in the underground chamber of the temple. Over 1,300 years of history, these objects were never discovered until 1987 when half of the temple was destroyed in an earthquake. A Hong Kong philanthropy donated huge sums to build great granite buildings in a grand plaza. We viewed the sacred bone when it was raised for a few minutes from underground at 4 PM.

Alternating from the rigorous full-day tour, we went to 2011 World Horticulture Exposition held in Xian. This covered a vast area that included a lake. We reversed our route to avoid the crowd. There was no line at the first building when we went in.

After a night of rest, we joined a two-day tour to visit the Yellow Emperor Mausoleum, the Yellow River Pot-mouth Falls and Yanan.

The Yellow Emperor is considered the common ancestor of all Chinese. He invented a carriage with a compass to defeat Chi You, who used smoke in the battle. With many other inventions, he started 5,000 years of civilization in China. He was called Yellow Emperor for the color of earth he represented. (His half-brother Yan Di, known as Sheng Nong, originated agriculture and herbal medicine.) Reportedly, memorial activities for the Yellow Emperor began early in history. The first memorial service of which there are written records was performed some 2,200 years ago by the first emperor of Han Dynasty. There is one old cypress tree with a stone tablet inscribed “Yellow Emperor planted this cypress.” The trunk of the cypress has a circumference of 11 meters. In 1982, two English botanists came to make measurements and check out its age after surveying old trees in 20 other countries. They declared this tree the king of cypresses. Among the many ancient cypresses that are over 3,000 years old, Han Wudi hung his armor on one when he brought 100,000 soldiers

to pay homage to the Yellow Emperor after winning a battle. A stone tablet marks this event.



Xuanyuan Temple...a square wood palace with a round opening in the center signifying the ancient belief that “heaven is round and the earth is square.”

We climbed a flight of stairs to Xuanyuan (Yellow Emperor’s name) Temple, a granite structure in the traditional style of a square wood palace with a round opening in the center signifying the ancient belief that “heaven is round and the earth is square.” Inside there were stone tablets including writings of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kaishek, and Mao Zhedong. In the center was a portrait of Yellow Emperor carved in stone. The image was taken from a historical drawing. On the back of a granite block was his biography copied from the “Historical Records,” written by the great historian Si Maqian over 2,000 years ago. It was Yellow Emperor who marks the beginning of 5,000 years of uninterrupted civilization in China. No other ancient civilization has lasted continuously to this day. On our way back, we passed stone tablets from different dynasties. I did see one from the Song Dynasty (960-1279). There may be earlier ones that I did not see. Two recent ones commemorated the return to China of Hong Kong and Macau in 1997 and 1999 from Western colonial powers.

We then visited the Yellow River Pot-mouth Falls. The Yellow River at its widest is over 400 meters. It narrows to 30 meters here with a 50 meter drop that forms thundering falls

at several points. Legend has it that Da Yu (21st Century BCE) made an opening here to ease the Yellow River floods. We now know it is a natural phenomenon.

From ancient history, we came back to the more recent Communist revolutionary base of Yan'an. The area benefits from "Red Color Tourism." Affluent tourists came here to spread their wealth to help the economy. Previously, people were isolated in the hills. We saw highways going through many tunnels and bridges; and evergreen trees planted on the hills to control erosion. The government has promoted the urbanization of the rural population in order to settle them in migration villages. This is so that the people can have better education and healthcare. It is also for environment protection. People used to cut down trees for cooking. And without electricity, the only entertainment was to work overtime to produce babies. Next to tourism, fruit trees also contribute to local economy. We saw apple orchards producing good quality fruits.

We visited "Date Garden" where many of the old revolutionaries lived. In China, Mao



Date Garden, where many of the old revolutionaries lived

Zedong is credited with establishing the People's Republic in 1949, but he is also generally held responsible for the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Deng Xiaoping was himself attacked three times during this period. He rose from disgrace to start the great reform of China in 1978. In order to have peace and stability for economic development, Mao was never openly denounced.

Big Goose Pagoda was built during the Tang Dynasty to commemorate the successful journey made by Xuanzang to bring back Buddhist scriptures (629 AD). On the walls there were historical paintings and calligraphy by



Big Goose Pagoda was built during the Tang Dynasty to commemorate the successful journey made by Xuanzang to

famous people. We were able to climb the seven flights of stairs to the top to have a better view of the city and the new massive musical fountains on the front plaza. At night, colorful lights brightened the grand plaza.

We returned to Beijing on a Saturday when traffic was lighter. In China, airports are usually quite a distance from city centers. In big cities, subways connecting to train stations are not only cheaper but faster than ground traffic. Fast trains are a good alternative to flying. Sometimes it takes longer just to get to and from the airports. It was good that we carried our passports. At most attractions, admissions are free for seniors 70+, half price for 60+, even for foreign visitors.

Beijing is another important capital city. Pre-historic "Peking Man" lived in Beijing area 500,000 years ago. Excavations



Pre-historic "Peking Man" lived in the Beijing area 500,000 years ago.

uncovered his scalp bone, which was lost in the turmoil of the War against Japan. But in the caves, ashes were discovered showing the use of fire. Mongols established the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) here. Their city wall ruins of 15 kilometers are now a green belt of parks in Beijing. Marco Polo was said to have visited China during this period. His travel tales about China fascinated the Europeans. Columbus carried Marco Polo's book during his voyage to try to find China. When he reached America, he thought he reached India. Thus he called the natives "Indians."

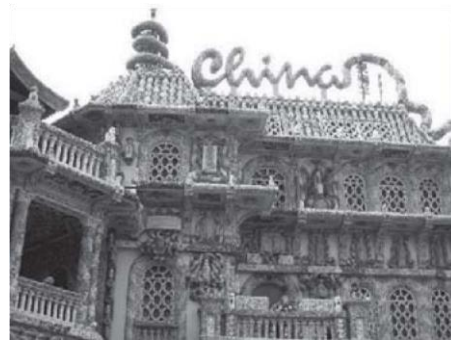
Emperor Yongle of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing and built the palace--the Forbidden City; he ordered the making of the world's first encyclopedia and the rebuilding of The Great Wall with bricks that can be seen today. The Great Wall covers some 3,000 miles and was first



Emperor Yongle of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) ordered the rebuilding of The Great Wall.

started more than 2,200 years ago, but it had deteriorated through the years. His other achievement was to send Zhenghe on a peaceful naval expedition to the south and west

seas preceding Columbus' expedition by ninety years.



a well-preserved area of Tianjin where there are historical buildings and shops.

The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) continued Confucian rule in the Ming's palace before entering into decline. In 1840, the British imported opium to poison the Chinese population. This was followed by the invasions of eight colonial powers, including Japan in 1900.

Sun Yat-sen saw no hope in the corrupt and incompetent Qing Dynasty.

He overthrew the 3,000 year monarchy system and established the Republic of China in 1911. This was the beginning of modern China. His Three Principles have been followed in Taiwan: Unity of the People; Democracy, and People's Livelihood. Inspired by Taiwan's success, China started economic reform in 1978. What is still lacking in China is Democracy. October 10 marked the 100th

year anniversary of Xin Hai Revolution led by Dr. Sun-Yat-sen. Today, people in China have

recognized the greatness of his ideas for a modern China.

We picked up some tour flyers at Dashilar□ with choices of tours in Beijing and surrounding areas offered by a reputable travel company. We started on a one day tour in Beijing—a boat ride in Yihe Yuan□, visits to the Olympic Park, the Bird’s Nest, the Water Cube, etc. We drove by Tsinghua and Beida universities and got off at Wang Fuging□, where there was a subway station to get home.

Another tour took us to Tianjin — about 130 kilometers from Beijing. This city was a port once occupied by Western colonial powers. It is now a splendid new city of 12 million people bustling with activities. We visited a well-preserved area of town where there are historical buildings and shops. We also had a 30 minute boat ride on Haihe□ going to the sea. Then it was shopping time at a Western Product Market across from a former French colonial building. One site listed in the brochure was the “aircraft carrier.” We thought it was the new one, but we did not see this because it is no longer in existence.

The one in recent news is the only aircraft carrier in China. For a long time, China resisted building aircraft carriers because it never has had aggressive intentions towards other countries. But now the U.S., Japan, India, and the Philippines are conducting all kinds of military exercises in a strategic circle to “contain” China. This mentality is short-sighted. Hostility will get nowhere since China has the military power to retaliate. In the global environment, China can choose to take its business to friendly nations. China awarded France’s Airbus a big order instead of Boeing because of apparent hostile attitudes in the U.S. China can actually play a role in helping the U.S. economy.

The urbanization of China’s population has created a huge middle class, and the large group of well-educated professionals are all eager consumers. Strangely, Americans like to buy Japanese cars while the Chinese like to buy

American cars. They like all things American. Budget hotel chains in the U.S. have become prestigious brand-names in China. American companies have become very profitable because of their business in China. For example, Apple Computer has increased its value a hundred fold because of its business in China. Cell phone users in China are approaching 1 billion—that is three times the entire U.S. population. China’s 1.3 billion consumers are twice the population of the U.S. and Europe combined. China will be the new economic engine to help pull other countries out of their economic troubles.

The rise of China cannot be reversed. Americans must change their mind-set in the new world. U.S. military spending has only depleted our treasury. After ten years since 9-11, we have come to realize that more weapons do not translate into more security. All it takes to do damage is one terrorist with a home-made bomb. Judging from the recent Wall Street protests, it’s time for the U.S. to lay down its arms and heed the people’s cries for peace and prosperity.

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