

# A VISIT TO SHANGHAI

by Lucia Lee

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*(EDITOR'S NOTE: After typing so many articles dealing with contemporary China, TRIPOD's dedicated Secretary, Lucia Lee, decided to have a look for herself. Upon her return to Hong Kong, we asked her to share some of her impressions with us.)*

After visiting the city of Guangzhou, my friend and I went on a ten day tour of the famous city of Shanghai. In such a short amount of space, it would be impossible to record all the impressions gathered from our trip. Perhaps the reader would be best served by an introduction to the city itself, followed by some comments on our three-day experience working on a farm in the countryside. The contrast between big city life and life in a rural community, which is the life-style of most people on the mainland, struck us very forcefully. And while the famous landmarks of Shanghai, its temples and churches drew most of our attention, a visit to the countryside served to balance our brief but eventful pilgrimage.

## THE CITY OF SHANGHAI

Shanghai is a major industrial centre of China and one of the world's largest ports. It's natural harbour and favorable geographical location once attracted businessmen from all over the world. Competition was so keen and wide-open that it became known as the "Adventurers' Paradise." The abbreviated name of Shanghai is 'Hu' (滬). It is situated at the mouth of the Yangtze River (長江) on plains formed by the accumulation of soil washed down by the river as it flows into the Pacific. Shanghai has four distinct seasons. Hot and humid in the summer, with temperatures ranging between 32<sup>0</sup>C and 35<sup>0</sup>C; its winters, while dry, can be

quite chilly, with temperatures averaging from 3<sup>0</sup>C to 5<sup>0</sup>C, sometimes dipping as low as -10<sup>0</sup>C during severe cold spells.

Shanghai is one of the three cities of China directly administered by the Central Government (the other two being Beijing and Tianjin). Encompassing an area of 5,800 square miles, it is divided into twelve districts. The 1982 official Government census numbered the population at 11,859,748, which ranks it second to Tokyo as the most densely populated city in the world.

The heart of the city is made up of multi-storied buildings, skyscrapers serving mainly as commercial centres, with banks, department stores and shops lining the streets. A visitor from Hong Kong is reminded of old photographs taken in Hong Kong during the 1930's. Nan-Jing Road ( 南京路 ) is a wide, bustling street running through the commercial district. It is crowded with people on the move -- some coming from a few hours of relaxation at the cinema, others queuing up to buy food, window shoppers looking at the displays of new consumer goods laid out in the department store windows, and, of course, thousands of workers on their way to or just returning from work. Despite the many changes of recent history, Shanghai still retains the flavour of its former bustling business.

One of the architectural gems of Shanghai is the four-century old Yu Yuan ( 豫園 ). Next to it is Cheng Huang Temple ( 城隍廟 ). This temple while retaining its original name, now has an altogether different function. The temple precincts serve as Yu Yuan's business arcade, where all sorts of handicraft products are offered for sale. We were told by the local people that to tour Shanghai without visiting Cheng Huang temple is like not having come to Shanghai at all! Their reason for saying this is because the original settlers of Shanghai were concentrated here. The "old city" is bounded by Ren Min Road ( 人民路 ) and Zhong Hau Road ( 中華路 ). And people searching for old-fashioned electrical appliances, used furniture, household articles or spare parts no longer available in the general market, make their way to Cheng Huang Temple, with the assurance that no matter what they are looking for they will find it here.

The life-style of the people of Shanghai is generally simple in comparison to other major cities throughout the world. Most of its people are factory workers. A worker with ten-year's work experience earns about 45 RMB (about 150 Hong Kong Dollars). Jobs are allotted through a unit placement system. School leavers who have passed their final examination qualify for job placement upon graduation. While the advantage of this system is that it raises the qualifications of workers,

the disadvantage is that within the society many young people have to wait a long time for jobs.

The main means of transport in Shanghai are bus and bicycle, with private cars being few in number. Bus fare, however, is comparatively cheap. To ride a distance of five to ten bus stops costs only seven to ten cents RMB (about 30 Hong Kong Cents). Despite the rise in the cost of living in recent years, the majority of people here are still able to make a decent living.

### RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES, CHURCHES AND TEMPLES

Being Christians ourselves, my friend and I were anxious to visit the city's houses of worship. We began with the Catholic Church which has the oldest tradition.

The *Xu Jia Hui Catholic Church* ( 徐家匯天主堂 ) stands at 158 Pu Si Road ( 蒲西路 ), in the district of Xu Jia Hui. Tradition traces its origin to the conversion of a famous magistrate, Xu Guang Qi ( 徐光啓 ), during the Ming Dynasty. His conversion came about through the influence of Matteo Ricci, the famed Jesuit missionary. He was baptized here in 1603 taking the baptismal name of Paul.

Masses are celebrated here each morning at 5:15, 6:00 and 6:30. On Sundays, morning Mass times are at 5:00, 5:30, 6:00, 6:45 and 8:00.

When we arrived on Sunday to attend Mass, many of the faithful had already gathered in the church to pray. We found the congregation mixed. A minority were foreigners. We saw many elderly people, but there were many young people in attendance as well. Some of the latter seemed to be there out of curiosity. During the Mass they were very attentive, but seemed not to be familiar with the liturgy, nor were they able to participate in the singing. While Mass was in progress, there were priests in the confessionals. Also one or two priests stayed at the rear of the church, greeting non-Catholic visitors and explaining to them the nature of the worship service.

The second church we visited was *She Shan Church* ( 佘山聖堂 ) in Song Jiang ( 松江 ). Built on the only hill in this suburban area, it is 100 meters in height and was constructed during the 1930's. Near the Church there is an Observatory constructed by the Jesuits, with Zhong Shan Chapel ( 中山堂 ) situated on the side of the hill leading to the Observatory.

It was believed by many that the Blessed Virgin Mary would appear here in the Spring of 1980. This incident drew huge crowds to the spot to pray. Although I was unable to feel the original emotional excitement of

the pilgrims as reported in the news media of the time, we did experience the tranquil and solemn spirit of the place. There happened to be very few people on hand that day. But while the area was somewhat deserted, still the air was crisp and the surroundings conducive to prayer and contemplation. I was reminded how Our Lord often brought his disciples and the crowds that followed him to such deserted areas to pray and to teach.

The large church at She Shan ( 佘山 ) had been vandalized during the Cultural Revolution. However, it is being repaired and will soon be open to the public. The fourteen Stations of the Cross are placed along the path between the Church and the Chapel to help Christians to recall the Passion and Death of Our Lord. When we were there, a statue was being erected on the lawn in front of the Chapel.

There is a seminary next to the Chapel that has recently been reopened. The rector is Fr. Jin Lu Xian ( 金魯賢神父 ).

We also visited a Protestant Church which is called the *International Church* ( 國際禮拜堂 ), a two-storey structure, situated at 53 Heng Shan Road ( 衡山路 ). The magnificent and spacious interior of the church can accommodate over 1,500 worshippers. Sunday worship is held here at 7:00, 7:30 and 10:00 in the morning. Every Thursday evening small groups gather here for Bible study. According to the caretaker, the church is always full for Sunday worship. He kindly offered to reserve seats for us for the following Sunday, but our busy itinerary would not permit us to take advantage of his kind offer.

We visited two other Protestant churches in Shanghai. One is Huai En Tang ( 懷恩堂 ) on Shan Xi North Road ( 陝西北路 ). Worship hours here are on Saturday evenings at 7:00 and Sunday mornings at 8:30 and 10:30. The second Protestant Church is Mu En Tang ( 沐恩堂 ) located at 316 Xi Zang Zhong Road ( 西藏中路 ). Worship hours are at 7:30 and 10:30 a.m. on Sundays.

According to various reports, since the recent changes in government policy, Protestant religious activities have been flourishing. This is, indeed, hopeful sign.

Part of our religious tour included a visit to the *Jia Ding Confucius Temple* ( 嘉定孔廟 ) which is located at Zhen Nan Avenue ( 鎮南大街 ). The exterior of the Temple presents a stately appearance. A handsome lion sculptured in stone and an imposing monument in memory of the sage are surrounded by tall shady trees that serve to beautify the compound. Peeking through the locked doors one could just make out the magnificent interior design. Because it has not yet been opened to the public, it attracted few tourists.

Despite the severe criticism of Confucius in the recent past, this temple dedicated to him is being restored. In the future, many will

be drawn to this place to venerate China's greatest teacher. Truly the reputation of Confucius withstands the test of time.

The *Yu Fo Si* ( 玉佛寺 ), a Buddhist Temple, situated on An Yuan Road ( 安遠路 ), Pu Tuo District ( 普陀區 ), is most famous for its priceless art works. A carved seated figure of Buddha and a sleeping Buddha, all done in white jade are the most outstanding of these. Inside can be seen beautiful worship areas such as Da Xiong Bao Hall ( 大雄寶殿 ), Tian Wang Hall ( 天皇殿 ) and Shan Gate ( 山門 ). Visitors must wear straw slippers when entering the House of the Jade Buddha. The atmosphere here is one of reverence and respect.

The majority of the monks who live in the temple precincts are well advanced in years. They are all kindly and hospitable to visitors. When called upon, they are happy to explain the historical background and the general situation of the monastery. Three times a day they gather for communal prayer. On the first day of each month of the Chinese calendar, they formally open the monastery to allow local people to burn joss-sticks and perform other ritual acts of worship.

After visiting the various churches, temples and monasteries, most of which are in the process of re-construction and repair, I could not but feel that unless the inner-faith of the believer is strengthened, the magnificence and solemnity of these places of worship will have little meaning. It is my hope that our brethren in China will take pains to nourish their faith and allow the fragrance of their interior life to spread.

### A VISIT TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

Since most of the people in China are engaged in farming, my friend and I were determined to spend three days living and working with farmers in a rural village. We hoped to gain some insights into their way of life, despite the brevity of our visit.

It was after 7:00 in the evening when we arrived at the rural home of a friend of ours. The elderly couple who greeted us were of rather dark complexion, a result of having spent long, hard days in the sun. They have four sons and one daughter, all of whom are already married. They also have a grandson and two granddaughters. Except for the married daughter, all live together in the one house. China is a strong advocate of family planning, permitting married couples to have only one child. In the practical circumstances of farm life, the boy is the symbol of farm labour and family continuity. When he grows up, he will be able to obtain an allotted plot of ground on which to build his future home.

Hence, grandma naturally looked mournful when she mentioned that her daughters-in law have all given birth to girls. She longed for a grandson!

### THE DAILY WORK OF A FARMER

The main work of a farmer is preparing the land and growing vegetables. In general, the farmer's life can be divided into two different phases: the busy season and the leisure season. During the busy season, the farmer begins work in the fields at 4:00 in the morning. Because of the heavy workload, he sometimes does not have time to return home for lunch. Instead, his lunch is brought to him in the field, where he eats his meal hurriedly, and then continues to work until after 8:00 in the evening when he trods wearily home.

On the other hand, the leisure season is much less demanding on him. After breakfast he works in the fields until about 11:00. He then returns home for lunch, which is followed by a nap. After his nap he returns to work, but by 4:30 p.m., his day's work is over and he returns home to rest.

Fortunately, it happened to be the leisure season when we joined this family. On the morning after our arrival, we joined the family in the fields, ploughing and weeding. Because I was working under a strong sun and had no skill at using farm tools, I found it most difficult. A few blisters appeared on my palms. Despite the hard labour, the rhythm of the work was slow and this life did not seem to me to be as hectic as life in busy Hong Kong. Someone with a writer's imagination can see life on the farm as quite beautiful, I thought. For one is close to Mother Nature. However farming life in its stark reality is to live such a life day in and day out without benefit of such a poetic imagination

### THE DAILY LIFE OF THE VILLAGERS

Village life is simple. One begins work when the sun rises and rests when it sets. After work, the villagers take time out to look after their own small allotted plots. Except for the fish and meat which they buy in the market, the rest of their food is the product of their own toil.

During the day while the adults work in the fields, pre-school children are brought to a day-care centre and taken back home when the adults have finished their work. The family then gathers for supper, after which they sit on the porch and chat with their neighbours. Very

rarely do the farmers go to the nearby town for amusement; nor do they engage in organized social gatherings or other forms of entertainment.

We found the villagers to be very courteous with strangers who come to visit; one of the reasons for this extraordinary courtesy, perhaps, is that they seldom associate with those who live in the towns. As a result, they are quite shy. They showed so much respect for us when we visited them that they would not sit down and eat with us at mealtimes, but always served us first. Despite all our entreaties, they never gave in! An electric fan is not a common article in the home. When we took our meals in the stifling summer heat, our hosts, fearing we might feel uncomfortable, stood behind us fanning us, doing their best to make us feel comfortable. Needless to say we felt quite embarrassed. Their sincerity and kindness, however, moved us deeply.

Our few days' in the farming village passed by swiftly. Although not accustomed to the hard physical demands of farm work and the primitive hygienic conditions, our hardships were mixed with joy. It was a wonderful personal experience to be able to make contact with such simple people, people who are meek, hospitable and genuine.

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## News in brief

The Italian News Agency, on February 10th, announced the news of the episcopal ordination of Fr. Li Side (李思德) as the new Bishop Coadjutor of Shanghai. We earnestly ask the Lord to assist him with His Grace.

We were saddened to learn of the death in Italy on February 13th, 1983 of Bishop Lawrence Bianchi (白英奇), ordinary of Hong Kong from 1951 to 1969. He was 83. During his leadership the Church of Hong Kong grew from 30,000 to 250,000, thus becoming the largest concentration of Chinese catholics in any one diocese of the world. When taking over the task of leading the Church of Hong Kong, Bishop Bianchi said: "We work for today and trust in God for tomorrow." We pray that this trust is now fulfilled for him.