

Maria is a retired teacher from Shanghai. When she was young she was sent to a labour camp in the Northwest for twenty years because of her faith. Her brief letter gives us a glimpse into the situation of the ordinary people in Shanghai today.

Feb. 11, 1995

Dear Josephine,

Thank you for your letter written some time ago. I had a terrible cold and was unable to reply before this. Please forgive me.

You cannot imagine how much and how fast Shanghai is changing. Many old buildings have been torn down; roads are being widened; foreign and joint business ventures are daily more and more numerous. The shops are getting to look more and more like those in the West than in China and

prices are skyrocketing. The elderly in the city refer to the
International Products Centre as the “Window Shopping
Centre”. When relatives or friends come from overseas, we
accompany them inside, so we can have a look for ourselves
at those things we would like to have but can only sigh for.
Ordinarily, we do not go inside. Television also provides us
with scenes of prosperity but they do not touch us. There
are some rich people among the younger generation. “Good”
people, so-called, live in nice houses and make a good salary.
They get in one month what our pensions pay in two or
three years. The gap between the rich and poor gets wider
every day. “Bad” people, so called, have been arrested,
imprisoned, and expelled from the Party.

Since I have returned to Shanghai, the city has only
taken care of my housing problem, providing me with a
place to stay for which I paid over 5000 RMB. My living

quarters are only fifteen sq. meters. Through the wall, I can
hear the neighbors talking and the children crying or shouting.
The only ray of sun I get is by leaving my one door open.
About ten meters outside my door there is a pile of garbage.
This building does not even have a house number. When it
rains the mud makes it almost impossible to enter or leave
the house. Mail carriers refuse to come to this area since
they can't find their way through the winding alleys. Some
folks refer to this as "tunnel warfare". So I have not dared to
invite you here. I hear that they will demolish this area in
another two years and I certainly hope so.

Being materially poor, we especially look forward to
spiritual treasures. Books on doctrine or prayer, tapes or
visual aids that can help us know God better are really
welcome, especially books on the faith and for our middle
school students. Could you send me a set of old books? It's

not urgent, but I would be most grateful.

God bless you and pray for me.

Maria

* translated by Peter Barry, M.M.