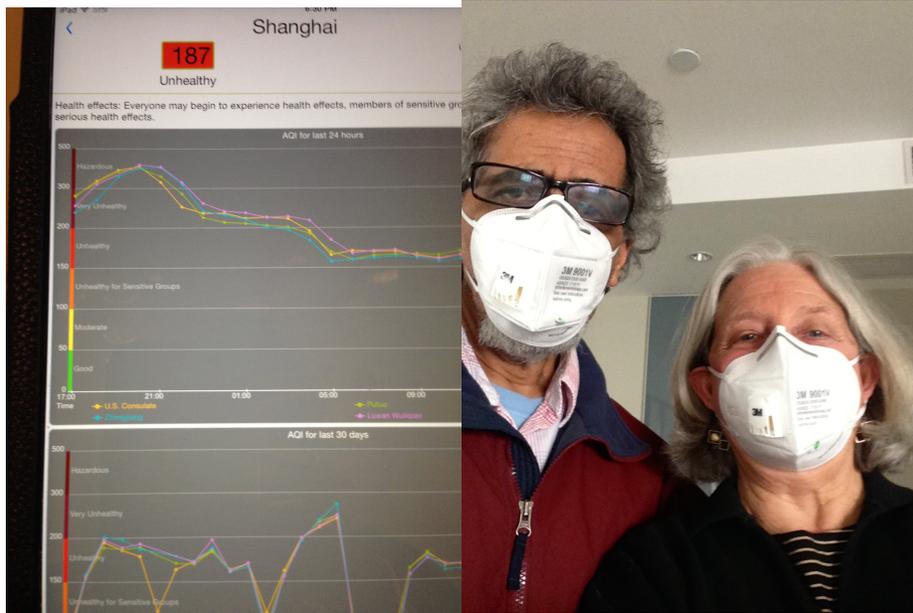
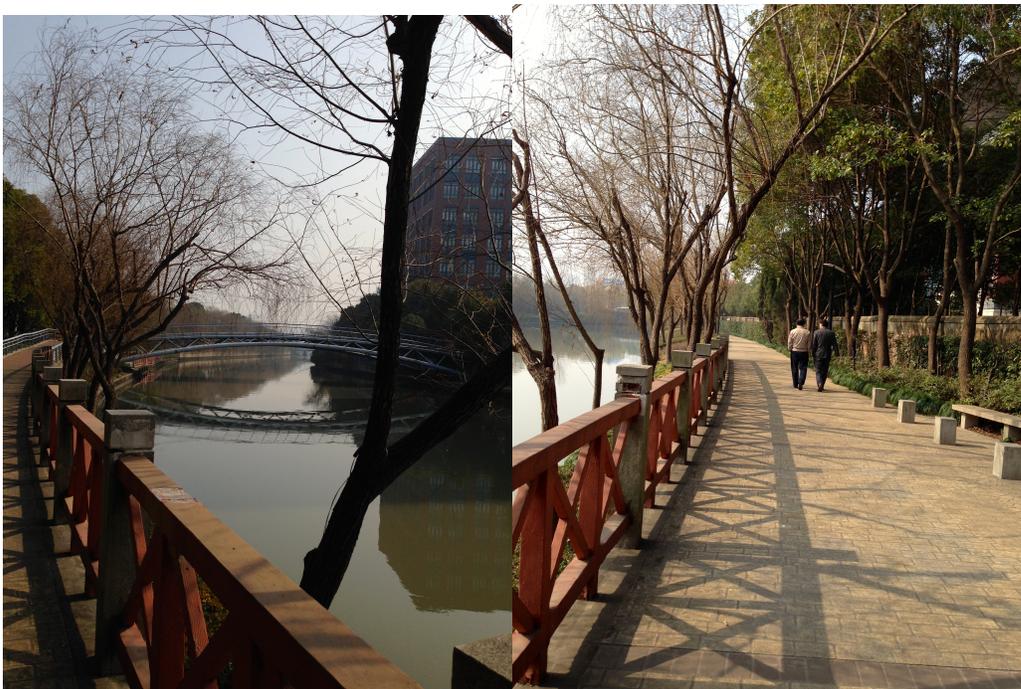


Shanghai Journal 1-26-15

This week it looks like we will be inside most of the time as the air quality index is high and it is deemed “Unhealthy” to “Hazardous” – we definitely wore our masks today. Here we have the daily report with the monthly report below. Red is definitely not good!



Last week when the AQI was better, we found a way to walk to the university that was mostly off the main roads. Here are some photos of that path. Lovely, right?



Here are some photos of our local grocery store, Lotus, getting ready for the New Year celebrations coming in a couple of weeks.



Note the ubiquitous McDonalds! However, I just read a wonderful story by Peter Hessler, a journalist who has lived in China for the past 12 years, and he offers an interesting perspective:

“When I first moved to the neighborhood, I regarded McDonald’s as an eyesore and a threat...Over time though, hutong life gave me a new perspective on the franchise...it’s common to see people sitting at tables without ordering anything. Inevitably, many are reading; in the afternoon, schoolchildren do their homework. I’ve seen the managers of neighboring businesses sitting quietly, balancing their account books. And always, always, always, somebody is sleeping...It’s also anonymous. Unlike Chinese restaurants, where waitresses hover, the staff at a fast-food joint leaves people alone. On a number of occasions, dissidents have asked me to meet them at McDonalds or a KFC because it’s safe.” [Strange Stones: Dispatches from East and West, 2013 Harper-Collins].

He also tells a wonderful story of how the hutong people made use of the fancy new bathroom erected in their neighborhood for the 2002 Olympics.

“Old Yang, the local bicycle repairman, stored his tools and extra bikes there, and in the fall cabbage vendors slept on the strip of grass that bordered the bathroom. Wang Zhaoxin, who ran the cigarette shop next door, arranged some ripped up couches around the toilet entrance. Someone else contributed a chessboard. Folding chairs appeared, along with a wooden cabinet stocked with beer glasses. After awhile there was so much furniture, and so many people there every night, that Wang Zhaoxin declared the formation of the W.C. Club...On weekend nights, the club hosted barbecues in front of the toilet. Wang Zhao supplied cigarettes, beer, and grain alcohol and Mr. Cao, a driver for the Xinhua news service, discussed what was happening in the papers...In the summer of 2002, when the Chinese men’s soccer team made history by playing in its first World Cup, the W.C. Club acquired a television, plugged it into the bathroom, and mercilessly mocked the national team as it failed to score a single goal throughout the tournament.”

I love these stories of the ingenuity of everyday people to repurpose commercial spaces for their own uses. When so much is taken over by private wealth and commercial interests, these stories offer ingenious ways to resist. Of course we need broader movements for change, but these stories speak to the spirit that makes a way out of no way.

Ravi had his first classes today and really enjoyed them. He said the students are shy and reluctant to speak but by the end of the afternoon recitation class with them they started to warm up. He is looking forward to the semester.

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