

Shanghai Journal – Hangzhou Trip
10-24-16

Dajia Hao, Nimen (Greetings, Everyone):

We had a lovely time in Hangzhou despite the rain throughout our stay. Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang province southwest of Shanghai and about an hour away by fast train. Hangzhou is the 10th largest city in China with a population of 7 million (by comparison, Shanghai is number 1 with 22 million, followed by Beijing with 19 million). Hangzhou is truly a gorgeous city, very green with trees and flowers everywhere. It has a huge lake in the center divided into five sections by three causeways that you can walk on to reach some of the small islands in the lake and the many temples, pavilions, gardens and arched bridges that surround it. In the distance you can see mountains (at least you would be able to on a clear day). On our first day we took a boat ride to one of the islands.

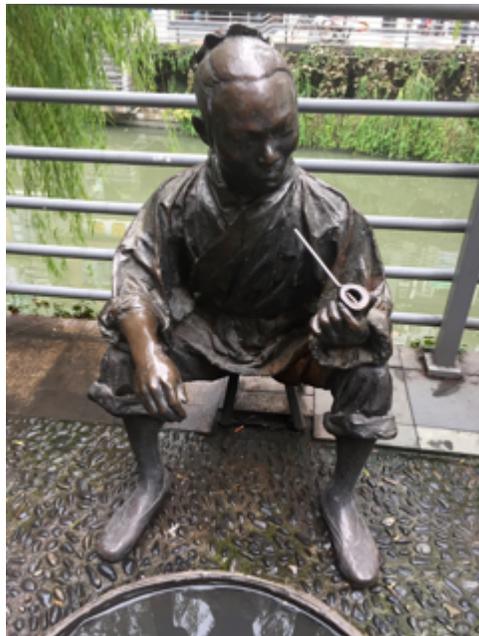




Despite the inclement weather and the fact that it was a weekday, there were still hordes of tourists. I can only imagine what it is like on a sunny weekend or holiday! People could rent costumes and dress up for photos, or try to find a spot to take their own photos without having a bunch of strangers in the background – not easy to do!



In the afternoon we decided to try an Indian restaurant we read about on Trip Advisor. It turned out to be in a different section of town and a bit hard to find. The taxi let us off at the head of a canal and after walking up and down both sides we finally called the restaurant to get directions. It turned out to be quite decent. (The photo is from our outside table at the restaurant). We met an Indian family from Dubai who had eaten there twice in two days. It is not easy to find vegetarian food in China! The restaurant owners were a young Chinese woman and her Indian husband from Delhi, and they have two Indian cooks. The canal area looked like an up and coming zone for small restaurants that is still taking shape. It was fun to find it. These statues were at various points along the canal – I like the fisherman smoking his pipe and the small child running behind the father.



We saw several garden sculptures throughout the city marking the G-20 Summit that occurred in Hangzhou in September and there were signs on all the buses and throughout the city with slogans related to the summit. We read that more than 2 million residents went on subsidized vacations so the city could be cleaned and security beefed up before the event. The city government actually ordered one week of vacation and distributed travel coupons worth more than 1.1 billion dollars!



After a late lunch we took a taxi back to the lake area to visit Linying Temple and discovered that Hangzhou traffic is truly a nightmare. It took so long to get there that by the time we got to the ticket office we only had 15 minutes before closing. So that was a bust. We also discovered that it is impossible to get a taxi at closing time so we started walking and did not see a single free taxi. After a good 45 minutes, a car stopped and asked if we were looking for a ride – it must have been an Uber – so we finally got a lift home, even if we did have to pay 50 kuai (20 more than we paid to get there – about \$9 as opposed to \$3.50).

The next morning we found out we could take the bus from right in front of our hotel to Linying Temple so we did that for 2 kuai each! We were so glad we didn't try to see it the day before. It is a huge site and a stunning place, not to be seen in a hurried manner. We would never have known what a jewel it is based on the blurbs we read about it, and none of the people who raved to us about Hangzhou even mentioned it.

We were completely enthralled with this amazing ancient Buddhist temple. To avoid the crowd heading for the Temple proper, we started our tour on a side path that led to a craggy limestone formation called the Flying Peak because of a legend that the peak was flown from India as a manifestation of the omnipotence of Buddhism. It turned out to be a jaw-dropping spectacle - over 470 Buddhist carvings in grottoes and on the hillsides and riverbanks. These were carved between the 3rd and 10th centuries.





These photos probably don't convey just how thrilling it was to walk along the cliffs and keep discovering statues, and then more...and then more...and then more... Simply awesome!

Next we went into the Temple complex – very grand in its own right. An Indian monk (named Huili in Chinese) founded the temple in 328 AD. At its peak (907-978), it was huge with nine buildings, 18 pavilions, 72 halls and more than 3000 monks. It is still a working monastery. As a result of marauders in different periods, the Temple has been rebuilt 16 times. Damage was less during the Cultural Revolution because of the protection of Zhou Enlai (who I mentioned in a previous journal also protected Potala Palace in Tibet – maybe he was a secret Buddhist).





It was impossible to take a photo that conveys the size of the Temple compound. We visited about five huge temples, tiered one above the

other up the side of the mountain, each with enormous golden Buddhas like the one above. The monastery also has a big working library and a museum with cultural artifacts. Quite an amazing place! We spent the whole day there and still didn't see it all.

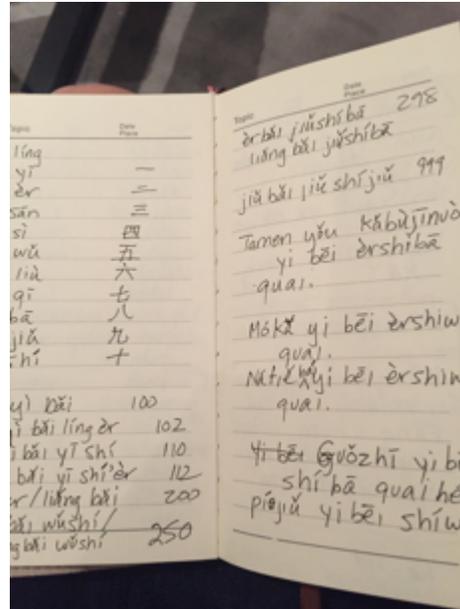
We took the bus back to our hotel to rest, then went to dinner at an Italian restaurant. Our concierge could not get us a taxi so we decided to walk. We stopped at a big hotel along the way to see if they could get a taxi there but the concierge there said it would be impossible for the next hour and we should wait. He was shocked that we would consider walking and said it was too far, but thanks to Google maps we knew it was about 3 kilometers. It only took us about half an hour to walk there and I'm sure a taxi would have taken at least that long in traffic. It was worth it. We had a really tasty asparagus risotto, made more in a French than Italian style (the owners were French), but still, very good.

The next morning before our return to Shanghai, we went to Qinghefang Ancient Street, an old shopping area in Hangzhou. It has century old shops selling everything imaginable - Wangxingji Fan Store, Zhangxiaoquan Scissors, and Jingyangguan Sheep Soup Restaurant, among others - plus a McDonalds set in a beautiful old building. I didn't take photos except the one below because it was too awkward to juggle the camera while holding an umbrella and trying to stay dry. I couldn't resist this one though. People were rubbing the Buddha's belly for good luck, so we rubbed his belly too and hope the luck rubbed off on us! Note the sign: "No climbing civilized visit." I keep forgetting to write down the amusing translations I see, but two I remember right now are: "Best Ramen Jauntiness" for a restaurant and "Awfully Chocolate Since 1987" for a sweet shop.

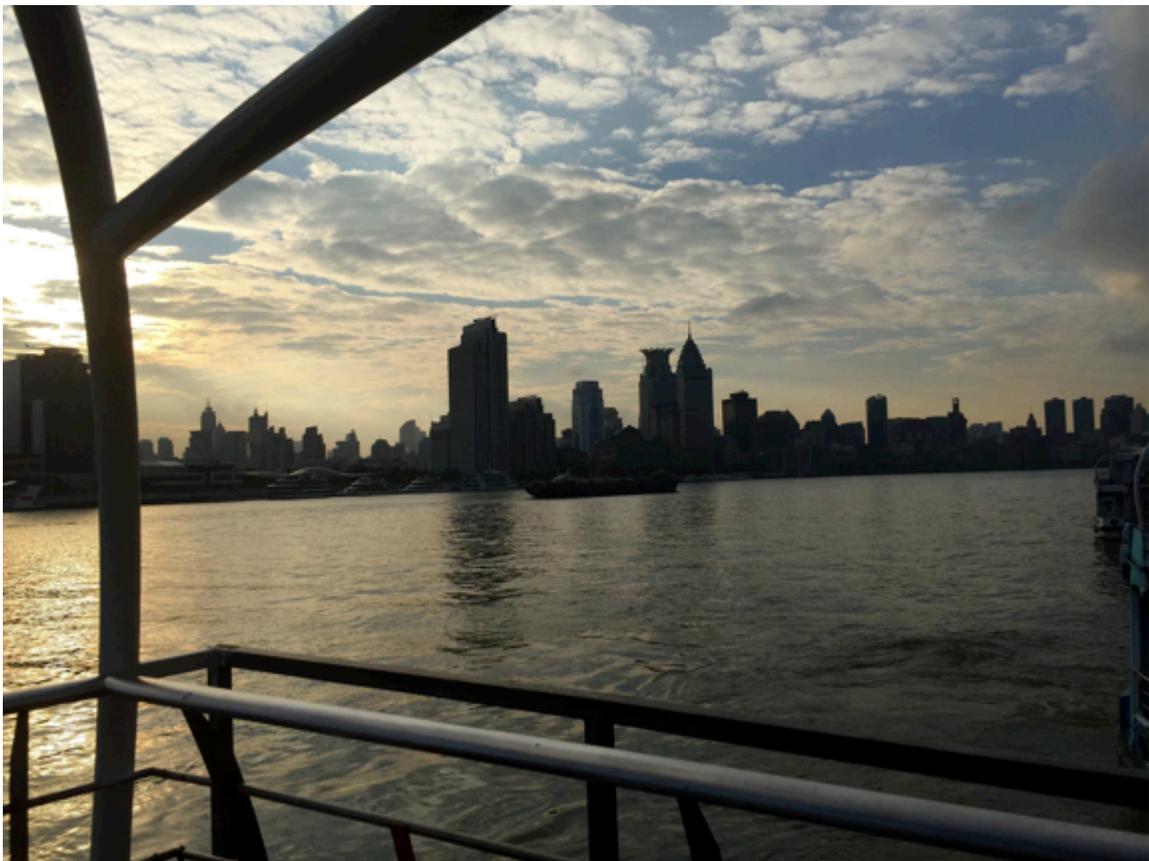
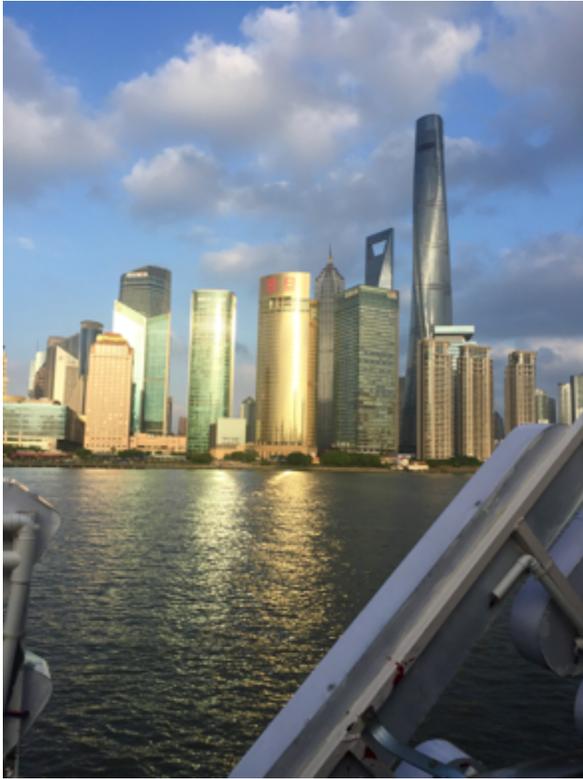


We walked around for about an hour and then headed to the train station and back to Shanghai. Just as we walked into our lobby, Chuck who had just arrived from New York, was signing in. He, Yuning and Pablo came for dinner last night. Then Fabio arrived from Brazil at 4 am this morning and he came for dinner tonight. Fabio and Ravi will be working together for the next two weeks. Sometime this week before I leave, Ravi, Fabio, Chuck and I are going to the massage place. It will be my last massage for this trip. So sad! I've really gotten used to having one a week! How spoiled I am!

Today I had my penultimate Mandarin class. I hope I can remember what I've learned so far and be able to build from that next year when we return. Here I am with my tutor/teacher Sherry and here is a page from my notes. Sherry is a patient and encouraging teacher and I enjoy talking with her. I think it has been a good thing for me to be a beginner again – it really makes me think about my own pedagogy and also how important supportive interpersonal relations are for learning.



After my class, I went to pick up a skirt I had copied at the cloth market in Puxi. Then I took the ferry back to Pudong and got a last look at the gorgeous skyline (at least for this trip). So happy to know about the ferry I can use with my metro card. It was a beautiful afternoon water trip.



Ana and Brena (her 5 year old) stopped by before dinner to give Ravi and me an orchid as a birthday gift. So sweet! I wanted to take a photo of Brena to include but she did not want that so of course I didn't take it. She is quite a wonderful, strong and determined girl – I love to see that!

Wednesday we are going with a group to have dinner at Lost Heaven. We will probably plan the massage for Thursday and have a quiet evening at home, packing for my early morning departure on Friday. So strange that I leave here Friday morning and arrive in New York Friday afternoon (but of course there is a full day in the air to account for). I will miss Ravi but I'm looking forward to being home for awhile.

Zaijian, Lee

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