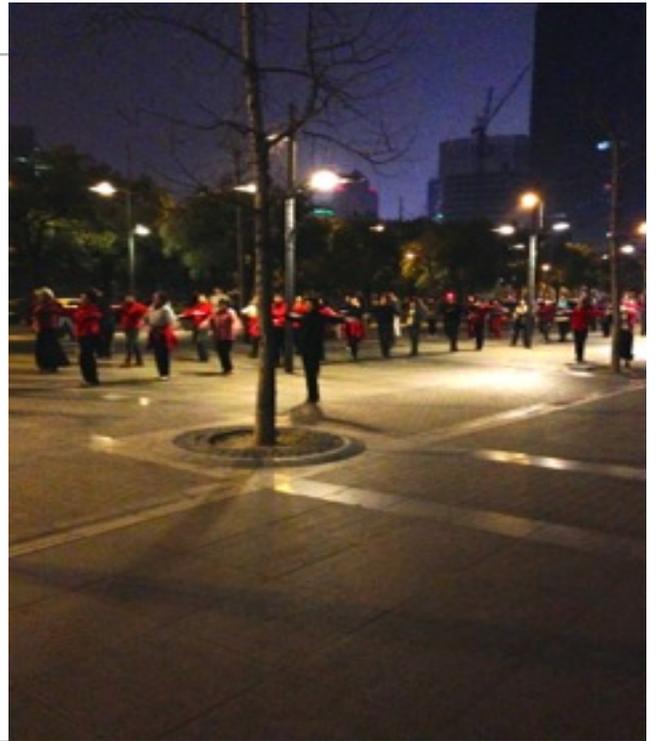




**Spring is in the air in
Shanghai!**

Nimen hao! Hello to all of you.

We have had two classes in Mandarin now and it is really daunting. Just for starters there are 90,000 characters and 5 tones for pronouncing each sound, which determines, for example, whether you are telling someone you love them or you want to hurt them! It is lots of fun though and very funny to hear a bunch of college professors struggling to pronounce syllables and words correctly. The teachers are great – very clear and very patient. So far, I have learned to say, “Wo jiao Lee. Wo shi Meiguo ren. Ni ne?” “I am Lee. I am from the United States. And you?” (Of course this is written here without all the diacritical marks that determine tone since I don’t have Chinese Pinyin characters on my computer). Here are some other country names representing others in the class: Bilishi (Belgian), Faguo (French), Eluosi (Russian), Aodaliya (Australia), Yiselie (Israeli).



The photo on the right is a group of people we pass on the way home from the university – we think they are practicing for a New Years Day parade (all ages - very polished and graceful.) We saw two such groups and while they had different steps the music sounded like the same song.

The photo next to it is from the park we pass on our way to and from the university. This tufted grass is everywhere and getting more lush each day – a harbinger of spring we hope. Below is a stand that posts the daily newspaper and this is the first time I've passed it that there wasn't at least one person standing and reading. Often there are several people reading, sometimes discussing. A communal newspaper! On the right is the lane we walk on with park on right.





Today I had my second cooking class. Ravi couldn't come because he agreed to cover a class for a colleague who is leaving early for the break. We were 6 women today – a Swiss from Zurich, an Italian from Milan, two Japanese from Tokyo, a Chilean from Santiago, and me. Above is a comparison of hot and sour soup (top by the chef, bottom by me). Looks pretty good huh? I didn't do quite so well with the mushroom dish below. Can you guess which is his and which is mine?





Chef Mike is doing a taste test to determine which dishes are acceptable or not. Two of my three dishes passed the test today.

He will be on television for a week after the break hosting a cooking show. The Swiss woman said she had gone to a different cooking class and it was awful so I feel really lucky that I picked this one. I really enjoy it and find him to be a wonderful teacher.

We are now busily planning our trip next week to Beijing and Xian. We had been told by some folks not to travel but then others said it is OK as long as we avoid certain dates (kind of like traveling at Thanksgiving in the U.S. and avoiding the day before and the Sunday after). We will fly to Beijing on Monday evening and spend three days seeing sights there: Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City, Lama Temple, Summer Palace, Temple of Heaven, the Great Wall, hutongs (old residential neighborhoods). Then we take a bullet train to Xian five hours north of Beijing where the terra cotta warriors were discovered. Xian is one of the oldest cities in China and was the capital through several important dynasties. It is also the starting point of the Silk Road. We have one night and day there and then fly back to Shanghai Friday evening.

Unless something really interesting happens before we leave, you probably won't hear from me until we get back, but then I should have lots of good stories and photos.

Gonghexinxi! Happy New Year!

Love, Lee

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