

Shanghai Journal 5-4-16

Ni Hao,

This past Saturday was another lovely day, so Ravi and I made an excursion to the old Shanghai Post Office. It is on the other side of Suzhou River across from the Bund in an area we haven't yet explored. The building was erected in 1924 and is enormous; in 2003 part of it was converted into a postal museum. It is actually a very interesting place that traces the history of the postal system in China up to the present day. According to the exhibits, a postal system existed as early as the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 B.C.). Below are tortoise shell inscriptions providing reports from the frontier, passes issued by the king allowing tax free transport, and inscribed wooden sticks to verify delivery time! Pretty impressive! I love the clay figures of addresser/addressee and messenger.

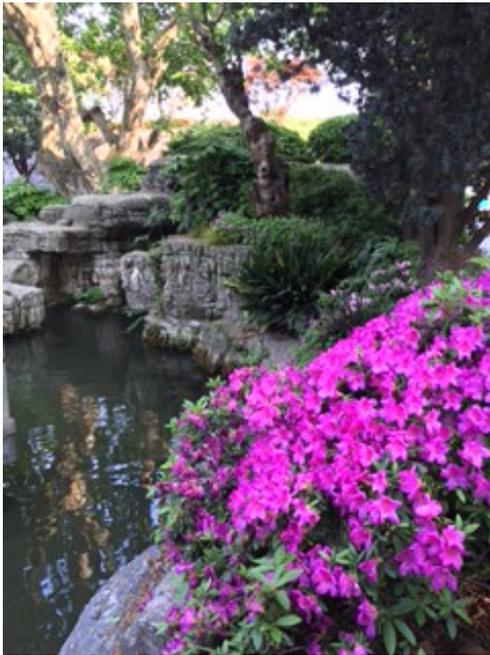


Below are an envelope from the early 1900's and a replica of the building. I read that the roof garden has a spectacular view of the city but unfortunately it was under

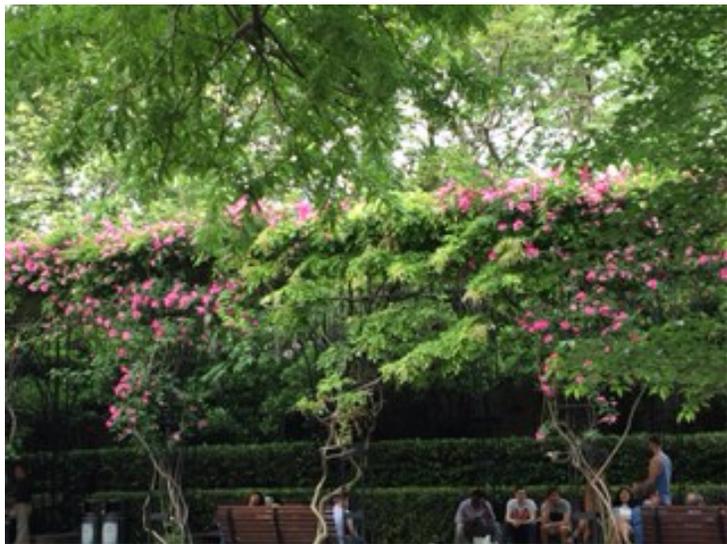
renovation so we couldn't go up there. Stamps from various periods were on display including some from the time of Empress Dowager Cixi. (She is a fascinating figure whose story is told by Jung Chang in a book titled *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine who Launched Modern China*). It was well worth the visit.



Next we walked along Suzhou Creek to the Waibaidu Bridge that links to the Bund Park where Inspector Chen (from my favorite Qiu Xiaolong mysteries) hung out as a kid. Bund Park figures in his mystery *A Loyal Character Dancer*. If you haven't read him and you like mysteries, check him out. Because it was the May Day holiday there were soldiers out in force, as is typical on holidays. The soldiers here look about 15 years old! Throngs of people were out enjoying the day and flowers were everywhere in bloom. One of the nicest days since we've been here!



On Sunday, another lovely day, we decided to check out Fuxing Park in the former French Concession and once the largest park in Shanghai. There were couples dancing to American country western music, families with children, people doing tai chi (notice the man in the background in 4th photo), a beautiful rose garden and a statue of Marx and Engels. We had planned to have dinner in Xintiandi (the section where the park is located) but there was so much pollen from the plane trees (imported from London by the French) that I couldn't stop sneezing so we decided to head home.



Yesterday I went back to the doctor and got antibiotics. Hopefully, that will do the trick with this cough and congestion that doesn't seem to go away. Also got Claritin for allergies – now that everything is in full bloom the pollen really gets to me. Today the antibiotics and Claritin seem to be working so I'm feeling much better.

I'll end with a funny story. Right before Kathy and Liz left, the four of us went to our massage place. One of the masseuses asked Ravi if I was his wife (Ravi has been working with a Mandarin tutor this year and really understands a lot). Ravi said yes, I was his taitai and he is my laogong (missing proper diacritical marks). Depending on how you pronounce the word and where you place intonation laogong can mean husband or eunuch. I guess he used the wrong intonation and they got a huge laugh out of it.

Tomorrow we are going to Suzhou for a couple days to see the gardens in bloom and erase our memory of freezing to death there in the winter. Next week Ravi gives final exams and we start packing up to leave the following Monday. Looking forward to being home!

Zaijian, Lee

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