

Shanghai Journal
November 20, 2017

Xiawu Hao Pengyou (Good afternoon Friends),

Two days after returning from Beijing I left for a five day trip to Washington D.C. to attend an Aspen Institute conference, “Civil Discourse in a Fractured Age,” hosted by their Youth Engagement Programs. The invitation to speak on the opening panel about the Storytelling Project was too tempting to turn down. I took the opportunity to consider the use of the term “civil” and the ways in which that term can be loaded, particularly in reference to marginalized youth. I shared ways I thought the Storytelling Model could be useful in this work, especially in terms of creating counter-storytelling community that addresses the unequal places from which we enter dialogue. Ximena Zuniga, whose work is in intergroup dialogue, reinforced these ideas and added insights from her wonderful work. The third person on our panel was Susan Rivers who develops interactive games that promote social emotional development (caring, empathy, cooperation).

Represented at the conference were groups I admire a lot, including the Southern Poverty Law Center, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Anti-Defamation League. All three have wonderful curriculum and tools for engaging young people in dialogue around challenging social justice issues. There were also some grassroots organizations and teachers from Chicago and Philadelphia who had important ideas to share. The youth who participated were terrific and diverse but I would say underrepresented in relation to adults.



Their words were eloquent and experiences essential to the conversation Aspen seems to want to promote. We’ll see where this goes but I was glad to have been a part of it.

While I was in D.C., I also met with a client who is writing a manual on social justice and health equity. I’ve been consulting with him by email and Skype so it was nice to finally meet in person. So, it was a jam-packed but fruitful trip!

I got back to Shanghai the same evening that Livio and Carla arrived from Rome for ten days. Livio and Ravi are working on a paper together so while they met in the mornings, Carla and I went around to see the sights. Their hotel was right behind the university so an easy place to meet up. The lobby always has gorgeous flower arrangements, and also a North Korean restaurant where young women dressed in traditional garb greet diners as they enter.



One day we walked around the former French Concession, following the path I walked with Linda. We ate Hawaiian Po at the same place on Wulumuqi Lu and Carla bought bags in the same shop across the street. We visited the Indigo Batik Museum where we saw new cloth hanging out to dry and Carla bought a jacket. We also went into several cashmere shops where Carla was able to get some scarves, a sweater and a cap at prices she said were much better than Rome.

Another day we took the ferry from Pudong to Puxi to walk along the Bund. It was cold and windy but still beautiful.



Unfortunately, the weather turned to rain for the next three days. One rainy day we went to the South Bund Spinning Market where Livio and Carla found some good bargains on scarves and gifts. Another rainy day we went to the Shanghai Museum – you can see the line of people with umbrellas waiting to get in and us looking a little bedraggled and wet. But the museum was dry inside and awe-inspiring as always. They both enjoyed Yang’s Dumplings at the Century Avenue underground mall where I took this photo of Livio outside a restaurant celebrating Hairy Crab season.



Finally, the rain stopped but the weather turned cold and blustery. Still better than rain! The four of us went to Longhua Temple, the longest historically and largest temple in Shanghai, and one Ravi and I had not visited yet. It is more accessible now that the number 12 metro line is completed. These posters promoting socialist core values lined the walls around the temple. These are a set of new official interpretations of Chinese socialism promoted at the 18th national Congress of the Communist Party in 2012. They include the national values of prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; the social values of freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, and the individual values of patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship. Interesting contrast to how we think about individual values in the U.S.



Longhua Temple covers thirty acres. It was built by King Sun (Wu) Quan for his mother in the three kingdoms period and is more than 1700 years old. At the entrance stood this pagoda and inside there were four or five temples. In addition to the more typical Buddha statues was this one with clearly Indian influence.







In this enormous hall they were preparing for some kind of gathering of monks.

The next evening we took the ferry over to the Bund and had dinner at Lost Heaven (Yunnan cuisine). It was cold, but a beautiful, clear night to see both sides of the river lit up and glowing.



Tonight we will meet for one last time for a dumpling meal. Carla and Livio leave for Beijing tomorrow for three days and then back to Roma. Ravi and I leave tomorrow for Yunnan for five days during the NYUSH Thanksgiving break. More on that when we return.

Zaijian, Lee