

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

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Thirty-five: Travelling once again in one's native land, hometown landscapes, feeling closer and dearer than ever.

I had just turned twenty in 1959 when after dealing with countless difficulties I finally arrived in Hong Kong. In those days Hong Kong was not very developed and the living environment was similar to old Shanghai. Because of water shortages, there was only tap water two or three days a week for several hours. Most people had to use buckets to store water, and daily life was made inconvenient by this. In those times it was very difficult to find good work, but through personal connections I was able to get a job with the Taigu Shipping Company. Thereupon I began to study English on my own. Without an English foundation, I felt that studying English was an extremely great effort.

China had no commercial finance administration system before the economic reforms were enacted. The Chinese government authorities understood keenly that local people's incomes were very low, while incomes abroad were much higher. Therefore they enthusiastically promoted the development of the tourism industry. Therefore foreign visitors were charged double for everything, no matter whether it was for plane or train tickets, hotel rooms, or restaurants. This step of overcharging foreigners for everything was quite unreasonable, and it has already been eliminated. However the cost of healthcare for foreigners in China is still twice that of Chinese citizens. This too is rather unreasonable, and I trust that the authorities will soon implement changes.

In 1988 I traveled to Shanghai as part of a representative group of Chinese-American businesspeople to study and make observations. Shanghai was just beginning its rapid growth at that time. The contemporary municipal secretary and mayor of Shanghai were Wang Daohan and Jiang Zemin respectively. They received the group and introduced its members to Shanghai and the planned development of the Pudong district. Wang Daohan and a famous Taiwanese entrepreneur carried out talks about peaceful unification between Mainland China and Taiwan in an effort to bring an end to the decades-long impasse between the two nations. Just one year later, Jiang Zemin had to leave Shanghai and take up the position of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party because of the crazy Tiananmen Square incident.

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The year 2008 was the fifty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. I had the opportunity to join a congratulatory group travelling to Beijing. This anniversary was different from ones in the recent past because people were permitted to enter the Tiananmen city gate tower and walk around the area, which was decorated with brilliant lanterns.

Upon climbing the tower and taking a look around, you can see numerous pavilions and pagodas, and have a panoramic view of the Forbidden City. You can imagine Chairman Mao there in 1949 calling for the people of China to rise up. Standing there you feel very honored, and you can at the same time see the great developments shaping Beijing before your very eyes. While visiting Beijing, I was able to express my sympathies to General Shen Ze, who was sick and staying at Harmony Hospital. General Shen Ze was a patriot and a fine leader, who originally fought for the Chinese Nationalist Party.

The two major rivers that run through the city of Shanghai are the Huangpu and the Suzhou Rivers. Before liberation, the Suzhou River was very clean. The source of the river is in Jiangsu Province. There are now many factories and chemical plants along the river that dump waste water into the river, making the water very polluted. In the early nineties, not only did the waste products from factories block up the river, but they also made the water malodorous. In the past few years, the city of Shanghai has begun to take environmental concerns very seriously. There have been large investments in projects to clean the river and its water. Now the water is much cleaner and there are signs of marine life. Now the banks of the river are covered in greenery, and along the river there are many newly constructed modern residences.

Hong Kong is currently China's most developed city. One could say that Hong Kong has used every resources available to it in the fullest. The appearance of the city is beautiful, and the scenery is very pleasant. Hong Kong's population is small than those of Beijing and Shanghai, but the city is still a very prosperous business center. Transportation in Hong Kong is also excellent. Both the hardware of the infrastructure and the administration are great.

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Thirty-six: The myriad landscapes of Mount Potala, Mount Huang, Qiandao Lake, and the West Lake.

Mount Potala is located in eastern Zhejiang province in one of the archipelagoes in Zhoushan prefecture. Facing the island of the Shen clan is a famous Buddhist sacred ground. This place is even more famous than the Zhoushan archipelago itself. Since Mount Potala is a famous Buddhist holy ground, from ancient times there have been many temples erected there. An especially famous temple there is the Cihangpu Temple. Legend has it that this is where Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of keen awareness, used to preach asceticism. Many lay practitioners of Buddhism are drawn here for this reason to worship and burn incense. About ten years ago an extremely large statue of the Guanyin Buddha was set up on Mount Potala, attracting even greater numbers of Buddhist pilgrims from local areas and abroad. At one temple in the area, there are three entrances: a middle entrance, and two to either side of it. The side doors are for common people to use, and the middle door is reserved for emperors. The only people for whom it has been opened are Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, and Jiang Zemin. The Zhoushan Archipelago is made up of a thousand small islands, and yet there are only a few that are suitable for people to live on. In addition to being famous for the Mount Potala Temple, Zhoushan is also known as China's fishing ground. It is currently a developing port city.

Qiandao Lake took form about fifty years ago, as a massive irrigation project completed by thousands of laborers. Dams and reservoirs were constructed, and the water was used to create electricity and irrigate farmland. The several hundred mountains in the area became the thousand islands of Qiandao Lake. The cleanliness of the water and the many small islands created from the mountain ranges have made Qiandao Lake a popular destination for tourists. The area was originally not very famous. However, it was popularized in the media after a large group of Taiwanese tourists were robbed by criminals. In order to maintain its reputation, the local government has already implemented many public safety measures.

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The surface of Lake Tai is calm and there are no waves. The lake and nearby mountains provide beautiful natural scenery. The most scenic areas are located in the Wuxi suburbs. A long time ago there were tin mines in this area, and on Ling Mountain near Lake Tai, there was recently built a Buddhist statue and many lotus flower fountains. This has attracted many Buddhist pilgrims who come to worship, as well as many common tourists.

The most famous scenery in Hangzhou can be found near the Qiantang River and the West Lake. The Qiantang River is Zhejiang's largest river, and is very broad. In past generations it was commonly used for shipping. Old legends say that the Qiantang River flows to the Dragon King's palace at the bottom of the Eastern Sea. Due to influence from Shanghai, the municipal government of Hangzhou has put great effort into development, and multiple story buildings as well as bridges have been built along the Qiantang River.

The stunning scenery of Hangzhou's most famous attraction, West Lake, makes tourists linger and want to stay forever. Emperors and kings of the past have left behind many famous historical sites around West Lake. The scenery of the West Lake has always possessed a sort of classical mystique, and now it is more beautiful than ever. In addition to the plentiful natural beauty of the area, there is also great man-made scenery. According to surveys, Hangzhou is China's best area to live in. After your first visit to the West Lake, you will want to return there every time you find yourself in Hangzhou. Even after a hundred times you will not tire of it.

Shanghai was just a small fishing harbor before the occurrence of the Opium Wars. Because of the corruption and impotence of the Manchu Qing Dynasty government, Shanghai was turned into a foreign trade port for the Great Powers after the Opium Wars. After that, the city gradually developed. Shanghai has two major rivers: the Huangpu River and the Suzhou River. One could say that these two rivers are Shanghai's "mother rivers."

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The most familiar parts of Shanghai from the perspective of an overseas Chinese person are Renmin Road, Santai Road, Beijing East Road, Fujian North Road, and Jumen Road. Although these are not famous roads in Shanghai, they are memorable from childhood for overseas Chinese people. Most lived or studied in these areas in the past, and so these roads feel close and familiar.

Renmin Road was called Minguo Road before the Communists' victory over the Nationalists. At the time of the name change, one of the famous spots there was the Siming Public Building, where people from Ningbo would often congregate. The Siming Public Building was built in order to have a place for people from Ningbo who had come to Shanghai to work to stay in temporarily. Local merchants all shared the cost of building it. It was built also to take care of problems of ill health and death for other Ningbo people. In such situations a coffin would be provided and left in care of the Siming Public Building. For those who were sick, but lacked the money to pay for a doctor, a doctor would be procured for a diagnosis. For those who were down and out on their luck and did not have enough money to return home to their relatives, money would be raised to pay for their travel expenses home.

There was also a primary school there, and many overseas Chinese had studied there through their second year of schooling. I lived and completed my primary school education near Santai Road and Beijing East Road before I left for Hong Kong. Life during middle school was full of hardships. When I was a little older than ten, I worked making hemp bags as well as other difficult jobs in order to help out with the family's situation. Finally I moved to one of Shanghai's nongtangs near Beijing East Road to live. I remember my parents submitting an application to go to Hong Kong through an overseas Chinese person, but the local police station and residency committee said not to go. Afterwards, we moved to Fujian North Road and lived there for a year. Another application was submitted, and luckily this time it was accepted.

Thirty-seven: From Beijing to Hong Kong, Tianjin to Macau, Northern landscapes and Southern scenery.

Upon mentioning Beijing, one will usually think of the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Wangfujin Boulevard, and the famous Beijing roast duck.

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In 1990, China hosted the magnificent Asia Games. Ten thousand people participated in a group performance at the opening ceremony. China earned the greatest number of gold and silver medals, cleansing the nation of its reputation of being the “sick man of Asia”, a humiliating nickname. The People’s Republic of China celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its establishment, and the government planned a military parade to celebrate. Five hundred thousand troops took part in the parade. There were only places enough for twenty thousand spectators, so the common people had to watch it on television. Those who were able to view the ceremony in person were very honored and received a deep and unforgettable impression. It brings to mind Beijing hosting of the Olympics in 2008, which had an even more elaborate and impressive opening ceremony and in which Chinese athletes accomplished a great deal.

The north of China has several large cities other than Beijing, for example Tianjin, Shenyang, Chengde, and the great port city Lǔshùn. These places have received Russian and Japanese influence since a long time ago. Since the Japanese have close connections to China’s northeast, when they invaded and occupied the area, they built an industrial base there, and so since early times Beijing has been comparatively developed.

Tianjin is the only city other than Beijing and Shanghai that is governed directly. Tianjing’s commercial and manufacturing industries are very developed. There are other important cities besides Tianjin, such as Shenyang, Liaoning, and Haerbin. After the economic reforms, all of these cities underwent major development. Lǔshùn and Dalian are two of China’s most important port cities. These two cities serve as an entry point for imports, and a point of exchange with Russia, North Korea, and Mongolia. After the economic reforms, many Chinese businesspeople went to Russian cities on the border to look for commercial opportunities. Lǔshùn and Dalian are not only important industrial ports, but were also once major naval harbors.

The province of Jiangsu contains the cities of Nanjing, Suzhou, Wuxi, and Lianyungang, all of which are important cities. Jiangsu and Zhejiang have been called “the two rivers.” Nanjing is located on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and has in the past been the capital of China.

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Industry in modern Ningbo is quite developed, and new construction is being carried out all the time. Every year there are two major events in Ningbo. The first is the Zhejiang Industry Convention, which showcases the province's industrial products. Numerous businesspeople from all over the world come to participate in this event. The second event is the Ningbo Clothing Exhibition. Every year this event attracts the people in the clothing industry from all over the world to come and participate in discussions. The scale of the Ningbo Clothing Exhibition is very large. In one recent year, over two thousand models were hired for the event. Ningbo earned its fame for clothing in the past when local tailors made the first Sun Yat-Sen jackets.

With respect to sea shipping, the Beilun Harbor in Ningbo is the second largest in the country in terms of volume of containers being shipped out. The common people of Ningbo have become prosperous because of all the commercial development of the area. Since villages gave their land usage rights to developers, they are the biggest recipients of land usage fees after the national and provincial governments.

In terms of transportation infrastructure, Ningbo is very developed. There are public highways, railroads, airports, and every district has a train station. The residents of Ningbo used to earn a living by farming, but now they earn a living doing business, and migrants from outside the province do the farming work.

The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River has been a very controversial engineering project. The positive aspect of the dam is that it can provide irrigation for farming, provide hydroelectric power, and prevent flooding along the banks of the river. Some negative aspects of the creation of the dam is that it will create more silt, and shallower river depths, and even affect the ecological environment of the river. Nevertheless, however you look at it, the Three Gorges Dam is the world's largest irrigation works and reservoir. The creation of the dam and the resulting rises in water levels has also submerged many historical sites. At the same time, many new communities have arisen along the site due to the numerous workers needed for the construction project. Whether the undertaking of this massive public project is a good or bad thing is very hard to say right now.

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Hong Kong is now a one of the world's most developed cities. Modern Hong Kong is vastly different from the Hong Kong of fifty years ago. In those days, many people wore wooden and rubber sandals, but no one wears them anymore. Wealthy citizens of Hong Kong used to employ poor people from Guangdong as their servants, but now workers from the Philippines occupy those jobs. One can see from these examples that people in Hong Kong have grown quite wealthy over the past fifty years.

The Philippines' primary source of foreign currency is remittances from Filipino workers abroad. Hong Kong Island in particular has undergone a great deal of change. Skyscrapers stand in great numbers. Queen's Square is the liveliest area. On Sundays one can see great numbers of the above-mentioned Filipinos. Generally speaking, Filipino workers can make more money in Hong Kong than back in their hometowns. They can get along harmoniously with their employers, and both sides have labor contracts. Another important change is that the once large Victoria Harbor has become narrower over the years due to land reclamation. Today's World Financial Center in Hong Kong is located on reclaimed land. Several decades ago there were no tunnels crossing the harbor, and so business was very good for the Star Ferry. However, now there are many tunnels and the Star Ferry has become a relic from past times. Another important characteristic of Hong Kong is that public security is very good, as evidenced by connections between many of the cities large buildings. Transportation is also very good in Hong Kong. Not only does Hong Kong have the world's greatest airport, but the city is also connected to many cities in Guangdong through hydrofoil ships and direct buses.

Hong Kong itself is a rather small place. Although the space is very limited, there are over 6 million residents. The city's population is concentrated mostly in Mong Kok in Kowloon and in Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island. The population density is greater even than in New York City. Residents of Hong Kong mostly live in high-rise apartment buildings that lack the greenery of grass and trees. Living environments with greenery can only be found in private homes that are inconvenient distances from public transportation.

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Hong Kong is a small city when speaking strictly of surface area, but in terms of shipping it is very developed. In the past, the city center of Kowloon had an airport facing the water. This type of airport that is in a bustling city center is very rarely seen. Afterwards the location of the airport was moved to a less busy place and was built into the world's most convenient airport. Passengers can board a light rail system that takes them directly from the airport to Central or Tsim Sha Tsui. This type of landscape and convenience cannot be found in any other city in the world.

Hong Kong's Peninsula hotel is a five-star hotel with nearly one hundred years of history. This shows that Hong Kong has a set of administrative methods that adapt to modern requirements. From its origins as a simple roast goose restaurant, the Peninsula eventually became a famous hotel. This miracle is similar to that of America's McDonald's fast food restaurant. The brilliant colors of Kowloon, Central, Causeway Bay, Wan Chai, and North Point make for what is perhaps the world's best nighttime scenery. When I first arrived in Hong Kong fifty years ago, the Taigu shipyards had already been transformed into a city of high-class residences, shopping centers, and office buildings. North Point's Queen's Boulevard not only has beautiful scenery, but also has for sale anything you can imagine eating, wearing, or looking at. In the transportation systems of the world's developed cities, electric trolley buses have all been phased out. However, in Hong Kong this vestige of history is preserved and in use.

Hong Kong currently has many thriving industries. Hong Kong's population has multiplied several times over in the past few decades. New people enter the population at a rate greater than the mortality rate, and so the population increases. The only type of business that has not seen a rapid increase is the funeral parlor business. Although Hong Kong has many Hill tops facing the ocean, none of these have been considered for placing cemeteries. The local government has made a number of cemeteries in locations with the back to the mountain and the sea to the front to sell to overseas Chinese as a boon to the local economy.

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Macau is a small island city in the south of China close to Zhuhai that was occupied by Portugal over four hundred years ago. No matter how developed the colony became however, its lack of land prevented it from being a significant center of agriculture or industry. Several decades ago the gambling and entertainment industries began to develop in Macau. The owners of casinos made a lot of profit, but who knows how many people gambled themselves into bankruptcy in the process. Not too many years ago, after the expansion of gambling rights in Macau, American casino owners from Las Vegas, Nevada began operations in Macau. The first such casino was the Sands Macau, the second was the Wynn Macau, and the third and latest addition was the Venetian Macau. The gambling industry in Macau is now even more prosperous than that of Las Vegas. Already the number of customers patronizing the old Hotel Lisboa Macau has dwindled. The high-rollers that come to these casinos are not from Hong Kong or Europe, but rather are businesspeople and government officials from mainland China. No doubt in the near future, Macau will be even more booming than Las Vegas as a center of gambling.

Thirty-eight: Travelling in China in early 1971,

The Cultural Revolution was still raging when I visited my homeland for the first time again in the fall of 1971. There were struggles taking place all over the country. The old was being torn down and new things were being established, and the new policies to open China up to the rest of the world were also beginning to emerge.

In the past, neither Taiwanese nor American citizens were permitted to enter China. In 1971, a travel agency based in Hong Kong brought the first group of American and Taiwanese tourists into the country. Americans and Taiwanese would first register with the travel agency and would hear back about whether or not they could travel to China in about a month. Common, law-abiding citizens would receive permission to enter China after a month. At that time our tour group was made up of about twenty people: a few Americans and the rest were Taiwanese. The travelers would each receive a single-entry travel permit, and would clear customs in Macau after having each piece of luggage inspected and examined with great detail. They would spend the first night near customs, and then travel to Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Foshan, and Guangzhou by train the next day.

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In October of 1971, I travelled to China to visit relatives in Shanghai. I went by way of Zhuhai in Guangzhou, so at one point I was taking a long distance bus to Guangdong. The travelers on the bus were all from Southeast Asia, except for several American Chinese and Taiwanese. All of them held passports from Republic of China or a Southeast Asian country.

The long distance buses in use back then were old and decrepit, and the roads we drove on were simple ones made of stone and dirt. When the bus drove by, the sky would fill with flecks of dirt from the road. The bus reached its destination in Guangzhou after two days of traveling through Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Panyu, and Foshan. Looking around at the time, I saw that none of the buildings surpassed five stories in height, the homes of the common people were old and in a state of disrepair, and business in the shops was light. All in all it was a bleak and desolate scene. Everyone, no matter man or woman, young or old, was wearing either a Sun Yat-sen suit or the People's dress, either in blue or in gray. This was because this was right in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. On the walls were written slogans such as, "Down with American Imperialism", and "Destroy the four olds and erect the four news". The people were suffering from a serious lack of food. Contemporary modern and developed Guangdong is worlds away from this bleak and backward scene. The change occurred when the vast majority of all factories in Hong Kong and Taiwan closed down and moved operations to Guangdong.

Thirty-nine: Moving from Shanxi to Zhejiang, and then emigrating abroad.

Since coming to the United States in 1963 until 1984, the high pressure work made me feel deeply that my health was in decline, and that my body and spirit were atrophying. At that point I no longer wanted to continue working fifteen hours a day. Restaurant work is very laborious, and afterwards I soon made the decision to quit the restaurant industry. Although working in a restaurant was a bitter experience, it did bring stability to my family.