

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

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Taiwan is an island in the southeast of China. The climate is warm and the landscapes are beautiful. The major airport that you arrive at when flying to Taiwan, the Chiang Kai Shek Airport, has already had its name changed to Taoyuan Airport by the Democratic Progressive Party leader Chen Shuibian. The Democratic Progressive Party enacted a campaign to remove reminders of Chiang Kai Shek from throughout the country in order to solidify Chen Shuibian's political position.

In terms of transportation, you can hire a car to take you from Taoyuan Airport to Taipei for three hundred Taipei dollars, whereas a bus ticket only costs thirty dollars. In the end I chose to take the bus. Not only was it convenient, but you can also enjoy the scenery of Taipei's suburbs. As the bus entered the highway, I saw that there were six lanes in each direction, and that the transportation system was very developed. A seventh lane is being added in each direction, which will make it one of the widest highways in the world. In Taipei's city center there is the Taipei 101 tower, which is administrated better even than New York's Empire State Building or Shanghai's Jinmao Tower. Visitors on the observation deck need only press a button to hear prerecorded information and explanations of the scenery. Taipei 101 also contains numerous offices, as well as world-famous brands in a shopping center located on the lowest floors. From these examples you can see that those in charge of the planning of Taipei 101 did an excellent job and poured a lot of hard work into the project.

Taiwan's southernmost coast has the Kending National Park. Here tourists can take a ride on a yacht to view the beautiful Pacific scenery of Taiwan's coastline. In the winter the wind speeds are too high, and the average yacht is not able to sail in the area. Taiwanese food is all very hygienic, and the presentation is also very good. Taiwan also has many special fruit products. Taiwan has many hot springs, and famous inns in the area will pipe water from the hot springs directly in the the bathrooms of the inn's rooms. The minerals in the spring water have anti-bacterial properties and are good for your health. The water can even help erase and diminish wrinkles.

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Forty: The Silk Road, the Hexi Corridor, the Gobi Desert, and the Mogao Grottoes

The Silk Road stretches from China, to the Middle East, and finally to Europe. In those times it was very difficult to build public roads, so not many people in China travelled to Xinjiang, and when they did it was unfamiliar for them. With the building of public highways and the development of air travel, it has become much more convenient to travel to Xinjiang. Now it only takes about five hours to fly from Shanghai to Urumuqi. Already about half of the population of Xinjiang is Han Chinese.

The Westernmost part of the Silk Road still in China is the city of Kashgar. Kashgar has a famous Chinese Muslim temple. The city also has historical sites related to the imperial concubine Xiangfei from the Qing Dynasty, as well as vineyards that produce famous wines. Xinjiang's many famous fruits and lamb dishes can also be found in Kashgar.

Urumuqi is part of a minority district, and now has roads, highways, and railways that connect it to the other major cities of northwest China. Urumuqi is the seat of government for the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. From Urumuqi you can travel to the Mountain Lake, which is mentioned in the Chinese classic, *Journey West*. In the past you had to stumble over a tortuous route to get there, but now there is a public road and a parking lot half way up the mountain. Next to the parking lot there is a gondola that takes tourists up to the top. The Mountain Lake's scenery is picturesque, and there you can ride a barge on the lake and enjoy the surrounding scenery.

Flying from Urumuqi for an hour and a half, one can reach the Mogao Grottoes. In these grottoes there are many engravings left behind by religious people. The area has been called a treasure trove of art. Dunhuang is a small village. The Mogao Grottoes are about fifteen minutes from the airport by car, and along the way is the Loess Desert. The Mogao Grottoes have several hundred landscape and mythical carvings dating back from several hundred years ago to as long as several thousand years ago.

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The ancient city of Chang'an was the capital of the Qin and Han Empires, and was already a prosperous city over a thousand years ago. In Chang'an there was the Afang balance, which was built by Emperor Qin Shihuang and was even grander than the Forbidden City in Beijing. According to legend, it took three months for the palace to be burnt down by tyrants.

Over seventy years ago, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, an incident occurred in Xi'an and Chan'an that shocked China and the rest of the world. The incident prompted all of China's military forces and powers to unite in resisting the Japanese invasion, and eventually China was victorious against the Japanese. Over thirty years ago, the tomb of Qin Shihuang was discovered in a suburb of Xi'an. Although the terracotta warriors have been excavated, the tomb of Qin Shihuang himself has not been fully opened due to technical problems. In addition to this, there are many pieces of art left behind by China's ancient literati that are contained in the Forest of Steles, a museum in Xi'an. Xi'an is another one of the famous cities along the path of the Silk Road. From the city of Lanzhou in the province Gansu you can see the power of the Yellow River's swift current. There are many historical sites near Lanzhou along the Great Wall. It is a pity that the local residents lack awareness of the need to preserve such things, and often take bricks from the Great Wall to build homes for themselves.

Taizhou was originally a poor fishing village in southeast Zhejiang, but after the economic reforms took place it began to flourish. Taizhou is the easternmost part of China. When the year 2000 arrived, Taizhou was the first place in China to see the light of the first day of the new millenium. Southeast Taizhou, Dachen Island, was the last place the Nationalist Army had control over before fleeing the Mainland in the Chinese Civil War.

Wenzhou is a city located south of Taizhou. The residents of this city began to operate private companies about thirty years ago, and ran very successful operations. Due to the residents' willingness to work hard, suffer hardships, and act decisively, companies in Wenzhou do business all over China, as well as Europe and the United States. Wenzhou people were never known in the United States for their business ability, but now they are the most famous of Chinese people in terms of ability to do business.

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Another Chinese city with an ancient history is Shaoxing. Shaoxing is widely known for its yellow wine. In ancient times there was a sagacious monarch named Yu the Great. His tomb is located in Shaoxing. In addition to this, there is also work from the legendary calligrapher Wang Xizhi. Shaoxing is also the hometown of Lu Xun and Zhou Enlai. Shaoxing has produced many famous people. This ancient city of Shaoxing has small bridges and running water, and so it has been referred to as the "Venice of the East".

The Shandong peninsula located in eastern China is a very beautiful place. The famous port city of Qingdao has scenic white sand beaches. Qingdao was formerly a German concession, and so there are many German style seaside houses with flower gardens. In the past these were only able to be enjoyed by Germans and wealthy Chinese. The famous Qingdao brewery produces beer that is sold all over the world. Qingdao is also a very important shipping port for the province of Shandong. There are also very many tourist districts to visit.

Guangxi and Guangdong are neighboring provinces. During the Qing Dynasty, these two provinces were administrated by one official, but after the revolution they became separate provinces. The major city of Guilin is better known than the provincial capital Nanning due to its beautiful landscapes. One famous mountain there, "Elephant Trunk Mountain" looks just like the trunk of an elephant. The rivers that run through the mountains are clear and limpid, but during the dry seasons they will sometimes get blocked. To attract tourists during these times, the local government will divert other rivers in the area to keep others flowing. Although Guilin is primarily a tourist city, it also has a very developed industrial side.

The Philippines and Malaysia are located in subtropical climes, and have very fertile soil, making it unnecessary to add fertilizer to the soil. Neither is it necessary to expend a lot of energy tending to the crops there. The harvests are plentiful, and all types of fruits are grown there. Since the natural resources there are plentiful, people do not need to rely on hard physical labor to secure their most basic needs. The indolent way of life of the local people gives Chinese immigrants opportunities to create businesses.

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Forty-one: Temperatures across the country vary greatly, China's mountains and rivers are magnificent sights to behold.

China is a vast country, with many varying climates. The winter in northern China is quite freezing, and the summers are warm. The seasons in eastern China are distinct. The summers in Guangdong and Hong Kong in the south of China are scorchingly hot, and you never see snow in the winters. In the center of northwest China, the altitude is high and so the air is thin and scarce. The large mountain ranges in the area block air from the oceans, and so the climate is continental and the changes in temperature are drastic.

The northeast of China is very cold during the winter months. The rivers freeze over, snow accumulates on the mountaintops, and the winter breeze is bone-chilling. Very few people participate in outdoors activities in these areas because they are all lying on the kang inside, staying warm. In the south of China, seemingly every season is spring and the water is warm. When going outdoors, a light layer of clothing is all that is needed. People in the south never have a taste of cold weather, like snow and ice. Between spring and summer there is a lot of rain due to the melting of snow in the mountains. There is even flooding in some areas. On the other hand, in the northwest of China, there is inadequate rainfall, and people must make effort to combat drought.

The Pearl River Delta in Guangdong is an example of weather typical of southern China. Hong Kong has a subtropical climate and the terrain is mostly flat. Spring and fall months are warm and comfortable. There is a lot of natural beauty there and people take part in all type of outdoors activities. However due to its location near the sea, there are sometimes violent seasonal storms.

The weather winter in China's north is severely cold, yet the winters in China's south are just a little cool. It is still very comfortable to do things outside, farmers can still plant their crops, and construction workers can still build homes. Now that the economy has improved and people are wealthier, it is common for people from China's north to visit the south during the coldest of the winter months.

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Inland China has a high-altitude climate, and in the summertime temperatures are high. There are sometimes floods that cause natural disasters, destroying crops and forcing people to flee. For these reasons, the lives of the common people are very hard there. Science and education are not at all developed in inland China.

The weather will sometimes be warm in the winter, and sometimes powerful winds will cause sandstorms. People who can afford it have heating systems in their homes. Since the enactment of economic reforms and the development of the economy, common people have had many gradual improvements in their lives.

Tibet and Xinjiang are the westernmost provinces of China, and border the Middle East and Russia. The terrain is mountainous. Tibet has been called the world's roof. The air there is cold and arid, and few people have the courage to go.

Tibet and Xinjiang are also places that have beautiful scenery. Many Han Chinese have moved or visited there since the economic reforms took place. For a tourist, the best time to visit is during the spring or fall. This area is the source of the cold northwest winds, making the winter time much too cold. Tibet's Lhasa and Urumuqi in Xinjiang have developed rapidly in recent years. They are very international cities, and have airports open throughout the whole year. Other airports in the area close during the winter because the weather makes it unsuitable for tourism. The public roads and railways built in recent years connect Urumuqi and Lhasa to each major city in China. In the past people assumed that in Lhasa or Urumuqi you could only find lamb or horse meat to eat, but now it is like any other place in China and you can find any type of food you wish for.

Near Urumuqi there is a vast, pebbly desert known as the Gobi Desert. Of course, even in the desert there are sources of water. Places in the middle of the desert that have water sources are known as oases. In the desert, the major mode of transportation is by camel, but now public roads have been opened as well. Riding camels has become a fun tourist attraction, and there are hundreds of camels available, waiting to take tourists on a ride.

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Forty-two: The economic reforms, starting from scratch, boldly constructing the future, hamlets becoming metropolises.

Seeing China's economy take off with my own eyes.

At the beginning of the year 2008, China had already experienced thirty years of rapid growth and expanding power following the economic reforms. Under these circumstances, China received worldwide attention. First of all, China's achievements made other developing nations study China as a model of economic policy for growth. China became a guide for backward countries to open up their economies and attract foreign investment. India and Vietnam were particularly influenced by the China model. Secondly, it caused already developed nations to try to obstruct China's path to becoming a superpower. They have one-by-one brought up issues like human rights, democracy, and patents. These types of nations are led by the United Kingdom and the United States. These nations also try to force China to raise the value of the Yuan to increase costs for Chinese products and make them less competitive. At the same time they have created severe restrictions on companies exporting products to China, and have disseminated information about Chinese products being inferior and imitation products. Some Chinese factories now are facing crises because of this.

Chinese imports are very hard to obstruct. British and American newspapers have published many articles about China's economic growth because China possesses the world's largest reserves of foreign currency. Chinese products are sold all over the world. A positive aspect of this is that China has become a world superpower. In 2008 China hosted the Olympics, and foreign media proclaimed that there were few if any countries that could spend tens of billions of dollars putting on such a performance, and China also received the greatest number of gold medals. They admitted that China is not only a manufacturing country, but also a great consumer economy. China has recently enacted new labor policies that will ensure worker's rights and a minimum wage, as well as welfare for workers.

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Nowadays people love to have expensive artwork to decorate their home. People also consider investing in stocks as their second job. All these add up to abundance in materialistic life.

As the economy becomes better, people have become millionaires and billionaires from establishing factories or investing in real estates. Those who have knowledge in business choose to involve with importing and exporting goods in the national and international competition. These profits can be exempted from (less) taxation. These are real examples in life.

Why was China able to accumulate a great amount of capital after the Open Door Policy? The reason is being that 30 years ago, although poor, the citizens or the country itself were not in debt. The advantage is starting from scratch, unlike the western countries including their people have lots of liabilities. In China, the use of credit cards has been established. If there is 10,000 Yuan in the bank, only 9500 can be used. Although this method is not scientific, it is reliable. This method not only encourages the user to spend, but it also makes sure that one does not become broke.

Using credit cards recklessly could make one become financially broke. 30 years ago, when I traveled to China, everyone was really poor. The priority was food and clothing. During that time, TV, bicycle, refrigerator, and washing machine etc were considered luxuries. Not everyone has all of these electronics, making that having one or two of them can be effortful. There is no air conditioning in the summer or heat in the winter. But almost everyone was healthy. Whenever I saw this condition, I would treat them to dinner and provide some financial support during holidays.

Not until early 90s did one see great improvement in industries, which attracted a good amount of overseas investors. When I went back to visit Shanghai in 2000, there were tremendous changes in the development.

There are numerous marvelous bridges and underground tunnels across Huangpu River in Shanghai. There are many more than those found in Manhattan, Bronx, and Queens in New York City. Pudong New Area used to be poor villages is becoming Manhattan in the East. This area has developed into one of the greatest financial and industrial centers in China.

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In 2000, the cost for upscale residential real estate in Shanghai was about 10,000 Yuan per square meter. Nowadays it is rising to 80,000 Yuan per square meter. In terms of the stocks, from January 1st, 2007 to December 31st, 2007, it was more than double folded from 1700 points to 5500 points. Its speed has become the fastest in the world. This type of drastic change is unbelievable.

In 2007, when I visited Shanghai again, the environment had changed since 1978. Time was precious to people who could only greet the friends from overseas on weekends or on holidays. Another change was that people started to treat guests in high-end restaurants with private rooms. There are many these types of high-end restaurants that fit for more than 500 people in mainland cities, Hong Kong and Taipei. For those rich people, they have Limousines, brand-name goods and superior villas.

The Chinese people were unable to buy gold jewelry many years ago. However, nowadays not only do they purchase gold, but they also choose high-end diamonds. In addition, they have their unique taste in clothing. There are a few people who have become really wealthy. It is easy to distinguish different classes in China. Those who have dark skin and average body are workers whereas those who have bright clothing, lighter-color and radiant skin are either businessmen or politicians. Products that are “Made in China” are prevalent throughout the world. China has become an important country in the world nowadays.