

Shanghai Impressions

Kam Wing Chan

December 17, 2005

Shanghai is enchanting (of course, very different from the Cascades) though quite cold (2^oC). This morning I woke up in a warm big bed in the classy Park Hotel (*Guoji fandian*) to seven windows of glistening modern and ultra-modern skyscrapers with a rising sun behind. What a different Shanghai, from what I knew nine years ago!



It was also intense. I arrived quite late last night and missed my dinner. After checking into the hotel, I decided to get some food. In a nearby basement food court, I easily found my favorite beef noodle soup and some dainty Shanghai wontons. This was a type of food court I had never seen before -- with only chain restaurants. The McD's, Burger King, Pizza Hut and Yonghe (a noodle chain from Taiwan) all were fighting fiercely face-to-face for a share of the pie in a tiny basement in this global city. Behind all this (figuratively) and me (literally), there was a bunch of 6-7 years olds (where are they from?) running around. On closer look, they were snapping and gobbling up unfinished noodles and food left on the tables. One even approached me for the beef in the soup while I was still working on it! They were obviously hungry, but they also seemed to enjoy themselves doing this, almost like playing a game. They ran and giggled -- is that happy or sad?

When I got out of the food court, I realized that I was already on China's busiest pedestrianized shopping street, Nanjing Road. Even though it was already close to 10 pm, this place was still full of people; many shops were still open. I decided to take a walk and get a feel for the town. There were many slim women, even in their winter coats, scarves, hats, and boots (they must be in vogue), quite chic, of course. I took some pictures of a few illuminated old Western, mostly neoclassical buildings, but soon found myself caught in a struggle, having to continuously fight off solicitations by different kinds of strangers -- three flirting women "wanting to make friends," four rather persistent "tour guides", and three beggars -- in a span of only twenty minutes. What a busy place! With so many years of China experience, I thought I could mingle in a Chinese street crowd; apparently, I couldn't. I think I had the right color, black, for my jacket, but I looked (I was?) a bit older than the average crowd on this street -- I had left my Kangol hat in the hotel room. Or perhaps any unattached man strolling alone on a Friday night is an obvious target.