

## China 3<sup>rd</sup> installment

Tuesday, May 25, 1999

The fifth day in China began with a three-hour train ride. We rode from Suzhou to Hangzhou via Shanghai. The farms alongside the tracks from Shanghai to Hangzhou seemed larger and the variety of crops seemed greater: wheat, rice, vegetables, and some orchards. Small combines were harvesting the winter wheat. The de-collectivized farmers are succeeding as capitalists and are becoming wealthy. As we got closer to Hangzhou, the new houses took on a Victorian, Queen Ann look that seemed very out of place and time.



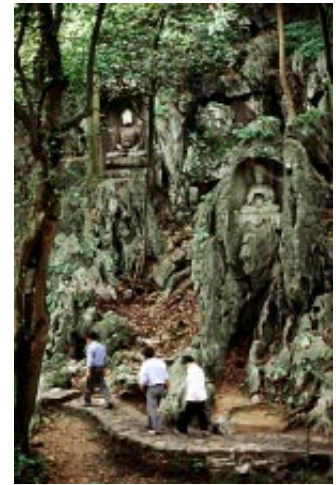
Huili's Pagoda

Hangzhou, although once an Imperial capital, is best known as a vacation spot because of the beauty of West Lake, with its islands, causeways, bridges, and pavilions. As we were told more than once, "In heaven there is paradise, on earth Suzhou and Hangzhou." Our hotel, the Hangzhou Shangrila, was situated just across the road from the lake. We had been so surprised and pleased by the non-smoking policy in public buildings and trains and planes, and the availability of non-smoking hotel rooms in Shanghai and Suzhou, that we were disappointed that the Shangrila was the first five-star hotel where they were unavailable.

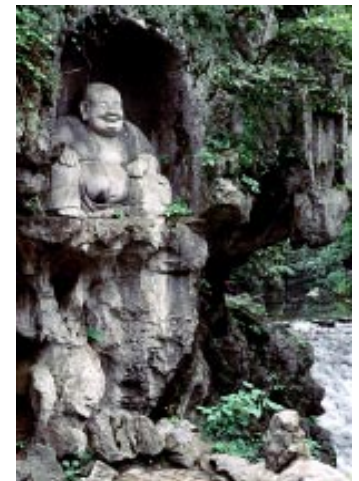
We spent the afternoon at the Ling Yin (Soul's Retreat) Temple complex in a woods outside of the city. It is next to Feilai Feng (the Peak that Flew There), so named because, Huili, the

Indian Buddhist monk who founded the temple in 326 AD, said that the limestone outcrop looked exactly like one in India and must have come from there. He is buried in a small stone pagoda next to the peak. Along the wall of the outcrop are 338 Buddhist carvings, mainly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but some going back to the 10<sup>th</sup>. There is a Smiling Buddha (13<sup>th</sup> century) and a much older and more popular Laughing Buddha and attendants (10<sup>th</sup> century). A low wall has been built in front of the Laughing Buddha, to protect him from people rubbing his belly for good luck. The carvings and the temple complex survived the Cultural Revolution because of the personal intervention of Zhou Enlai.

The current Temple complex was originally built in 969 AD. The main temple has been rebuilt 16 times, the last time during the 1950s. It has been identified as the most active Chan (Zen) Buddhist temple in China. We were given a detailed explanation of each and every statue in the three buildings of the complex. It was not always easy to hear because of the jumble of voices of the competing tour guides, the requirement to keep out of the way of the worshipers, and the mind-numbing number of symbols and sculptures.



Buddhist carvings on Feilai Feng



Smiling Buddha

Back at the Shangrila, we created our own shopping opportunity by wandering through the hotel shops. There we found a boxwood carving of a hero of the Song dynasty, Guan Gong, who has been elevated into a god of war. We were told that as long as we had his sword in our house, we would not need one of our own. We decided we couldn't pass up that kind of protection.

Jeff lectured on Buddhism and the history of Hangzhou. The highlights:

Buddhism began in India in ~500 BC as a system of self-denial. The goal was to end reincarnation by becoming a realized being. The Buddhist monks believed that the Buddha was a mortal teacher. Buddhism became a more popular religion when the emphasis shifted from ascetic, self-denial to the doing of good deeds. Those who became enlightened but were willing to come back and help others were called Bodhisattvas. In this branch of Buddhism, Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, is just one incarnation of Buddha.



Guan Gong



Stone Guanyin  
Bodhisattva, 681-  
907 AD

Buddhism entered China c. 100 BC. (Daoism, the formalization of ancestor worship, was the Chinese response to the introduction of Buddhism.) Buddhism is mentioned in the records of the Han imperial court in ~200 AD. The earliest Buddhist statue was found in Sichuan province, an extremely fertile area for religious experimentation. The incorporation of the Dao Goddess of the West, Guanyin, as a Bodhisattva shows that Buddhism was blended with Daoism during the 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Buddhism reached its height in China during the Tang dynasty (618-907) but was suppressed for a time starting in 845 AD.

During the Song dynasty (960-1279), the foundation of urban Chinese society was laid. Unlike Europe, Chinese cities were not places of individual freedom, but instead there was much tighter social control. There were no conflicts between merchants and the government.

Industrialization was beginning with the production of silk, lacquer, ceramics, paper, and gunpowder. Trade expanded to the capitals of Southeast Asia. Commercialization led to the development of a money industry. Eight hundred million coins were in circulation and paper money was introduced by 1120 AD. The population increased from 50 to 100 million. The river and coastal areas were the most prosperous.

The government was run by a bureaucracy of men of letters—the closest example to a “Confucian” government in China. The scholarly elite were at the top of the pecking order. Wealth and longevity of a family counted for nothing if a (male) member of the family had not been successful in the civil exams.

The high point of the Song dynasty was reached during the reign of Hu Zong, the last of the Northern Song Emperors. He was a patron of the arts, an artist himself, and a member of the literati. However, because he didn't pay enough attention to military affairs, the Jurchen (who established the Jin dynasty (1127-1234) in Northern China) captured him and his number one son.

The number two son and much of the bureaucracy fled south and established the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) with its capital in Hangzhou. The dynasty had inherited a tradition of open-mindedness from the Tang dynasty, but became hostile to foreign influences as the Jurchen overran the North. Buddhism was suppressed again.

Wednesday, May 26, 1999

It rained most of the sixth day in China. The Cox Report was made public. It said that the Chinese stole our nuclear secrets over the last ten years. We did not see any sign of fall-out in China.

Our first adventure of the day was a boat ride on the West Lake. The lake is surrounded on three sides by low hills. The city is on the east or delta side and the Shangrila Hotel is on the west. The lake is only six feet deep and the water level and quality are tightly regulated. Water is pumped into the lake from the Qiantang river and the outlet is into the Hangzhou section of the Grand Canal. Boats with power use electric motors to keep oil out of the water. Over 400 tons of carp are harvested from the lake each year, along with other fish and freshwater pearls.

It was raining hard while we were on the lake, but that did not prevent boats, large and small, from carrying tourists and sellers of postcards.

Our next stop was Guo's Villa. It was rebuilt by the government in 1991, using plans developed from what was left standing, pictures and paintings of the villa, and eye witness accounts. It has all five of the classic elements of a garden: water, mountain, pavilion, bridges, and plants. It had lovely views from every angle. It is adjacent to the West Lake and a freshwater pearl farm. We were told a little about freshwater oyster husbandry:

Of the 200 varieties of oysters, only four produce pearls. The female triangle-back oyster is one of them and produces freshwater pearls. When they are eight centimeters across, pieces of chopped up male oyster are placed inside. A mature female oyster can contain up to fifty pearls. You can tell how old the oyster is by counting the concentric triangles on its shell, just like the rings on a tree.

An eight-year old oyster was opened up for us and it contained 32 pearls. Virginia was given one of the pearls, because she guessed closest to the right number. We were then directed to the pearl shop, attached to the villa. That gave me plenty of time to contemplate the garden.

We had lunch at a medicinal restaurant, Hu Qing Yutang, in an old part of Hangzhou and afterwards, went across the street to the herbal medicine pharmacy. It was built in the Ming dynasty and had ornately carved walls and ceiling. The pharmacists were filling orders, just like they do at Sav-on, except that, instead of counting out a week's worth of pills, they were mixing a week's worth of herbs into seven little piles and then individually wrapping each pile.

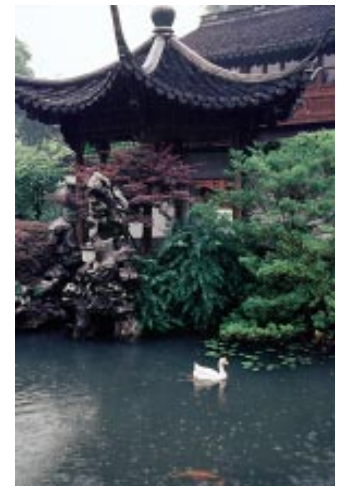
Before we went on the boat ride, Jeff gave a lecture on the Liu He ta (pagoda) and Wu Zixu, the angry ghost of the Qiantang River who causes the tidal bore. The highlights:

The Qiantang River tidal bore happens once a month and, until modern changes in the river channel reduced its force, it would rush up river with a wave reaching 10 meters high at the autumn equinox. When these exceptional tidal waves happened, the countryside would be flooded. The site of the Liu He pagoda, which overlooks the Qiantang, occupies a central position in the Chinese cosmos. It has Six Conjunctions—the four cardinal points, plus up and down. Every effort has been taken to channel this conjunction into controlling the angry ghost or river dragon that causes the tidal bore. The Liu He pagoda was built in 970 AD (and rebuilt six times, the last in 1900), but the site has a history as a place of worship that goes back to ~1000 BC.

Wu Zixu is a historical personage (d. 489 BC) who was famous as a wise counselor to the State of Wu when it was at the peak of its political power. His biography was originally written in



Rain on West Lake



Guo's Villa

~200 BC and was later included in the Han dynastic histories, written by Sima Qian in 120 BC. His biography explains how he became the angry ghost of the river.

Sima Qian was the “royal historian”, i.e., astrologer and chronicler, of the Han Emperor. His father, Sima Tan, the previous royal astrologer, had convinced the Emperor that the stars said that the year 116 BC would begin a new world order and that all history up to that point should be recorded. Sima Tan started gathering together all of the ancient texts and compiling them into this history, but died before it was finished. Sima Qian accepted the responsibility to finish the task, but was almost prevented from doing so.

Sima Qian was a favorite of the Emperor until he came to the defense of General Li Ling. General Li Ling was a successful warrior and loyal subject, but recently the Huns had defeated his army. Instead of committing suicide, he had surrendered to the Huns in exchange for the lives of his men. Sima Qian argued that General Li Ling had behaved honorably. All of the other courtiers agreed with the Emperor that General Li Ling had behaved disgracefully. The Emperor ordered Sima Qian to commit suicide for his outspoken disloyalty. However, because his skills were so important to the Emperor, he allowed Sima Qian to pay a fine instead. Unfortunately, Sima Qian was a poor man and none of his friends dared to upset the Emperor by helping to pay the fine. When it became time for the spring amnesty, Sima Qian still had not found enough money to pay the fine. The Emperor then gave him the choice of death or castration. To everyone’s surprise, he chose castration. When asked why, he said that he had promised his father that he would finish the history and his promise was more important than personal shame and, also, that all great works were done by those who had had to suffer.

Sima Qian’s history consists of genealogical tables, geographical information, and seventy-two short biographies. He used the biographies to emphasize his own philosophy of human values and human worth. His story of Wu Zixu is as follows:

During the “Spring and Autumn” period (772-481 BC) of the Zhou dynasty, China broke into small warring states. Four of them are important to this story: Wu centered at Suzhou, Chu to the west, Yue to the south, and Qi to the north. Wu Zixu was a native of the State of Chu. His father was the master tutor of the crown prince. The crown prince also had a lesser tutor who was jealous of Wu Zixu’s father. The lesser tutor was sent to pick up the bride that had been selected for the crown prince. The lesser tutor felt that she was too beautiful for the crown prince and suggested to King Ping that he keep her for himself, which the King did.

The lesser tutor continued to foment distrust between the crown prince and King Ping until the King finally accused the crown prince of being a traitor. Wu Zixu’s father defended the crown prince, but King Ping chose to believe the lesser tutor. In spite of his good advice, King Ping condemned Wu Zixu’s father, and his sons, to death for supporting the crown prince. While his father and older brothers did the honorable thing and committed suicide, Wu Zixu helped the crown prince flee to Suzhou, the capital of the rival State of Wu.

Wu Zixu became an advisor to Heliu, a general of Wu. When Heliu usurped the throne of Wu, Wu Zixu’s influence increased. Together they planned and fought a successful campaign against Chu. Ten years after the death of King Ping, the Wu army sacked Yin, the capital of Chu. Wu Zixu was disappointed to discover that the current king, Zhao, and the rest of the royal family had fled to the minor state of Sui. Wu Zixu exacted his revenge by digging up old King Ping’s body and giving the bones fifty lashes. The State of Wu demanded that the State of Sui give them King Zhao, but it refused and thereby preserved the State of Chu.



Umbrella Day in Hangzhou

King Heliu and Wu Zixu then focused their attention on the State of Yue to the south (centered at Canton and extending into North Vietnam). After four years of fighting, King Heliu was wounded in the finger and died. His son, Fuqai, listened to other advisors who counseled shifting the war to the north against the State of Qi. Wu Zixu tried to persuade him to continue his father's policy of fighting the danger in the south. King Fuqai's advisors convinced him that Wu Zixu was an agent of the Qi and he ordered Wu Zixu to commit suicide. Wu Zixu complied, but before he died he told King Fuqai, "Plant my grave mound with catalpa trees; you will need them for coffins."

This so enraged King Fuqai, that he placed Wu Zixu's body in a wine sack and set him adrift in the Qiantang River. The people of Hangzhou took pity upon Wu Zixu because of his lack of a proper burial. They set up the Liu He shrine to worship his frankness and, also, to placate his ghost. Not long after Wu Zixu's death, while King Fuqai was off fighting in the north, Yue conquered the State of Wu.

As the Old Timer, on the Fibber McGee radio show, was oft to say, "That isn't the way I heard it, sonny." Our local guide, Jane, gave us another explanation for the construction of the Liu He pagoda. It goes as follows:

Liu He, a small boy, lived near the Qiantang River with his mother and father. One day when the river dragon was very angry, he sent a tidal wave that swept the boy's mother and father into the river. Little Liu He was very unhappy. He was so upset that he started throwing rocks at the river dragon. This made the river dragon even angrier, but Liu He did not stop throwing rocks. The dragon told Liu He to stop or he would send another tidal wave, but Liu He said that he would not stop until the dragon returned his mother to him. Liu He continued throwing rocks. The dragon said that he would stop sending the tidal wave if Liu He would stop throwing rocks, but Liu He just continued throwing rocks. Finally, the dragon could stand it no longer and returned Liu He's mother to him. Liu He and his mother lived happily ever after and the people of Hangzhou built the Liu He shrine to celebrate the little boy who tamed the river dragon. [This version has to be true, because there is a statue of little Liu He, with a plaque telling his story, in front of the pagoda.]



Little Liu He

We visited the Liu He pagoda after lunch. Little Liu He was right there with one foot stepping on the river dragon and a large rock in his hand. The pagoda is 50 meters tall and has thirteen layers of roofs; however, on the inside there are only seven levels. I climbed the circular staircase up to the sixth level. The stairs to the seventh were blocked off. There were open windows under the roof at each level that gave a panoramic view of the area. Because of the constant drizzle, and the smog of the city, you could barely see the trains on the railroad bridge, next to the pagoda, that crosses the Qiantang River.

Our last adventure for the day was a ride out of Hangzhou to Mei Jia Wu village, where they grow the famous Longjing (West Lake Dragon Well) tea. It is one of five villages outside of Hangzhou that grow Longjing tea. Farmers have been growing tea there for 600 years. Mei Jia Wu has a population of 558 families, approximately 1500 people. They have become very prosperous since the 1980 Land Responsibility Act fixed the tax



Mei Jia Wu Village

on the land and allowed the farmers to earn as much as they were able beyond the fixed tax. The road into the village was being realigned and the houses in the village were being replaced or upgraded. Although the public places in China are kept sparkling clean (workers were constantly polishing the



Harvesting Longjing tea

glass cases at the Shanghai Museum to remove finger prints or nose and forehead smudges), this is not the case for roads and waterways. The stream that ran through the village was full of trash.

We were taken to the Mei Jia Wu Tea Research Institute (by now we had learned that Research Institute means shopping opportunity) for lectures on tea and a chance to taste (and purchase) the local product. The village was a favorite of Zhou Enlai. He visited it five times. The institute houses a small museum with pictures documenting all of his visits. This is what they told up about tea:

There are four kinds of tea produced in China: green, black, jasmine, and oolong. The bushes that produce the tea are the same, but the processing of the leaves is different. The young, green leaves can be picked from a bush about thirty times a season—April to October. There are three formal harvest periods: spring, summer, and fall. The spring leaves are the most valuable. The bushes produce for about 100 years. They are pruned each year and then, as they approach their 50<sup>th</sup> year and have become much less productive, they are cut back to the roots.

The fresh picked leaves are cooled in the shade for three hours and then placed in a wok that has been heated to 80 degrees C. until they lose 70% of their water to evaporation. The leaves are cooled again and then put back into a wok at 40 degrees C. for complete drying. Oil from the tea berries is used to grease the woks so the tea will not burn.

The rain had stopped while we were at the Liu He pagoda and the sun came out as we left the tea village. When we got back to the hotel, Virginia and I went for a walk on West Lake's

Su causeway to take some pictures. We walked across the Jade Belt Bridge that was built in the Qing dynasty. A stone plaque called the bridge "a long rainbow over the waves." The limestone foundation and railings sparkled and the red and gold painted wood shone in the light of the setting sun.

We finished the evening by having dinner in the bar of the hotel: two beers with potato crisps and spring roll appetizers.



Jade Belt Bridge on West Lake