



Random observations on life of the common Joe in Shun De, Guangdong Province, China – Part 3
Travelogues

Sunday afternoon and a raging storm has rolled in AGAIN. Loud cracking thunder and bright lightning bolts has made the view overlooking the city from 9th floor hotel room quite spectacular. So far I have had one day without rain during my entire stay in Shun de, China. What a drag this is.

Early in the morning I did get time to go for a walk to a big box store called “Lotus.” This is the type of store that makes any westerner comfortable, as it is like shopping back home. The store is huge in that it contains merchandise that you would find at any Canadian Store, Loblaw’s or Wal-Mart. The building is at least 100,000 square feet in size per floor and it has two floors. The first floor is a grocery store that is well stocked with foodstuff just like a Loblaw’s grocery store, including taste samplings, large produce area, fresh meat and fish counters. The one difference in the fish counter that we are accustomed to buy from back home is that they do mean FRESH when you buy fish. The fish are not displayed dead lying side by side on a thin layer of crushed ice; they are in fact stored in live in aquarium tanks. You can choose from a wide variety of salt and fresh water fish as well as from live squid, octopus, eels, turtles, etc...

As you look around you, everything in China, especially in the major city centres are being replaced with new. Constructions abound, cars and motorbikes are everywhere and affluence keeps surfacing. As one looks at the modern highway system that has and is continuing to be put into place across the country, you can’t but help to notice two unique things on the road. The first is very obvious, and that is that the cars are virtually new. The majority appear to have been built within the last ten years and have been made with all of the toys and conveniences of any car made anywhere in the world. The



second and most striking observation is the old technology in a convoy of military trucks carrying army personnel and these vehicles were also of the same vintage. It is an interesting contrast, as one witnesses the rapidity to modernization in the car industry however this has not taken root in the very important trucking industry. All goods manufactured by industry in China are trucked to a nearby port before it is put on a cargo ship. This country moves more cargo by land and sea than almost any country in the world and it does the movement by truck using the oldest and most dilapidated trucks available. Go figure....

There is a fascination in Asia for breast enlargement. Not the artificial type that you hear or read about in Hollywood. Everywhere you look you are reminded of it. Watch television, and you see ads for gadgets (something similar to Dr. Ho’s muscle stimulator), drinks (potions of all types that delivers a certain chemical to right place causing you guessed it – larger breasts, creams (can’t tell you how many different creams that are offered to stimulate growth of the fatty tissue in the breast), all of which promises enhanced cleavage. Walk the weekend market, and you are bombarded at every second table with a variety of bras that promise better cleavage and bigger breasts. They come in different thicknesses of padding and in a wide range of colours. The pre-occupation is endless, and it has become a very large industry.

One of the great attributes of the Chinese culture is the inner desire to better oneself. They work hard and long hours in the hopes of trying to accumulate wealth, however small this may be. At one of the stoplights today, such an entrepreneur was there selling her retail products. Where in the world would



you find someone walking from car window to car window trying to sell cell phone 12V recharging kits? In Canada you would shop at your local Radio Shack, Futureshop or Best Buy store, but here someone is willing to deliver it directly to your car window while you are driving. Quite amazing... Southern China is a tropical area and little did I know that it was also one of the largest producers of bananas. The banana trees are next to the miles and miles of rice fields. I was out in the country today and saw the current state of farming in Guangdong province. Rice is still planted, cared for and collected by hand. Thousands of workers are in the

fields tending to the rice paddies in the hot sun. As for the bananas, what I could see of them today was that they were almost ready for picking; however they did have to wait a few days while they ripened in the blue plastic bags that they are wrapped in on the banana tree. Corn is also another staple and they grow this stuff year round. When you drive by a corn field, you can almost imagine that you are on a country road back in Canada. The only dead give away are the trees, as we do not have palm trees everywhere.

Took some time off this week (Freedom Day as it is called here in China) to go and visit a mountain hot spring resort. This place is called the Fairland Open-Air Hot Spring and it is located in the town of Zhongshan. You can visit this place on the internet by clicking on the following link: www.xmy-hotspring.com. The hot spring areas of Western Canada (Fairmont, Banff and Radium) can learn a thing or two about operating a hot springs resort. My friend in Shun de took me there to go for a relaxing swim in the spring water which is kept at 30 degrees C. There are 38 different pools and hot tubs to relax in. Why sit or swim in a sulphur smelling pool when you can relax or swim in a Lemon, Milk, Coconut and several other pleasing scented pools. They are very relaxing. Included in this family resort, you can get a variety of massages out in the open air. They have large marble covered areas that are heated by the hot springs. You lie on these hot spring heated marble stones on your towel and then you can have someone massage your feet, your face, your legs and your arms. An outdoor spa while it is pouring rain outside with a whole lot of thunder. It was quite pleasant and relaxing. It isn't too busy this time of year because it is too warm. The locals like to visit this place in what they refer to as winter that is, when the temperature drops to 20 degrees C.



The whole issue wrapped around motor vehicles in this country is mesmerizing. Just yesterday, I again witnessed how the arms of the law could be stretched to suit one's purposes. The first instance had to do with the person in the car needing to stop at a local mobile phone company to settle the account. This store is located on a main street of Shun de which is four lanes wide plus an additional lane for parking on each side. Since there wasn't any parking available on either side of the street the driver double parked next to a vehicle legally parked. Now you are probably wondering what makes this situation so unusual. Well, let me tell you! The driver drove into the oncoming traffic lanes and double parked in the left lane in the wrong direction, left the car and went into the shop for the next 10 minutes. Oncoming traffic was now reduced to one lane, with bicycles, scooters, cars, mini cargo trucks, transport trucks and buses

adapting to this change in traffic pattern and filed without complaint into one lane until the driver reappeared, jumped in the vehicle and proceeded to drive down the street in the wrong direction until he could safely move into the correct lanes. If this occurs in North America, you would have a police car appear very quickly to press charges and most importantly, the driver would be crucified by fellow drivers long before a police car arrived on the scene.



The second situation involved parking the car when we went to dinner. The restaurant was located on a very busy street in the city (8 lanes of traffic wide) and there wasn't any parking available. The driver takes this matter into his own mind, because it may just rain later. So why park half a mile down the road when you can park right in front of the restaurant. To so, all he had to do was drive up on the sidewalk and position the car in such a way that it leaves the pedestrians enough room to walk around. As in all other instances related to driving and traffic management, this is done without a peep from oncoming vehicles and pedestrians. I would say that it is expected. As you look down the street, you can see several cars parked on the sidewalk in front of a variety of shops and restaurants.

As I travel I am amazed as to the amount of construction surrounding me. The city/country is in a perpetual state of flux or change. What is even more amazing is how the building that is new gets to looking well beyond their years shortly after they are constructed. I believe much of it has to do with the construction materials used (wood, tile and plaster) and the very high level of humidity in the area, as this is a very tropical area. Not long after the buildings have been completed and they are directly exposed to the elements (after removal of bamboo scaffolding and protective cover), the buildings have



this greyish tone appear and as time goes on you get long black streaks everywhere on the exterior. I can only surmise that the black stuff on the building is mould, and this would be attributed to the areas climatic conditions. In addition, there also has to be an impact on the exterior of the buildings due to the very high level of industrial pollution. Most electrical supply plants are coal fired, thus leaving probably a high level of sulphur in the air, and the high level of humidity captured this pollution and traps it in the rain. Regardless of the factors, the buildings look much older than they really are.

During my excursion to the hot springs I did get to drive by a new housing development. This development is again evident of the ongoing individual wealth creation that exists in China. IF I had a camera I would have taken a picture, but it isn't necessary as you can easily imagine what this housing area looked at. Think of any new housing development in the GTA and you have witness the new housing trend in China. The homes are 2500 to 3500 square feet, same style as we are accustomed to in Canada and finished in stucco. Each of the homes has large garages in the front of the house, a small back yard and all the conveniences of a modern home and neighbourhood that we would see in Canada.

Thursday afternoon and I was taken to an old part of the city for lunch. This restaurant was as old as the hills and does not look like it had been updated for 50 to 60 years at the earliest. Small wooden tables and chairs with tea served in traditional china teapot and miniature cups. This style of tea service is called "Kung Fu" Tea. Who would have guessed? I was brought here by Jimmy my dedicated driver for



most of the four weeks that I have been here. He is proud of his neighbourhood and wanted to treat me to lunch in the tradition of the real and down to earth Chinese population. The place was very hot as it didn't have air conditioning. We were large hand fans to use to keep the air flow around us cool enough to make it bearable in the 30+ degree heat. Jimmy did the ordering and from there I was challenged to eat what was served. We started with something very tame, rice with small pieces of chicken. This I could easily handle. Arriving at the table next was a hot pepper served with a

small fish on it. Man was this spicy. As for the fish it was OK and not something I would venture out to have again. The next dish that arrived was a serving of pork. Now this should have been appetizing, however I could not get past the thickness of fat that was on the plate. The pork pieces must have been from the pigs back as the chunks were virtually solid fat. One bite into a hot chunk of pork, and man was it disgusting. A mushy piece of hot fat that leaked liquid out of the side of your mouth was what you got. Gross is the best way to describe this. I did not want to insult my host, so I ate a few pieces to make it look good. Now the last dish, I was very familiar with. It was cooked pork blood sausage. The reason I say that I had some familiarity is that I remember as a young boy being served beef based blood sausage.... And this I remember as being very good. A taste of the pork sausage and god it took everything I could muster to not empty my stomach. This I could not have a second bite. It was far too gross for words, let alone consume.



It's my last night in town and my last dinner with the working group. Dinner was a normal Chinese meal with some wine to reminisce and celebrate the achievements of the past month. What I will not miss from my meals with the locals is the spitting out of bones and other remnants that cannot be digested during the meal, the burping, the high consumption of Mou Tai (a local white wine that is 52% proof), looking at dishes that look more like bait than food, the use of a fork and knife as feeding utensils and the ability to have a conversation in a language that I am familiar with without the yelling that is the custom when Chinese people converse while consuming copious amounts of food and liquid refreshments. The yelling is the one thing that I could not get used to during my stay in China. I believe that Chinese people cannot have

a civil conversation unless they are yelling at each other. Put 6 to 12 people at a table and guess what is going on. You would think that you are at a World Wrestling Federation match where the opponents are yelling at the crowd to get their support. My ears will be getting a welcomed rest and I hope that the ringing will stop long before I land in Toronto on Saturday night.