



Travels to the City of Chongqing

Travelogues

City of Chongqing, China's largest populated city at 31.2 million people.

This week I visited the City of Chongqing. It is about 1300 kms west of Shun de. As most cities, Chongqing isn't part of a province in the country. When the communist regime began experimenting with the establishment of experimental capitalist centers it created certain areas of China as Free Trade Zones. These areas/cities are run with its own government that is it reports directly to the Central National Government. This allows uninterrupted and unchallenged growth without having to deal with



multiple levels of government for approvals. In this way the Central Government was able to control the spread of capitalism, reap the benefits (taxes) of massive growth industries not tied to internal demand, and allow for the attraction of large world companies for creating and building massive industrial complexes to provide jobs for the millions of people in need of work. This literally transformed the country from an agricultural based economy to an industrial based economy.

When you translate the word "Chongqing," you get The City of Hills. This city is San Francisco on steroids. Just imagine a city as hilly as San Fran with a population of 30.2 million. The density is overwhelming. In America we tend to look at skyscrapers as buildings occupied by business during the day. Well here in Chongqing, it is people that populate these buildings as their homes. There isn't a piece of land that is left as park land. I was warned that while here I would most likely not see a bicycle, primarily because of the hilly environment. They were right, as in a whole day of travel, I saw one bicycle and it was equipped without any extra gears on it. Everyone walks, rides a scooter or motorcycle, travels by city bus or uses a motorcar (Word for car in China) to travel anywhere. The taxi cabs are all mini Suzuki cars. Boy, are they small. When you get in four travellers plus the driver into one of these cars, you are packed in like sardines. Not only are you subjected to sitting in close quarters, the driver doesn't use the air conditioning even when it is 30 degrees Centigrade outside. You roll down the window using the manual window crank for a breeze. I know that the cars are equipped with AC, as I can see the button on the dash, but it appears that it is never used.

In China meetings are still attended wearing a suit with shirt and tie. So you can just imagine what we looked like when we got to our destinations. We arrived somewhat damp with perspiration. I guess one needs to be acclimatized to survive. Perspiration stains are OK as everyone has them on their clothing... It is more or less expected. I guess Westerners are just a bunch of wooses for complaining about the heat and humidity. Humidity runs at above 85% day in and day out.



The cab ride was 45 minutes long and I felt like a wet dish rag when I got to the Suzuki Head Office which is located in the factory. What also is most interesting in my travel to the Suzuki facility is that this ride was for at least 40 kms along streets that are similar to Yonge, University and Avenue Road in Toronto. We went through a grand total of 5 traffic lights along the way. This is during rush hour with motor scooters, cars, delivery trucks, transport trucks and a string of buses as far as the eye can see fighting for free space on the streets that are 6 to 8 lanes wide. One

cannot forget that there are also cars and people crossing the street anywhere along the way and not always at intersections. So as I described in an earlier note, chaos is always very close to appearing. We did make it there and back safely, and I did not witness any incidents anywhere along the way.

On Friday we went to visit two other potential customers, Ford and LIFAN. Ford has a car assembly plant that is practically new (5 years old) and LIFAN which is a local motor-scooter and motorcycle manufacturer that has designed and built its first car in a brand new car plant. Again the trip was taken in a small cab however this time the cab driver was a woman. She drove much the same way as the male drivers, however not as aggressive in tight situations. When it came for a spot in a lane that fit a scooter and there was a competition between a city bus and her little car, she gave in and let the bus in. A male driver would never let this happen.

A special note about all the cabs in this city is that all the seats have white cloth seat covers on them. They are the shape of the front and rear seats and they also cover the headrests. On the headrest part of the cover the day of the week is embroidered on them. So on our trip to Suzuki, our seat had Thursday embroidered and our trip to Ford had Friday on it. You can see this from outside the car. This is not only done to indicate the day of the week it is it also indicates the cleanliness of the cab. If the cover indicates the wrong day, then the cab has not been cleaned and as a customer you are not to hire it as transport. Another important point about the cabs is that they are all equipped with manual transmissions. I find this unusual because this is the first place where I have seen cars equipped this way. What makes it most unusual is that this part of the country is very hilly, so driving a car with a manual transmission is a lot of work for the driver.

As a city goes, it is similar as to any other in China. I do believe that China has a stronghold on the massive cranes required to build tall buildings, as they appear in the skyline like fixtures that belong there. They look like they could be the TV, Radio or cell phone towers that are atop a building in Canada. The amount of construction that is going on is mind boggling. What is most striking is that all these modern buildings under construction still use bamboo as the scaffolding for the workers to work on when finishing the exterior of the building. It is hard to believe that bamboo scaffolding continues to be so widely used as a means of constructing the exterior of a building in the 21st century.





Rivers in China are an important method of shipping goods to the coastal areas. Chongqing is no different. In the middle of the city it has two rivers that converge. The first is the great Yangtze and the second I don't recall. Anyhow, the Yangtze is filthy dirty and must be lined to the bottom with chemical and other forms of pollution. It is gross and disgusting to look at. I walked down to the shore line and looked back up towards the city and wow what a sight. Here I am more than 200 meters below the city looking at this yellow and brownish putrid and stinky water. The city has built concrete dikes to the height of 200 meters and in July of 1989, the river banks swelled 189 meters above where I was standing. It is difficult to fathom the amount of water that was required for this to occur. People that lived in first floor apartments were told

to evacuate and move in with relatives or friends that lived in apartments above ground level. The city didn't flood, but I am sure that somewhere along the Yangtze, a great deal of flooding occurred and many lives were lost. I visited the juncture of the two rivers and this is where you clearly see the difference in the two rivers. The second river has clear clean blue water merging with the second and then proceeds towards the coast.

While here in Chongqing I did get the opportunity to have a couple of unique items for meals. At lunch yesterday, I was surprised at the table with a dish of fresh frog – not just the legs, I mean the entire thing. To cook it, the chef uses the Chinese chopper and chops the hell out of it and then boils it (you know the saying "If it moves, How do you boil it"), boils it flesh and all, puts it on a plate mixed in with hot peppers and then serves it piping hot. You then consume this dish along with a bowl of sticky rice. What I failed to tell you is that I was sitting next to several fish tanks, one of which was holding this poor guy, before he was scooped out and turned into lunch. Having frog cooked this way, I mean skin and all is how all animals, fish and other species are cooked and served. This makes you wonder "why do the westerners only eat the legs on a Frog?" Are we all woosers for doing so?



Chongqing is supposedly very famous for its VERY spicy hot pot (kind of fondue). Let me make clear right now, I mean VERY spicy. Spicy dishes from southern USA or Mexico don't hold a candle to these spicy dishes. The basic foodstuffs in making the hot pot broth are the innards of a duck. This in itself is enough to turn you off, but as part of the meal you get the stomach and tripe of the duck as pieces of meat to cook in the hot pot. Yum Yum..... The texture is like a hard piece of gum that loses its flavour very quickly. Yum Yum... As for most of the remaining dishes, you get an assortment of beef, pork, veggies, liver, etc... commonly served with a broth fondue,

however the most surprising was this white slimy wormy looking dish. When I inquired as to what this was I was quickly told that the stuff was a pig's brain. We had two whole dishes of this gloppy looking stuff. So being adventurous I did try a bit of it, and I mean a bit of it, as just the thought of eating brains was not something that I found very appetizing. The stuff feels slimy in your mouth,

but not enough to make you feel like gagging, and when you bite into it, the texture is somewhat similar soft yogurt. You know the feeling, it's like you have nothing in your mouth, but you still have the flavour as it quickly melts away. Yum Yum... What certainly helped to digest the very hot spicy food was a cold beer. Thank god for the cold beer as the ongoing service of hot tea would not have been good enough to keep one cool from the spicy food, or to help you swallow the pig's brain.

It is customary in the afternoon when on a field trip to stop off at some little desert shop and have what is called "Double Milk." This is kind of a thick, hot, sweet milk, and egg mixture in a bowl. Since this takes a few minutes for it to be prepared, the Chinese like to order an appetizer to munch on while they wait for their dessert. Since the menu is all in Chinese, I leave it up to them to order the desert and the appetizer. I was not ready for what the group had in mind for the appetizer. The selection was boiled "cow stomach, intestine and lungs" served with a side dish of "Sauce Piquant." Mmm, mmm. Not exactly my idea of an appetizer, especially served with what was supposed to be dessert. The Cow Guts taste isn't all that bad; once you get past the idea of what it is you are putting in your mouth to eat.

One of the areas that that is fascinating is related to local currency. I know that I described this a bit in a previous note, but I think that it is worthy to discuss it further. For me personally I have gotten a better understanding as to the value from a local resident's perspective, because if I use my western roots as a measure, it totally creates a misunderstanding of the local economy and those who live in it. For example, my flight to Chongqing cost me 700 Yuan or approximately \$85 CDN one way. For the co-workers that I am working with, making this expenditure was a major financial decision for them and the company.

To better understand the value one is working with in China is to give you an idea of the currency and how it is treated. The currency has two names: 1) the Yuan or 2) Renminbi (RMB). It is the same however outsiders tend to call the currency the RMB and locals call it the Yuan. The largest paper note is worth 100 Yuan. This is valued at today's rate as \$13.91 in Canadian Dollars. Other paper notes come in 50 (\$6.85 CDN), 20 (\$2.78 CDN), 10 (\$1.89 CDN), 5 (\$0.94 CDN), 2 (\$0.28 CDN) and 1 (\$0.14 CDN) denominations and as an example the use of the local transit system costs 3 Yuan. Then to take currency one step further they have coins in the denominations of 50 (\$0.07 CDN), 10 (\$0.015 CDN) and 1 (\$0.0015 CDN). On several occasions I have taken the time to go shopping in a local grocery store (the big box type) with all the modern conveniences that include electronic checkout. Just think that if you want to carry any significant sum of money you must carry it in 100 Yuan notes. That is some wad of money to have on you any one time. When you pay with the 100 Yuan note it is scanned for counterfeit. If it passes, the note is not put in a cash register, it goes into a slot in the counter which is directly into a safe, and then they give you your change. At this point you would think that the cash drawer of this very fancy electronic cash register that scans bar codes would open up and that displays the change to be tendered would open up and expose the cash that is present in the register. Not so. The person behind the counter pulls out a cardboard box that contains a pile of oddly sized notes and random coins. The counterperson ruffles through the box to count out the change that you are to get from the disorganized contents.



I did ask why China did not have a bank note higher than 100 Yuan, and the answer is that there is a high level of counterfeiting going on in the country. The maximum size of note to 100 Yuan ensures that if a bank note is passed to a small merchant, their losses are limited to that particular note. The government fears that if they made notes available in denominations of 500, 1,000 and 10,000 Yuan, that this could wipe out the income or savings of a small merchant or many individual families. Any one caught with a counterfeit note loses the currency and absorbs the loss. As a result all business large or small has counterfeit detecting machines to analyze the notes before it is accepted for payment.