



Travels in China & participation in Trade Mission
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Travelogues

Travel to Asia is both challenging and rewarding. It is mentally and physically demanding, and in fact this trip was more so than any I have done in the past couple of years. This particular trip was a bit different in that it included my participation in a Trade Mission – Automotive Industry in Shanghai and Nanjing, China with the Ontario Government and several Ontario based manufacturing companies.

As usual, my trip started with a Thursday night flight leaving Toronto International Airport at 11:30 pm. I like this flight because a few hours after takeoff, I can get my usual 5 or 6 hours of sleep as it is bedtime and arrive in Hong Kong on early Saturday morning, around 7:30 am. With eighteen hours to kill in a plane, this is certainly on way to get up to six hours knocked off without any recall of time. As in most flights, not much happens while stuck in a tube some 35,000 feet in the air. However, what was most interesting is that the name of the flight attendant responsible for the area of the plane that I was sitting in was Fiona. This is a highly unusual name, as Fiona is also the name of my wife. Whenever I meet new people that I interact with from Asian descent I am always interested in finding out why they have chosen a particular English name. The flight attendant informed me that when she was a young girl in school learning English, one of the books that she had to read was an adventure story about a young girl named Fiona.

As in all my trips, Hong Kong is where I start, however this time I proceeded directly to Taiwan for weekend meeting in Taichung. I elected to not spend a day or two in Hong Kong, as I was on a very tight schedule and had much work to accomplish in a very short period of time. Arriving to my hotel at 1:00 pm on Saturday afternoon did make the excursion an exhausting travel schedule. After a few hours of rest I took a taxi and met up with a friend who was celebrating his birthday with his extended family. This was quite an extravagant dinner at a restaurant on the top of a nearby mountain. The view of the city at night was breathtaking and the meal was fabulous. Nothing unusual at the table for consumption, except that Chinese tradition includes toasting with Kaoliang (Strong White Wine @ 58%) everyone at the table to recognize my friend's day of birth. Fun was had by all.



One of the most enjoyable things to happen on this particular evening was that the my friend's son Kevin who is 8 years old, had garnered enough confidence with his English that he began to speak to me using his English. This was enjoyable, rewarding and fun. Eight year olds have a lot to say, especially when they have an interest in learning more about our culture and why things are different. I look forward to further visit with my Taiwanese friends, and look forward to Kevin's ongoing progress in mastering the English language. In fact, I have taken on the challenge of learning Chinese by enrolling in a Mandarin Language course at Ryerson University starting on May 1st. That's another story.....

While in Taichung, I did take time on the Sunday afternoon to go to an open market of artisans. Painters, jewellery makers and a host of many other crafts people had their wares on display. The market is the same but at the same time different than an artists market that I would attend in North America. The obvious difference is that all crafts have an Asian look to them, and this should net be unexpected. It was a fun and interesting day. I was taken to this market by three people that work for a supplier that I do work with in Taichung. They happily volunteered their time on a Sunday afternoon to expose me to the Taiwanese culture. In a previous travelogue I did report that Cherron was a new and nervous driver. For this particular day she borrowed her father's brand new Toyota Corolla, picked up her co-workers and myself. All went well and without mishap. What I did not realize until later in the day, that Cherron

had had an encounter with a stubborn street sign. At different times during the afternoon, we got in and out of the car and I had noticed a small dent in the left front fender but did not really think anything of it until later that night at dinner, the cat came out of the bag. I questioned Cherron about the dent as a joke, thinking that I would blame it on her driving skills, when she informed me that she had hit a sign while parking the car earlier that morning. Her next challenge was going to be – How do I explain to my Dad

Later in the week I moved on into mainland China, more specifically Guangdong province. My schedule was very tight with business activities, not allowing for any free time. As usual, I did manage to have several great traditional meals that included fish, more fish, vegetables, snakes and the like during my stay; however I was not served anything that I had not been exposed to on any of my previous trips. I did work and travel with Joe, and I must report that his driving has improved significantly since my last visit. He has mastered the art of driving a car equipped with a manual transmission, and he has also mustered up the courage to drive as aggressively as his countrymen, that is drive not by obeying the rule of the road, but by interpreting them as he thinks they apply to him. What I mean is that such things as lines on the road, traffic signs such as a “STOP” sign, traffic lights are only mere suggestions for drivers. For someone that has never been to mainland China, this would be a nerve racking first time experience. I was told by friends of Joe’s that he has had to have his new car in for several small paint repairs since his purchased of his new Mazda last December. I did not feel while travelling with Joe this time that I needed a crash helmet.

The next leg of the trip was where I was exposed to something totally new. I was invited and participated in Trade Mission sponsored by the Ontario Export Development Branch. Seven Ontario based companies participated in the event that travelled to Shanghai and Nanjing in China. In Shanghai, the group was able to take in the Shanghai Auto Show, and what a large event this was. Busy was an understatement. Attendance at the 10 day affair is 110,000 to 150,000 people. When compared to the Toronto version of the same show, the program in Toronto is deemed successful if it can attract 150,000 people in total over a 10 day period. Unlike the North American type of auto shows, this program includes the parts suppliers of the auto industry.... Which by comparison to the APAA/SEMA show in Las Vegas in November of every year – this is a much larger and grandeur affair. The Shanghai Auto Show was an eye opener in that it provided a small window on how quickly the automotive industry and market is establishing itself in China. The show attendance is proof of the pent up demand for cars and trucks by the residents of the country. In fact China currently has more than 100 China owned and based automobile manufacturers, which over time is sure to shrink in size, much like what has occurred during the 20th century with the rest of the western world.



In fact the market is so large, that the automotive industry holds two shows in two different cities simultaneously. The second show in Nanjing which does not include the automotive vehicle manufacturers, is a show dedicated to parts and accessories manufacturers that focus on the aftermarket service segment. This is a smaller show when compared to the APAA/SEMA show in Las Vegas, however over time it will certainly overshadow this show. The reason for this is that the service repair aftermarket is new to China as they’re secondary repair market is just beginning to evolve. This show was also very well attended by the evolving aftermarket jobber/repair industry

participants. However, the suppliers that participate in this show are very different from the OEM type suppliers that attend the auto show in Shanghai. The suppliers at this show are for the most part not suppliers to the vehicle manufacturers. As a result, one does have to perform their due diligence on these companies should they be used as a supplier to auto parts and accessories in the North American aftermarket.

It was a busy five days of travel and meetings with potential China based business partners. Most of my travel to and from China has been predominantly solo and it was an exiting opportunity to travel with other Canadian company personnel that have the same international business interests as I have. For most of the participants, this was their first exposure to the Asian market. It was an eye opener for them I am sure.



The Trade Mission provided a great opportunity to learn more about the services and support that our Ontario and Federal governments provide to companies in China. Staff from the Ontario Provincial Export Branch, and Canadian overseas staff located in the Canadian Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing offices were on hand to assist the Trade Mission team in their efforts to make contacts for potential export sales relationships to Chinese companies. As a group we experienced first hand the effectiveness of the Canadian personnel stationed in China and the quality of support that they can and do provide to Canadian companies that are considering entering the China market.