

January 15, 2004

Return from China

Upon return from China I am happy to report that the Chinese celebrate Christmas and our New Year as well. Of course bigger celebrations are planned for the week of January 23 – traditional Chinese New Year. But when I was in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou, decorated Christmas trees were everywhere along with “Happy New Year” signs in English.

I did not get a chance to roast a small pig as ovens are not popular in Chinese homes and my apartment did not have one either. But my Chinese guests fell in love with my cabbage rolls, pirogues and pork schnitzels. As I expected they were curious about the taste of foreign foods and our traditional Polish food was a big hit.

I was much impressed with the Chinese city of Shenzhen, which is only one hour by train from Hong Kong. It is a modern and rich city with a lot of skyscrapers, luxurious apartment buildings and opulent hotels. Known as the center of computer technology in China, the city has population of 7 million people, even though it is only 30 years old. New construction is everywhere, under supervision of firms from the West. Judging by new construction alone, there is a lot of investment money in China.

I experienced the most courteous and professional service in restaurants, department stores and supermarkets. The food was high quality even though it ranged in price greatly depending on the location of the restaurant. Chinese establishments really value clients and readily express their gratitude for any purchase. I had the opportunity to tour a local hospital in Shenzhen where I admired the pleasant atmosphere and fast service. The parks of Shenzhen were magnificent and included highly decorated and elaborate temples where many devoted Chinese paid their respects to Buddha statues.

Unlike Hong Kong, Shenzhen made me feel that I was the only foreigner in town. I was met with discreet stares by curious Chinese. But at the same time I felt safe and really at home as China, although an exotic country, in many ways reminded me of Poland. This is mainly because the neighboring city of Canton (population of 10 million) is an older town and if you disregard all signs in Chinese it looks like Warsaw. As I moved away from the big cities by bus to explore the countryside, the smaller towns and villages were visibly poorer but teeming with activity by industrious Chinese.

Some analysts say that China’s economy is emerging as a superpower, even exceeding the strength of America in the next three decades. It is already bigger than Britain and Germany in terms of economic growth. China has the land mass and the population: now it is building a more sophisticated economy.

The growth in China is not without problems. When I was in there, the Shenzhen stock exchange was taken over by the government. A government exhausted by the visible corruption among the managers. The Chinese banks are suffering from too many

defaulted loans and currently the government is assisting them with \$85 billion aid. But any fast growth is not perfect and I am certain that problems will be solved there as soon as they show up.

The only unpleasant incident I encountered was in the Polish Consulate in Canton where I went to assist my Chinese friend with a visa application to Poland. An over-aggressive and rude young Chinese woman, who presented herself as the assistant to the Consul, greeted us. She stated outright that the Consul was too busy to see us and made a big fuss about the details of the visa application. Even though she could speak Polish, English and Mandarin, nobody has taught her manners and her behavior was shocking, unnatural and offensive. Almost as if the Polish Consulate were afraid of Polish nationals and she acted as if she was defending the Polish Consul from me. That is understandable as most of the consular posts are still staffed by the loyal ex-members of the Communist Party of Poland.

When I was in China, every day I was in touch with my office in Canada and the world with high speed Internet. Thus I enjoyed reading about the slide of popularity of the ruling party (SLD) in Poland and I read about one corruption affair after another. I am convinced that there is much more corruption and government manipulation in Poland than in China. Considering that the Chinese government would never opt for an unpatriotic economic reform like that of the unpopular Balcerovic in Poland, I was able to witness a country working unhindered on all cylinders, self-confident towards the future.

Since China has successfully avoided to be entangled in international politics and petty wars, they can now concentrate on economic growth and keeping full employment. I regret that because of the mediocrity and servility of political leaders in Poland, my motherland land is on the opposite course.

It is absolutely amazing that after the violent revolution, which occurred in China not so long ago, the country is progressing so fast and is grateful to the former communist leaders such as Mao Tes-Tung and Den Xiaoping for making this possible. The popular explanation here is that any father has to be strong in order to discipline children and that social order of China had to be destroyed first in order to build a new society with the foundation for the current growth. Whether you believe this explanation or not is up to you but there are many visible signs of spontaneous gratitude to the former leaders, like restaurants with that have food that only Chairman Mao ate, taxi cabs that are voluntarily decorated with Mao portraits and huge billboards with a photo of Deng Xiaoping in front of ornate beds of flowers. You can argue that there is not much democracy in the political process in China but you cannot negate their growth rate of 10% each year for the last 15 years.

To summarize this short note, I recommend that you also visit China as it is an unique and exotic, former communist country that is fully independent from controls of International Money Fund and the World Bank. You will have a pleasant experience at a

most reasonable price, before it gets too successful and too expensive to visit. To see young and inviting capitalistic China now is to see future of the world.

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