



Special Edition - 25th Anniversary Trip to China



Sister City Trip to Jinan

By STEVE COHN

This past October, I had the pleasure of leading a 19-member delegation to visit Jinan, China, for the 25th anniversary of the Sacramento-Jinan Sister City relationship. This two-week trip was a real eye-opener. China has changed completely since I last visited 10 years ago. Then, Jinan was celebrating the opening of the first freeway to the City. Now, this “medium” sized city of 6 million has freeways everywhere, and hundreds of cranes constructing high rise apartments and offices, with ground floor retail, adding to the hundreds of high rises that were built in the last two decades. They have a new outdoor stadium and two indoor arenas next to their new City Hall/Regional Museum complex, a massive regional flower garden on the City’s outskirts, and a new Performing Arts Center under construction Downtown. This is truly a modern City.

What made the trip particularly memorable was the return of Sacramento’s own Grace Liu to her native city. We got to meet some of her family and friends. She is truly beloved on two continents. I also had the opportunity, along with the venerable Virginia Mueller,

to be interviewed on Jinan television. The station left us a video of Jinan that will be played on Sacramento’s Access television, and we are sending a video of Sacramento for Jinan television.

We also visited the 2008 Olympic center, the Forbidden City and Summer Palace in Beijing, the Great Wall, Qingdao, a scenic coastal city of 9 million that is home to China’s famous Tsingtao beer, Yantai, famous for its wine, Suzhou, the Venice of China, and Qufu, the hometown of Confucius.

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has documented extensively over the years about the growth of the middle class and other dramatic economic and technological changes in China, India, and other previously third world countries. Nonetheless, I was surprised at the seismic shift I witnessed in China. What used to look like the poorest parts of Mexico now has more modern infrastructure than the United States. For example, the new airports and rail stations in Beijing, Shanghai, and Jinan are both beautiful and functional. We rode the train between Beijing and Qingdao, a distance of roughly 600 miles in less than five hours, traveling up to 150 miles per hour. There is not one train in America that (see page 2)



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(Continued from page 1) travels that fast. Yet, in China, they don't even call that high speed rail. By next year, they will open a true high speed rail system between Beijing and Shanghai, including service through Jinan, that will virtually "fly" up to 240 miles per hour. This will rival HSR systems throughout Western Europe and Japan. Meanwhile, we're in the early planning stages for systems in California, Florida and a few other states, but without any long-term guarantee of full funding.



In Shanghai, I traveled everywhere I wanted to go via one of the cleanest, most modern and customer-friendly subway systems anywhere in the world. English language signage is omnipresent. I also took the "Maglev" train from central Shanghai to the Airport, which is one of the only magnetic levitation technology systems in commercial operation. The train actually elevates slightly above the track and travels up to 250 miles per hour. However, due to its cost and other operational/technological issues, the Maglev is unlikely to supersede more conventional high speed rail technology. Judging by the number of people I saw using iPhones, iPads, iPods, Blackberries and every other conceivable gadget, it is my impression that China's communications and computer technologies are also quite state-of-the-art. Their schools are producing some very impressive engineers, doctors, scientists, and business people. Judging by the vibrant retail scene and entrepreneurs everywhere, this capitalistic, entrepreneurial country does not even seem Communist to a visitor like me.

But what impressed me the most were the Chinese people, especially the young people. They seem to be very forward looking, and unafraid of the future. Don't get me wrong. They still have plenty of problems in China trying to feed 1.3 billion, tackling the horrendous air pollution problems caused by coal burning plants and the extraordinary number of new cars clogging their roads, and the social problems that tremendous growth can cause. And while they may not seem Communist to a visitor, they are still a totalitarian country with only one political party, censorship is rampant. The Government owns all the land (Chinese can buy houses and buildings and lease the land for 70 years from the Government) and the Government dictates most business and many personal decisions (though it turns out you can have more than one baby, you just have to pay a \$7,000 tax, which is more than most Chinese can pay). But they work very hard, they have a can-do attitude, and they are able and willing to apply scientific and engineering principles to solve their problems. In contrast to what you may have heard or read, most of the people I talked to seem to genuinely like America and Americans. In short, I think we have a lot to learn from each other.

Sacramento City Councilman Cohn is a strong supporter of sister-city programs. JSSCC would like to thank him for leading the delegation and representing Sacramento well in the official duties with Jinan. The trip was funded by JSSCC and private citizens. No government money was used to pay for this trip.

Clockwise from left: Chairman Xu presents a scroll of Confucius portrait as a gift to Sacramento. Councilman Cohn gives gifts from Sacramento to Secretary-General Geng. Our delegation at the Sacramento Garden, a replica of the World Peace Rose Garden (WPRG) on the Capitol ground. Built by the City of Jinan as a token of friendship, the Garden is located in the Jinan Garden Expo Park. Cohn and WPRG leader Anup present a plaque for world peace and friendship.



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