



TRAVEL



China's move forward is dynamic

By Georgia Hotton

Looking down from the seventh floor of the Sino Pearl Hotel in Xi'an, China, it seemed as though I were looking at Chinese history: past, present and future.

The southeast corner of the massive wall of the inner city was just across the street. (Renting a tandem bicycle, a young Chinese friend and I had ridden the 13.7 kilometers around the wall earlier in the day.)

Originally built during the Tang dynasty (618-907), it was rebuilt as a stronger wall during the Ming dynasty (1368-1633). The north side of the wall had just been restored in May, thereby making the bicycle tour possible.

One-third of the street in front of the hotel is being torn up by heavy equipment for major repairs. Laborers with picks and shovels dig 10-foot deep trenches while others lower, by rope, heavy cement pipes into these trenches.

Traffic on the street below is a maze of thoughtful chaos. Bicycles, pedestrians, trucks, taxis, scooters, buses, carts, BMWs are all moving forward wherever there is a minute opening.

No accidents

I choose the word "thoughtful" because in two weeks of traveling around the city, by bicycle, taxi and bus, I didn't see a single accident or any road



PHOTO COURTESY RUTH CHERRY

GEORGIA Hotton takes in the "Elegant Ladies" monument at the new Tang Paradise park in Xi'an, China, where she taught English.

rage.

There is apparently a city ordinance against using horns and almost none are heard. The whole scene seems harmonious as distinct from the horn honking melee of Cairo, Egypt, for example.

Throughout Xi'an, tall cranes are at work to build skyscrapers. Older buildings are being demolished by men wielding sledgehammers and improvised levers made of old pipes. Despite the incredible activity, this is a relatively quiet city—a city that is famous as the beginning of the Silk Road, the original information superhighway extending from Xi'an to Rome.

An Wei, the president of the

Sino-American Society and our host for the Global Volunteers, described China today as more capitalist than the United States, offering more freedom to its people than the United States.

Certainly, it is recognized as the world's most economically dynamic country. The May issue of Newsweek suggests the future belongs to China.

Through an Elder Hostel service travel adventure, 14 of us spent two to three weeks working in Chinese schools teaching English. Elder Hostel works with Global Volunteers, now working in 20 countries, which was the first American NGO (Non Government Organization) to send volunteers to the People's Republic of China. Since 1996, they have sponsored 117 groups of guest teachers.

Packed classrooms

I taught English in Xi'an's school # 83 to packed classrooms of 50 to 60 young teenagers who were polite, attentive and obviously eager to learn. Their school day begins at 7:15 in the morning and ends at 6 in the evening. There is a two and a half hour lunch break. When 3000 students, many of whom are wheeling their bicycles from their indoor parking lot, flow out of the school yard, it is impressively orderly and friendly.

In my classes, student questions ranged from "What do you think about Hip Hop?" to "What do you think about the Taiwan problem?"

Knowing little about Hip Hop, I turned the question around and the class was entertained by a solo perform-



AP PHOTO | SERGEY PONOMAREV

LIFE-SIZED sculptures of warriors stand upright in the pit where they were unearthed in 1974 in Xi'an. The Terracotta warriors are among 8,000 pottery soldiers and horses, created and buried 2,200 years ago to guard the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shin-huang of the Qin Dynasty.

ance from the questioner.

In early May, government officials from Taiwan had met with mainland officials and progress is being made toward improving relations.

One night at dinner in the Yongming Noodle Restaurant, An Wei explained the history of the nationalist vs. communist civil war going back to 1927. He fully believes there will soon be only one China and it looks as though relations are improving dramatically toward that goal.

As a university professor of English, An Wei had been sent off to work on a farm and live in a cave during the Cultural Revolution which began under Mao in 1966. Yet, today, An Wei is extremely optimistic about China's future and devotes his life to improving friendly relations between China and the United States.

The Cultural Revolution ended; Tiananmen Square happened 15 years ago; both are past events in China's current march forward.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof writes on May 29, 2005: "There are plenty of legitimate reasons to be angry with China's leaders, but its trade success and exchange rate policy are not among them. The country that is distorting global capital flows and destabilizing the world economy is not China but the U.S. American fiscal recklessness



PHOTO COURTESY XI'AN TOURISM

IN XI'AN there is a city ordinance against using horns and almost none are heard, despite the amount of traffic.

is a genuine international problem, while blaming Chinese for making shoes efficiently amounts to a protectionist assault on the global trade system."

Economy booming

At the same time the Chinese economy is booming, the leaders are committed to maintaining economic stability. The focus is on the 2008 Olympic games. The focus is on cleaning up the environment. While they have a long way to go because of a heavy dependence on the use of soft coal as an energy source, they are using more and more natural gas. The taxis of Xi'an—there are thousands of them—are fueled by natural gas.

Education is a top priority. English teachers in School #83 only teach two 45-minute classes per day. The rest of the time is spent on preparation and correcting student work. Top teachers are sent at government expense to study abroad.

With a population of 1.3 billion and English being a required subject from the early grades on, China already has more English speakers than

there are in the United States.

When the United States attempts to block textile imports from China, we should not be surprised if China tries to block Caterpillar imports from the United States.

Ultimately, China can be one of our biggest markets. Friendship between our countries is critical to both of us. For both of us it can be a great win, win scene. Without friendship, there can only be losers on both sides.

For those seeking challenging, enlightening adventure travel, I highly recommend Elderhostel service trips or go directly to Global Volunteers at globalvolunteers.org on the Internet.

Other personal highlights of this trip included a visit to the site of the Terra Cotta Army, discovered in 1974 and being described as the eighth wonder of the world, and a cable car ride up to the north peak of Huang Shan mountain.

Altogether it was the most exciting trip I have ever taken.

Georgia Hotton has lived in The Villages in Green Valley since 1997 minus two years with the Peace Corps in Latvia. She was born in Indiana, grew up in Wisconsin and spent most of her life in Taos, N. M.



PHOTO COURTESY XI'AN TOURISM

ORIGINALLY BUILT during the Tang dynasty (618-907), Xi'an's wall was made stronger during the Ming dynasty (1368-1633).

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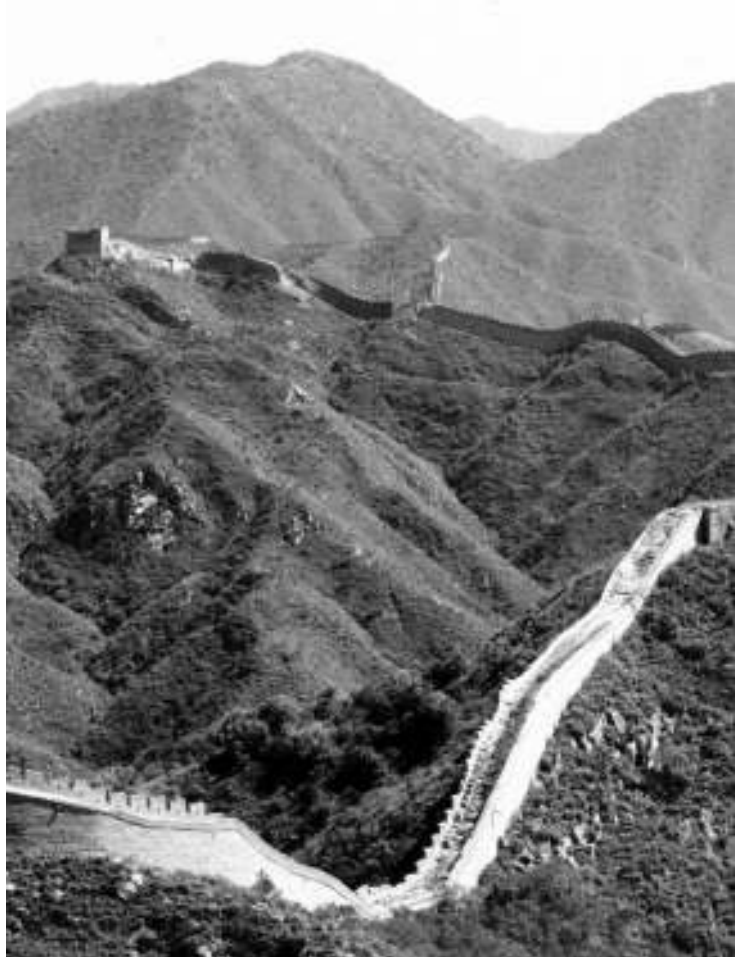
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