

Day 17 (Monday 10/06/08) At Sea

During the night it was necessary to set the clocks back another hour. Now the ship's clocks are exactly 12 hours ahead of the time in Oak Ridge. Because of all the time changes we are having trouble sleeping to our usual wakeup time. At about 4am we go get coffee from the Lido and the day rolls on from there. It's no wonder we feel the need to turn in early.

This morning we had calm seas and overcast sky with temperatures in the low 70s. It was very pleasant walking the deck.

At 9am we were all called down to the dining room where the ship had arranged for what is called a "Face-to-Passport" check. The purpose of the check was to allow Chinese officials, who boarded in Kobe, Japan to compare the photo in our passports with the appearance of our faces. They don't want anybody sneaking in to China on someone else's passport. The whole process went amazingly fast. We line up at the appointed time and the Amsterdam office staff handed us our passports. We carried them a few feet and gave them to one of the 4 or 5 uniformed Chinese officials. The official looked at the passport picture and then focused on our face and waved us on. The Amsterdam office person then collected our passport from us. There were a dozen or so people who didn't show up for the check and the cruise director had to make several increasingly threatening announcements about the need to get your face down for the process. Finally those announcements stopped so we assume the ship has passed that hurdle and will be allowed to dock in Shanghai.

At 11:00am we went to the Queen's Lounge to hear the next lecture by Dr. Jay Wolff. Today's subject was about the Opium Wars and the history of China from the mid 1300s up through 1949 when the communists took over. Dr. Wolff has a way of making history seem logical and interesting. Our synopsis of his talk goes like this.

China in the 1300 called itself the "Middle Kingdom" because in the Chinese mind it was located between Heaven and the barbarians who inhabited the part of earth that wasn't China. They had minimum trade with the outside world at that time and were not influenced much by foreigners. The Mongols introduced tea to China about that time and they made it a national drink. Eventually English people tried tea and the demand for tea in Britain really boomed. Tons of tea were being exported to Britain in the 1700 and 1800s and the British had difficulty in paying for it. The Chinese didn't want any of the goods made in Britain. All they would take for their tea was silver. Eventually in order to keep the tea coming Britain was suffering a drain of the national treasure of silver much like the US is now suffering from the drain of dollars to pay for oil. Britain had a source of opium from its colonies and started to ship it to China rather than silver to pay for the tea. By the mid 1800s every man in China under 40 years old was hooked on opium and Britain had solved its balance of payments problem.

The Chinese rulers realized that their country was being ruined by the opium addiction of its citizens so they passed laws in 1836 trying to stop the trade in opium. Britain was a dominant world power and ignored the Chinese laws against opium. The shipments of opium continued and trade routes were protected by the British military to keep the opium flowing. The Chinese tried military resistance but were beaten by Britain in the first Opium War in 1842. In 1859, for

the first time in history, France and the British joined forces to fight the Chinese who were trying to restrict the trade in opium. In 1862 the second Opium War came to an end with the defeat of China and signing of the Treaty of Beijing. The loss of face for the Chinese in the Opium Wars and their aftermath left permanent scars and explains much of the Chinese negative attitude towards the Western Nations in modern times. In 1949 China fell to the communists and a concerted effort to assert the Chinese will against the West began. Dr. Wolff said that one of the first things done by the communists was to rid the country of opium addiction which still remained from the days of British exploitation. The communist government outlawed all traffic and use of opium. Punishment of people suspected of any contact with opium were swiftly convicted and executed. Of course, many innocent falsely accused people lost their lives but China was able to break the addiction to opium in less than a year.

In 45 minutes Dr. Wolff was able to explain the Opium Wars which we were only vaguely aware of until now. He has a real gift for what he is doing. His lecture helped us better understand the conflict between the West and China that we have seen in our lifetime. He delivers his lectures without any notes. He was a dentist before an early retirement and was able to turn his love of history into a new career. Here is a picture of Dr. Wolff discussing history with some enthusiastic passengers after his presentation today.



We are glad he will be with us through the whole cruise back to San Diego.

Before dinner Ray and Ann stopped in for a visit. It was fun getting together and talking about what we have been seeing and doing so far on the cruise. Like us, they like walking and while in Japan they had spent time exploring the streets and markets for interesting close up views of how the people live.



After dinner we came across our Cruise Critic friends from Ohio and Germany. Barbara joined the team and here we have Hennie, Mary Lou, Barbara and Diana.



Orlin couldn't resist taking advantage of the situation and joined in the fun.



Our friends headed off for undisclosed activities and we finished the night off enjoying the Amsterdam Singers and Dancers performance in the Queen's Lounge.