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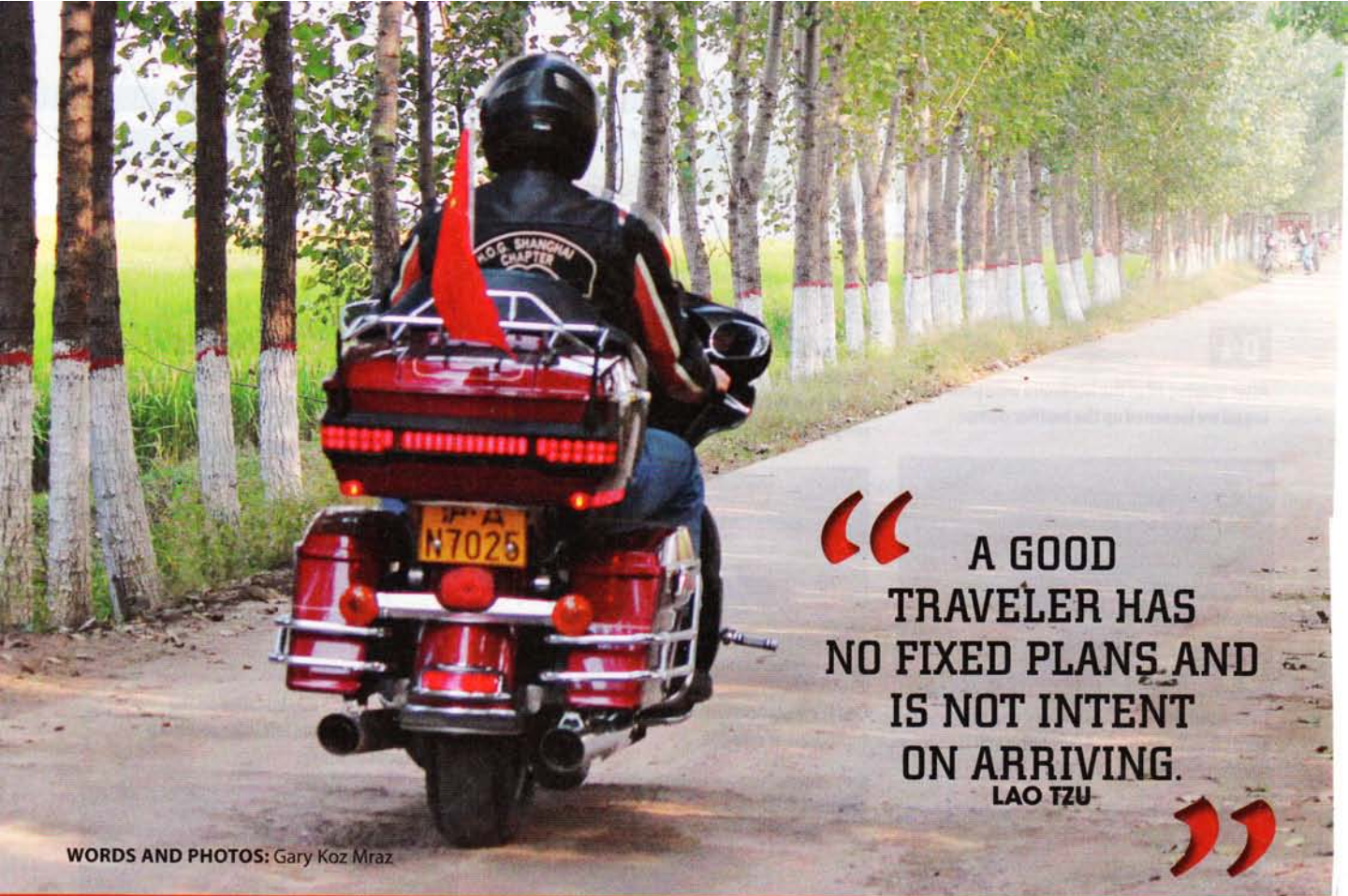


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WORDS AND PHOTOS: Gary Koz Mraz

“ A GOOD TRAVELER HAS NO FIXED PLANS AND IS NOT INTENT ON ARRIVING. LAO TZU ”

DEEPER INTO

ZEN & THE ART OF MOTORCYCLING CHINA, PART 2:

Riding On The **Dragon's Back**

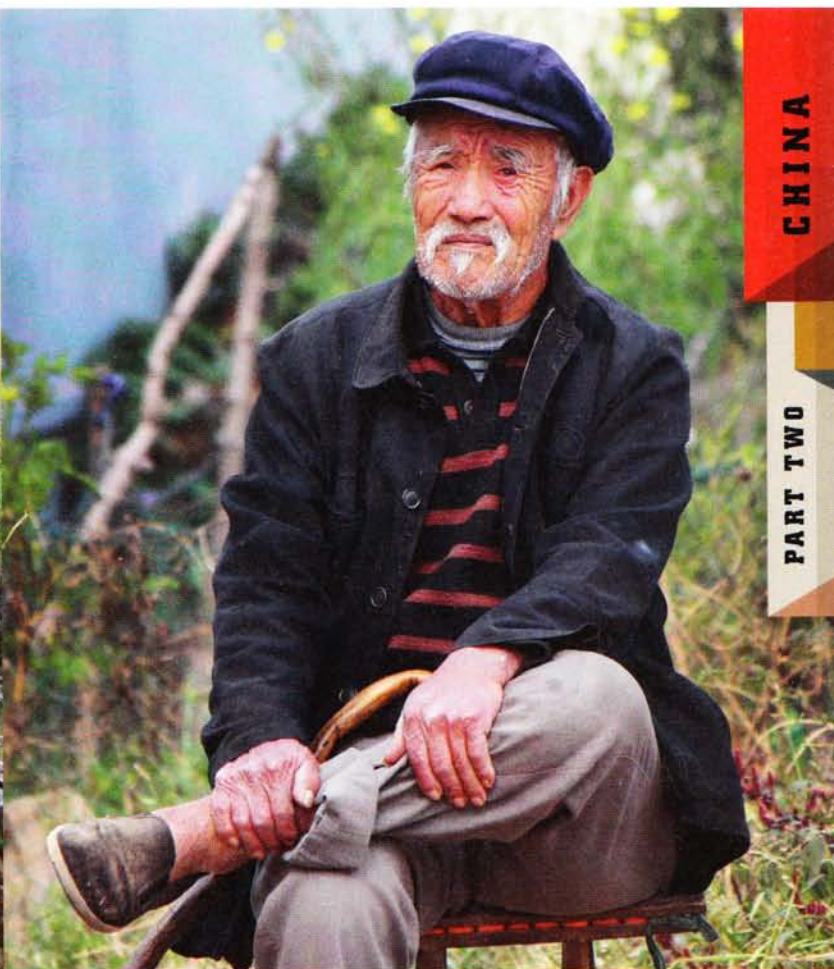
I had travelled China 20 years ago and recently returned to ride with the Shanghai H.O.G.s to the third annual H.O.G. event in Qingdao. Though the roads are challenging and traffic a real-life video game where you're the target, I had found a Zen traversing these roads. I found new friends, foods, and fantastic experiences. Like riding an American Harley-Davidson motorcycle through communist China. How apropos. The

Chinese can get large-cc Japanese motorcycles but they want Harley-Davidsons, the icon of personal freedom worldwide.

DAY FOUR QINGDAO TO LINYI

Leaving Qingdao I lament that there wasn't more time here. It's by far the most beautiful city I've seen so far. Sister city to Long Beach, California, it's a port city and renowned for its

Tsingtao beer. Boasting 27 miles of beach, Qingdao has become a vacation destination. The return to Shanghai took us even further into rural China. Open roads and open space constrict to small, industrialized manufacturing cities. The air hangs thick with the smell of coal. Used to fire the furnaces of industrialization and to heat rural homes, China's air quality and pollution control is sorely lacking. It is a modern day industrial revolution similar



RURAL CHINA

to what America went through 100 years ago, leaving these towns with serious air and water issues. The smog can be so oppressive that first stage alerts restrict airplanes from landing! Linyi, like most Chinese cities, feels like it's suspended between the past and the future, and again, like every city I visited, dozens upon dozens of new high-rise structures are being built. Everyday life is a cacophony of sound, bizarre machinery, honking horns, buzzing scooters, and overloaded bicycles rattling by on bumpy roads. Of course every time we stopped we drew a crowd. Some gas stations still adhere to an absurd belief that it's safer to pour gasoline into a motorcycle with a pot, which doubles spill potential and triples fill-up time.

Riding these Chinese roads is reminiscent of great Chinese author Lu Xun. In his short story *My Old Home*, after 20 years away, he like me, has seen

the dramatic changes. Hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

I had gotten to know Jay Chang on this journey; his exuberance for riding was contagious. Born in Shanghai, his family moved to Canada when he was 19, and he finished his BA in Vancouver, Canada. After graduation he worked several different jobs before deciding to move back to China. Now he is the CEO and owner of the largest Alcoa fastening system distributor in China and told me that the 2008 financial crash took a serious toll on the Chinese economy. They also went through some difficult times and 40 percent of Chinese business went bust or almost bankrupt during this world financial crisis. Fortunately his is on the rebound.

Dinner in Linyi was hosted by one

of the H.O.G. members and we all sat outside on the sidewalk and dined on a busy street. After dinner, we were escorted to the People's Square only to find a celebration in progress. By now I'd figured out that shadowing Jay was the hot ticket: young, handsome, smart, and wealthy, he always knew exactly where the action was. Yes, that's Jay with Red Army soldierettes. They can handcuff me anytime.

RIDING THE DRAGON'S BACK DAY FIVE LINYI TO YANGZHOU

There are many good roads in China but there are far more bad ones. Today rarely saw Fourth gear. The hard roads became an angry dragon undulating below us. Waves and bumps that shook and bounced the bikes for miles, this dance was the twist. Next came the ruts. Small ruts became 2-foot-deep



Filling gas into a tea pot

“WHERESOEVER YOU GO,
GO WITH ALL YOUR HEART.”
CONFUCIUS

potholes. Moving too fast to avoid, one sent Jay airborne bucking him completely off his bike. He banged up both his body and bike but he rode on to our next stop. Convinced he could soldier on, we disagreed and called in the chase vehicle to trailer his bike and get him safely to Shanghai. Jay is a seasoned rider; his first bike in China was a Suzuki GSX-R600 in 2003. He had that bike for three years then purchased his first Harley-Davidson. I'm gonna miss him. Continuing on, the hard road suddenly closed sending massive trucks, cars, scooters, and us down a dirt road that ultimately became a single lane. We encountered a Mandarin standoff that took our whole team to resolve so our motorcycles could pass, and that was the easy part. A bridge was also closed for repair routing two-wheeled vehicles, meaning bicycles and scooters, (Harley-Davidsons have never passed here before) to a temporary bridge over the river. Four feet wide and 40 feet long, this was the only access to the other side. Certainly not intended for fully loaded 1,000-pound Electra





Dinner on the streets of Linyi



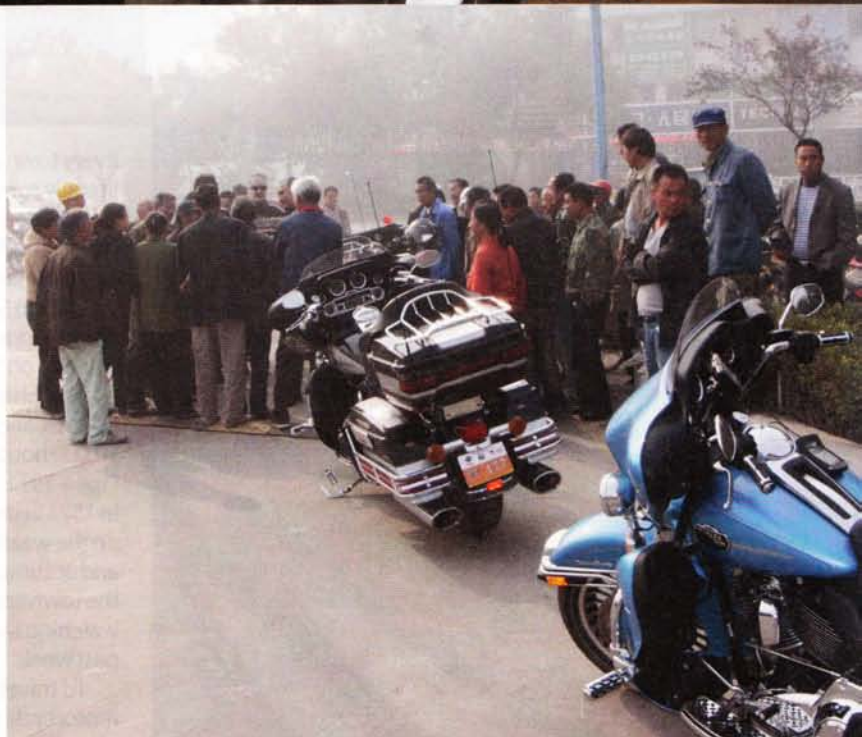
Jay Chang

Glides, with great trepidation we crossed. As the bridge swayed high above the river, each one of us said a silent prayer. It will be a great adventure if nothing goes awry; sheer stupidity if something does. We toasted at dinner in Yangzhou to a great adventure.

Like every city I visited in China, its history runs deep. If this were a sightseeing tour, I would visit the beautiful Five Pavilion Bridge and Twenty Four Bridge at Slender Lake, He Garden or Wen Feng Tower, but it's not. I am riding seven to 10 hours a day on roads unpredictable as an angry dragon.

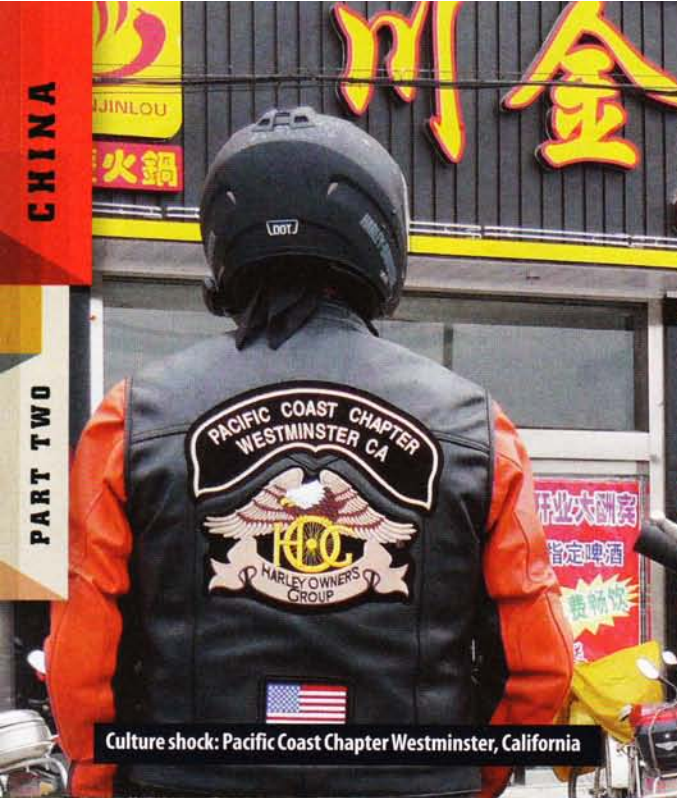
DAY SIX: YANGZHOU TO SHANGHAI

Sixth gear, three lane roads with barriers in between prohibiting oncoming traffic, people actually using turn signals and paying attention to stoplights. It's hard to believe I'm still in China. Lunch in Wuxi was my favorite so far. Roasted sweet & sour baby eggplant, edamame and tofu dish, shrimp, and fresh vegetables sautéed with a tangy soy sauce.



Dirt roads become temporary bridges

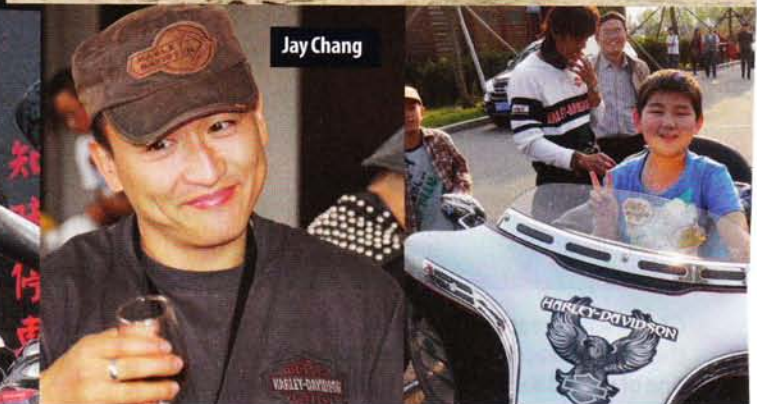




Culture shock: Pacific Coast Chapter Westminster, California



Asphalt becomes dirt roads



Jay Chang



Thousand pounds of Electra Glide?

Every town and province has its own unique food; there was literally something distinct and new almost every meal on my journey. I realized that the term "Chinese food" would be like saying "European food," a complete misnomer. French and German cuisines are completely different.

Back in Shanghai I had one more day and visited Zhujiajiao, a canal town, often compared to Venice, Italy. It is situated on the bank of the Dianshan Lake on the western outskirts of Shanghai. The town features waterways, arched stone bridges, ancient streets paved with stone, and more than 10,000 houses dating back to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The five-arch Fangsheng Bridge, built in 1571 in the Ming Dynasty, is still standing there. Inscriptions on the weather-beaten stones tell people to do good things and accumulate merits for the afterlife. There are 36 bridges in the town and each has a name and a story. Sitting on a bridge watching the boats drift by, I contemplate my story and the past week.

I'd traveled six days and 1,600 miles on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle through China's largest cities and rural villages; places that had never seen the likes of Chinese or Americans on thundering Harleys. I have newfound friends and respect for the people and its culture, not to mention a new respect for the durability of a Harley. I had ridden with the Shanghai H.O.G.s in China, met wonderful people everywhere. Deemed worthy to ride with this elite group of adventure





Bizarre machinery



riders, they presented me with an honorary Shanghai H.O.G. patch. I'll wear it proudly.

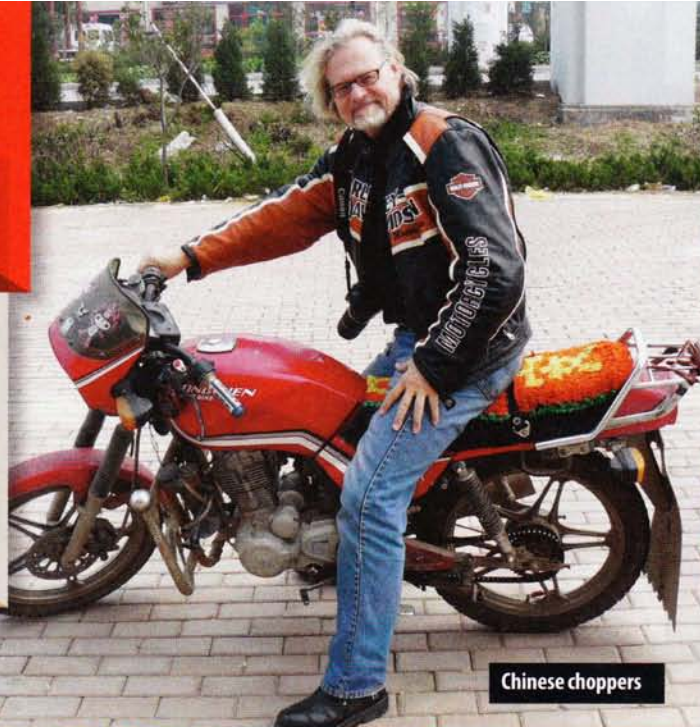
NEXT SUPERMODEL

Modern China is a seductress; growing at an unprecedented rate, she's the world's next superpower. Five-thousand years of continuous history, yet it is in the fast lane to the future. She is beautiful, consuming, and a purveyor of products for the world. She is a supermodel that wears too much makeup. Communism suddenly is full throttle on commercialism. She is very enticing; attracting everyone's attention by offering up the world's largest population of new consumers. But it's not easy to make small talk with a supermodel, let alone ask her for a date. But if you do, you'll find she's smart, funny, and down to earth. In fact, her parents were probably poor farmers and these young new Chinese entrepreneurs like Jay don't put on airs or pretense. They don't emanate entitlement, they embrace opportunities. Americans too are finding opportunity in their burgeoning economy. Harley-Davidson is but just one. I met US citizens like Ed Hsu (a Shanghai H.O.G.). Recently featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, he is American born Chinese who moved to China to open Awfully Chocolate franchises blogs.wsj.com/scene/tag/ed-hsu/ and owners of Grease Monkey, an American based automotive repair franchise. Yes, a billion Chinese still live in third-world conditions, but that world is changing rapidly. Twenty years after my first visit, China has changed dramatically and this time, she has changed me. Her unbridled chaos frightened me at first but now the rest of the world seems mundane. I found zen and the art of motorcycling China and am anxious to return.

CHINESE H.O.G.S PAINT THE TOWN RED

Only two week's after my return, Harley owners from both Shanghai and Beijing visited SoCal and we rode the Pacific Coast Highway from Surf City Harley in Huntington Beach, California, to San Francisco. With rented Harleys from John Wang, who is fluent in Mandarin and owner of EagleRider Rentals in Texas, and we headed up the coast.





Chinese choppers



Zhouzhuang

This group included the first Chinese woman H.O.G. member to ride in the US and several female passengers. Again Road Captain James Rice shepherded the Chinese H.O.G.s. James was invited to address the Long Beach Qingdao Association discussing international business. The "headquarters" was Westminster Harley in Westminster with dinner at Original Mikes in Santa Ana. Leaving for Santa Barbara early the next morning, we made a visit to the Solvang Motorcycle Museum in Solvang. Heading north to Cambria, Hurst Castle, Carmel, Monterey, then San Francisco, the Chinese contingent once again loved riding Harley-Davidsons up America's coast.

Special thanks to HDC, Harley-Davidson China, the Shanghai Harley-Davidson Dealership, the Long Beach Qingdao Association, and Westminster Harley-Davidson in Westminster, California. ●