



GUIDO T. POPPE - PHILIPPE POPPE

CONCHOLOGY, INC.

NEWSLETTER: SHANGHAI 2017 NR 1

Chinese beauties enjoying an afternoon chat in the lotus field. Hangzhou, July 2017.

Around 25 July 2017, there was a first official big Shell Show in Shanghai, China. We decided to assist on that event, and at the same time we could visit and roam around a little in that fantastic part of China.

Shanghai is what Wikipedia calls the biggest "city proper" with a population of more than 24 million people. The city is located near the mouth of the Yangtze river, and as a consequence its container port is the busiest one on the planet. Apart from that it is one of the most important financial centers, and that started already a century ago. Its history is fascinating and in fact, I dreamed seeing the old buildings along "The Bund" already when I viewed, as a young boy, early 19th century photos in books on China and on Shanghai in particular. I never hoped to see these buildings still existing in reality today.

Read more on Shanghai in Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai>

The trip went smoothly with a direct flight from Cebu to Hong Kong and a few hours later we went to Shanghai. Our Chinese friends He Jing and Grace were so kind to pick us up at the Pudong Airport, which is almost two hours from the City center. It was great meeting them once more.

They brought us straight to a comfortable hotel near the Shanghai Zoo, where the Shell Show will take place a few days later. The next morning we started our exploration of that big city with a few topics of particular interest to ourselves. We continue the newsletter with photos as usual.



We started with the aquarium. We always try to visit the local aquaria wherever we travel, our interest in marine life never diminished and I am even more curious about the fresh water animals. Because I have an endless admiration for their ability to survive through centuries in this harsh, limited and fast changing environment that are mainly streams, rivers and lakes. Here the entrance of the local Shanghai aquarium, and as you can see, full of young people.



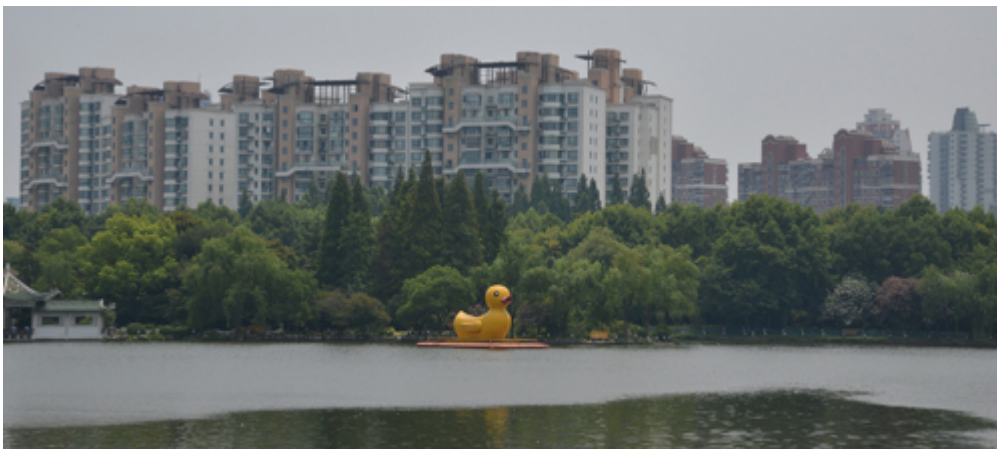
The aquarium went deep underground: in fact several stories deep, and at the end big elevators brought us back to the surface. The "fantastique" was mixed with the reality. On the left the reef and on the right a giant dragon mask, or something like that, with the people passing below it.



Changing light games and educational talk: here a guide explains what is to be seen in a touch pond. A screen gives even more information.



Plenty humoristic aquaria, here one of these where the fish enjoy their meal on a classic Chinese dining table, complete with chairs and dishes.



At a few occasions I have seen this giant floating Duck in different cities throughout the world, for example in Osaka. We were a little surprised to meet him in Shanghai. This duck is called the Rubber Duck, it is a sculpture made by the Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman, and the army of Rubber Ducks started conquering the world cities in 2007. This photo is taken just outside the wonderful underground aquarium.



Our next visit, which He Jing & Grace were proud to show us, was the Shanghai Natural History museum. The building outside is impressive, beautiful and modern, as you can see. But this part of the museum is literally "the tip of the Iceberg", as the museum goes several stories deep underground.



Here all of us, except Philippe who took the photograph. This amazing photo shows on the top right the number of people visiting the museum at that moment: 2,886 - and not yet crowded. This is on a normal weekday a little after 2 pm as can be seen: interest in Natural History is flying high in China. From left to right: Mona, Grace, He Jing, your author and Sheila.



And this is a few minutes and meters later: a view on the iceberg proper. One needs more than a day to visit: we did several hours for one floor only!



About Dinosaurs: a fascinating subject in all Natural History Museums, and the Chinese youth is in full admiration as can be seen here.



Not an aquarium but an exhibition of reproductions mixed with the real things such as the giant *Tridacna*. All is made in quantity and magnificent: these displays arouse the curiosity of all.



How one shows different biotopes.



There are endless exhibitions of natural history samples of all branches of the animal kingdom one can imagine. General view on one of the rooms.



Another gigantic room, one enters with the door on the left, out with the door far on the right. The back wall are screens with a film of the living savannah, this goes fluently over into the stuffed animals, the whole gigantic room becomes a very alive spectacle. Quite unbelievable and worth the travel to see it.



Our photographer Philippe photographed. With animals from the big north.



A spectacular collection of the horns of big mammals.



For the shells, the designers decided to work with sets of 9 for each species in this case. Other displays of shells were again surprising but differently arranged.



Even the museum is full of people, the atmosphere is relaxed and truly civilized. All are busy photographing with their cellphones and enjoying the tremendous diversity of the displays.



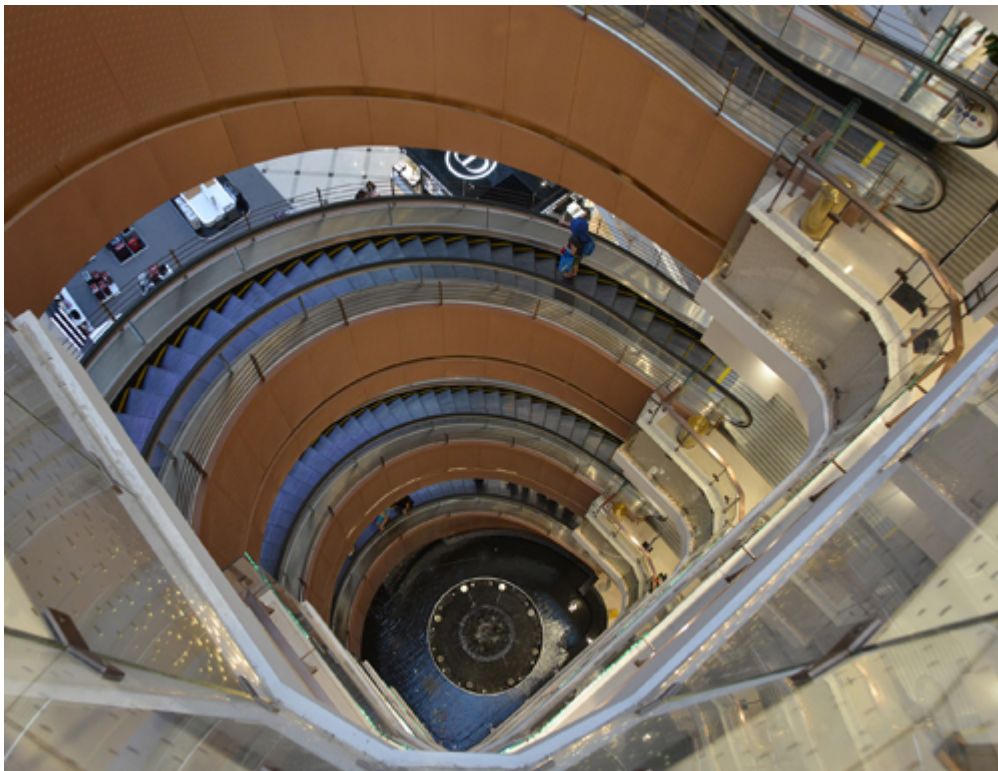
We close the visit with this amazing display of *Ornithoptera* and giant Goliath beetles. For sure, the entomologists among you will be able to appreciate the view.



The modern skyline of Shanghai is a paradise for Philippe who loves sky scrapers. Here the second highest one on the planet - on the right - more than 600 meters high.



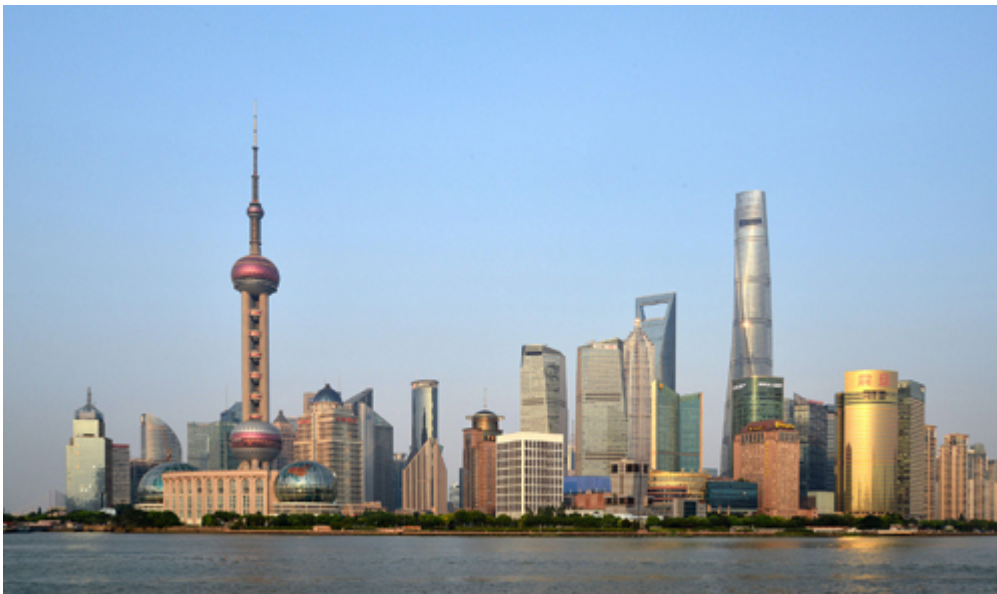
And when moving through the city one is permanently confronted with the old meeting the new: here early 19th century buildings next to skyscrapers. This is uppermost pleasing for the mind.



Speaking about modernity: a rare view on elevators in a shopping mall: as you can see the elevators are not straight, but they turn. This is a technologically quite unbelievable achievement.



One encounters robots saying "hello" in the shopping mall. They can also answer some questions.



This is a view on part of Shanghai that most of you have seen already. It is the view from a place situated in a turn of the river Yangtze. On the riverside you see here, all is new, beautiful and impressive. On the other side you have a gigantic walking path where usually you will meet hundreds of fellow visitors, and the old buildings in the European style from around 1880. That meeting place is called "The Bund" and is world famous.



A view on the walking path of "The Bund" in the afternoon. The atmosphere is relax, all enjoy the moment and are either busy with snacks, cellphones or friends.



Youngsters and aged together on "The Bund": selfies with or without stick are a great occupation there.



Major scenery near "The Bund" where a professional filming crew is busy.



On the way back we passed a church which He Jing told me was the church where Heude was working for some time. This former "big building" is now dwarfed out by the surrounding sky scrapers.



Pierre Marie Heude (1836-1902)
(photo from Wikipedia)

Pierre Heude was a French Jesuit missionary with a taste for natural History. He was particularly interested in fresh water bivalves and made an amazing contribution to the knowledge of the Chinese species of the family UNIONIDAE. Miracles occasionally happen. Three decades ago there was an aged woman in the center of Brussels selling rare books in a minuscule shop. "On demand". Once I expressed there my interest in books on mollusks and a few weeks later she called me. During a short visit I was invited and installed on a small table with a leather finish on top. On which she displayed with pride the ten volumes on UNIONIDAE of Heude. I still remember the price of 1250 euro - at that time a multiple of my wage. But I made the effort and still have the volumes today, now I bound these in leather and I guess they are worth a multiple. I have never seen the complete Heude listed by bookdealers since. The most remarkable thing in these volumes is a full-page drawing of a hinge of an *Unio*, real size, about 25 cm long. Heude indicates the place where he found the hinge and said later explorers should go there to find the complete shell... which must be gigantic. One day we should do that.



After that busy day and many kilometers of walking we spend the night eating in a perfect restaurant. Here the entrance: one walks through an aquarium full of orange cichlids, then passes all blue aquaria, and after that access to splendid tables with the best of famous Shanghai delicacies.



And this is the view from the window of the restaurant at 9 pm.
All the happy young Chinese still shopping, eating and making selfies.

The next day we moved to Hangzhou for further visits: for the next newsletter on Monday.

Several members expressed their enthusiasm about the newsletters and several went already in the footsteps of some of them. In case this is your plan, please save the newsletters in your computer as for the moment we do not have the place to store them properly on our homepage. Thanks for doing so.

Sincerely yours,

Guido Poppe
For Conchology, Inc.

You can contact us: philippe@conchology.be
guido@conchology.be
sheila@conchology.be

<http://www.conchology.be/>

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