

IMAGES OF SHANGHAI

'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.' (Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2)

There are very strong indications that the Government of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) may not have been telling HKSAR residents the entire truth about the likely ramifications of the rapid development of the largest city in the PRC: Shanghai.

By accident, design or sheer incompetence, there appears to have been a wide gap in the statements of the HKSAR Government of late, especially in respect of the economic boom, taking place in Shanghai, a city of 20 million-plus residents.

One was told by the HKSAR, high muck-a-mucks, for instance, during the first week of November 2009, that the construction of the Shanghai Disneyland Theme Park, now about to take place at an initial investment cost to The Walt Disney Company of not less than \$US3.50 billion (about \$HK27 billion) – not including hotels and resort infrastructure – will not harm the HKSAR's economy.

Instead, one was told that it is likely to stimulate more interest in the facilities of these 416 square miles.

Such nonsense!

That would suggest, inter alia, that Mr Robert A. Iger, Chief Executive of The Walt Disney Company, is a bit of a nut case in agreeing to establish the Shanghai Disneyland on a 1,000-acre site in the Pudong District of Shanghai.

The plans for the Shanghai Disneyland, which will take at least 5 years before it can open its doors, is for a Magic Kingdom-style theme park to cover about 100 acres of the 1,000-acre site, with a mixture of hotels, shops and a plethora of knick-knack stalls.

It will be bigger than the Disney theme park of California and equal to the Disney theme parks of Paris and Tokyo.

The Disneyland Company has plans to expand the Shanghai facility to more than 1,700 acres, rivaling Disney World of Florida.

The Florida theme park attracts more than 45 million visitors, annually.

The HKSAR has only about 7 million permanent residents and the majority of the annual, 30 million tourists are either business people or the elderly, neither of which group would have very much interest in visiting the Disneyland of the territory.

However, there is quite a number of visitors from the PRC, proper – the PRC proper, being distinct and separate from the HKSAR of the PRC – and many of them do come to the territory, especially to visit Disneyland.

When the Shanghai Disneyland is completed, it will be interesting to learn how many of the PRC tourists, who might have considered the HKSAR as a travel destination in days of yore, will opt, instead, to travel to

Shanghai, forsaking the HKSAR in order to visit its larger, newer, and more modern theme park in the middle of the largest metropolitan city of the PRC.

By air, Shanghai is just 2-plus hours away from Shenzhen and it costs about 1,000 renminbi to fly to this commercial city.

TARGET () is willing to cover all bets that tourists from the PRC, proper, those who have little to no interest in shopping in the territory, will determine that Shanghai offers many more advantages to them than the HKSAR.

Shanghai has an abundance of very good Chinese restaurants, both northern cuisine and southern cuisine, and the prices for dining in Shanghai are a fraction of the prices, charged in the HKSAR

The senior executives of The Walt Disney Company know their onions; they have done their sums to be sure.

Aside from the fillip that The Walt Disney Company will give to Shanghai, this city of 6,185 square kilometres (about 2,388 square miles – about 5 times the size of the HKSAR) is destined to become the financial powerhouse for the PRC, proper.

Only recently did the Shanghai Government announce that it intends to establish what it calls a '*mini-Hongkong*'.

One visit to Shanghai and one is taken aback by the vibrancy of this city and of its 20 million-plus inhabitants.

Shanghai has a smooth-running, Metro System that is as good as the Mass Transit Railway System of the HKSAR.

The Shanghai Metro System is efficient and clean and it is not abused as in the case of the New York City Metro System where, only too often, unruly (adult) children run amuck in the stations and/or execute unspeakable acts in the facilities, provided by the New York Metro, when they are not trying to rob users of the Metro.

Shanghai's Problems

Shanghai still has many problems to overcome, but overcome them, the city will.

Within spitting distance of the Shanghai Hilton Hotel, for instance, one may witness men, urinating against a wall, leading down to an entrance of the Shanghai Metro System.

Etiquette – the rules and conventions, governing correct or polite behaviour in society in general – are not generally widely observed by the vast majority of the resident Chinese population, not because the population does not want to adhere to what may be considered acceptable social behaviour, but because there is not a long tradition of etiquette.

The population cannot be expected to change the habits of the past 60 years or so when successive governments of the country did not consider such niceties as acceptable social behaviour to be placed on the board of priorities when many people of the country were going hungry and needed shelter.

Spitting on the streets is commonplace and one has to be able, from time to time, to dodge yellowish blobs of sputum that may come one's way as one walks down the streets.

When a Shanghainese sneezes in public, it is almost a guarantee that he or she will not cover the sneeze droplets, issuing from his/her nose, with a tissue or a handkerchief.

Crossing the streets can be a hazardous affair as motorists, by and large, do not follow the rules of the road very strictly.

The double-white line, marking one side of the road to another, for instance, appears to mean little to many motorists who, willy-nilly, cross back and forth in a seemingly mad attempt to get from point to point as quickly as possible, regardless of the risks that may be involved.

Motorcyclists think nothing of using the sidewalks as a shortcut, sometimes for some distance.

Motorcyclists, also, think nothing of going against the flow of the traffic when they determine so to do.

Many of the motorists in Shanghai have only had their driving licences for a short period of time.

The Shanghai Police scarcely pay any attention to the antics of motorcyclists except when there is an accident, requiring medical assistance or settling a dispute between the perpetrator of the accident and the injured party.

Knockoffs of brand-named goods, such as Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Valentino, [Salvatore Ferragamo](#), [Nike](#), [Timberland](#), [Rolex](#), [Cartier](#), etc, etc, etc, abound throughout the city and such niceties as intellectual property rights are unknown by most people although hawkers of knockoffs take precautions not to allow the Authorities to note what they are trying to sell.

Knockoffs can, also, be found in a number of departmental stores, but one would have to be an expert in order to tell the difference between the knockoff and the original.

It is hardly any wonder that the US Authorities take exception to piracy in the Middle Kingdom.

Generally, there is a lack of understanding among the general population of Shanghai – and this is likely to pertain to the population of the entire country – as to such things as:

1. Smoking cigarettes can, and does, kill people;
2. Dental hygiene is important to one's overall health;
3. Eating foods, laced with such chemicals as DDT – **dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane** – banned in many countries since 1974 because of its toxicity, its persistence in the environment, and its ability to accumulate in living tissue, is harmful to one's health and can, and does, lead to multiple medical complications; and,
4. Unprotected sexual intercourse with strangers is a sure-shot method of proliferating communicable diseases, such a venereal diseases, AIDS, etc.

Probably, due to ignorance more than any other reason, the population of the PRC, thought to number in excess of 1.30 billion people, eat locally produced ice cream as well as drink milk, any brand of milk, produced in the country.

However, many international food companies, such a Baskin-Robbins and Häagen-Dazs, refuse to put PRC-produced milk products into their ice cream – because managements of these ice-cream giants do not trust PRC-produced milk.

This is the result of the 2008 China milk scandal, involving fresh milk and infant formula, and other food materials and components, adulterated with melamine.

In November 2008, the PRC Government reported an estimated 300,000 victims of this scandal, with 6 infants, dying from kidney stones and other kidney damage, and with 860 babies, having to be hospitalised.

On investigation, it was discovered that melamine – a compound, used in resins: A white crystalline solid used in making synthetic resins and in leather tanning – had been added to fresh milk in order to cause it to appear to have a higher protein content.

The milk scandal surfaced, first, on July 16, 2008, when 16 children in Gansu Province, all of whom had been fed on milk powder, produced by Shijiazhuang-based, Sanlu Group (), were diagnosed with kidney stones.

Further investigations resulted in discoveries that at least 21 other, PRC milk companies had been adding melamine to their milk products.

International producers of ice cream and milk products do not want to be tarred by the same brush as the Sanlu Group and, as a result, they have banned the purchase of such products in the PRC by their franchisees.

The Future For The HKSAR

If the HKSAR is determined to advance its present position as a thriving commercial and entrepreneurial territory of the PRC, it will have to re-invent itself in a similar fashion as did the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) of the PRC.

The MSAR, today, is the largest gambling Mecca in the world, surpassing Las Vegas by a wide margin.

And the gambling explosion of the former Portuguese enclave came about in a period of just 7 years, following the cessation of the gambling monopoly, formerly held by Stanley Ho's Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau.

Stanley Ho's Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau held the gambling monopoly in Macau from 1962 until 2002.

And it is well accepted that the development of this little enclave has a long way to go, still, with more hotels and resorts, on the drawing boards.

It is, now, a certainty that changes and/or modifications must be made to the manner in which things are done in the HKSAR if it is to prosper.

The old ways are out; the new ways are in.

Very few people require buggy whips, today, because there are no more buggies.

When the Government of Denmark determined, more than 30 years ago, that its garment industry was no longer able to compete with similar garments, produced in Asia, with Jutland, threatened with financial ruin, the Danish Government helped to promote the concept of the Danish Design, of furniture, of light fittings, of fabrics, and where-ever the unique designers of the country could find a foothold in any part of the world.

The economy of Denmark has prospered to this day by this one determination.

Competition is not always a negative, it seems: It can result in spawning offspring of a completely different hue.

The Danes proved this.

If the HKSAR cannot compete with Shanghai in a certain field, then, consideration must be given to circumventing the problem(s).

In the 1960s, the British Colony of Hongkong, as the HKSAR was then known, was an industrial base,

mainly for shoddy goods.

When the Government of the PRC opened its doors to Hongkong industrialists, seducing them with cheap land and labour, Hongkong ceased to be an industrial base for shirts, shoes, and garments of all kinds.

Emphasis was placed on other areas of commerce.

Hongkong continued to prosper after a period of re-adjustment to the necessities of the day.

Today, Shanghai is nipping at the 'heels' of the HKSAR.

Complacency is not an option for the territory.

The financial infrastructure of this territory is, still, superior to that of Shanghai's, but it will not always be so unless action is taken soon; and, the forces that are present in the HKSAR are marshaled with a view to meeting the challenges, facing these 416 square miles.

The HKSAR may well lose on the roundabouts in the short term, but it could win on the swings.

Beijing does not want a poor 'cousin' in the shape of 7 million-plus Hongkong residents and it will, without question, strive to assist the territory where-ever and whenever it can – because it is in Beijing's interests so to do.

Politics aside, money still talks.

But one of the many problems of the HKSAR is that bullshit still walks the corridors of power in this territory.

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