

Norbert Egger

Pearl on the Yangtze

The rise of Zhenjiang – a personal perspective

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3.2 Sightseeing and cultural life in Zhenjiang

A visit to the Old Town is to be highly recommended as somewhere to relive the past. One can saunter along the little Pier Street from west to east and then turn south along Boxian Road, Jinglu Road and Zhongshan Road. Wherever remains still exist or have been suitably restored, the visitor can encounter a history that goes back 1,300 years. On my first visit to Zhenjiang 25 years ago, I was able to get a feel for how people had lived in the preceding centuries, and this left a lasting impression on me. For example, some way up on Marco Polo Road, small dwellings had been hewn into the hillside rather like caves, in which three to four people lived in relatively confined quarters; large metal containers had been placed at intervals outside on the street, in which the human excrement was

*View over the Old
Town at night
(Xie Rong)*



collected. There was no question of running water or other modern comforts. But the polite friendliness of the residents and their sense of community radiated genuine harmony, even towards a total stranger from overseas. In fact, I can recall one very vivid experience on my first visit to Zhenjiang in 1994: my wife and I were walking up Marco Polo Road accompanied by our interpreter, looking with amazement at the little dwellings, when an elderly man invited us to view his accommodation. He offered us green tea from Maoshan, and a heartfelt extended dialogue ensued. I'll never forget this encounter.

One of today's touristic highlights is the renovated Old Town of Zhenjiang with its many alleyways and the rather special Marco Polo Road. Also known as Xijindu Ferry, this street leads directly from the Yangtze to the Old Town, a route reportedly taken by Marco Polo after landing on the banks of the river. As one of Chi-



*Marco Polo Road
(Xijindu)*

Eyewear manufacturing in Danyang

Today, Danyang is particularly known all over China for its eyewear industry. The city is home to the world's largest eyewear manufacturing complex, with a history that spans 40 years of development, and represents the largest market for eyeglasses in the whole of Asia. Over 1,500 eyewear producers have established themselves here. They produce 50% of the world's ophthalmic lenses and have 80% of the Chinese market; 35% of China's demand for spectacle frames is covered by Danyang. With thousands of people travelling to Danyang from all over to buy their eyeglasses, it comes as no surprise to learn that the purpose-built glasses market with a total area of 32,000 m² has become a major tourist attraction.

*Eyewear centre
in Danyang*



Huantai, the solar energy company in Yangzhong

With a workforce of over 4,500, the Huantai company in the county-level city of Yangzhong is one of Zhenjiang's major employers. The Huantai group is based in the provincial capital of Nanjing and the plant in Yangzhong is the largest subsidiary.

The company was founded in 1988 and is a major manufacturer of solar cells in the field of photovoltaics. At the Yangzhong plant,