



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# International Section News

June 2001 – Issue No. 25

## My Trip to Taipei and Kuala Lumpur - Jan. 7-15, 2001

by Robert L. Brown

**T**his past January, I had the privilege and good fortune to travel to Taipei and Kuala Lumpur. The original reason for the trip was an Education Conference sponsored by the International Actuarial Association that was held in KL, January 12-14. The SOA then arranged a side trip to Taipei, sponsored by our ambassador there, Won How Lo.

For those of you who have not met Won How, he is a mass of energy with ideas percolating out of him like a fresh spring. It was certainly everything that I could do to keep up with him and his carefully scheduled itinerary.

Luckily, my wife, Andrea, and I started our visit to Taipei with an easy day. One of my Ph.D. students from the University of Waterloo, Cary Tsai, who now works at the National Taiwan University, was kind enough to show us the sights. We spent a marvelous half day at the National Palace Museum where hundreds of pieces of Chinese art and sculptures are on display. We could have stayed there all day, but had the chance to lunch with Professor Chiu-Cheng Chang of the Chang Gung University. Chiu-Cheng and I often pretend to be long-distance runners, and it was great to swap stories of past triumphs (mostly Chiu-Cheng's).

Once I joined Won How Lo on his itinerary, the time just flew past. In less than three days, I visited the National Insurance Regulators and the Ministry of Health. In both cases, I spoke with the most senior officials in the departments. Won How Lo seems to know everyone. I also had the chance to give a luncheon presentation to the Taiwanese Life Insurance Association. Finally, I met and spoke with our members in Taipei. This was a very young and

energetic group who showed a keen interest in the activities of the SOA.

I cannot move on to KL without also noting our wonderful hostess, Shau Lo. She was a delight to be with, and went out of her way to show us the highlights of the city (and places to leave our Canadian dollars!).

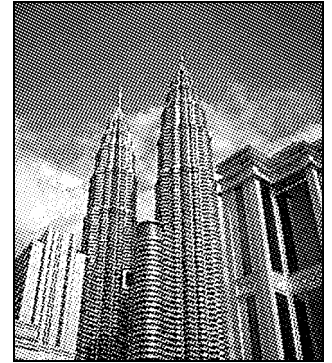
Then we were on to Kuala Lumpur. This is a most amazing city. Downtown KL is one of the most modern city centers I have ever seen. It has a communication tower that rivals (but is shorter than) Toronto's CN Tower. But it also has the amazing twin towers of the Malaysian Petroleum Company headquarters (the Petronas Towers). These are 82 floor twin buildings, which many of you would have seen in the movie, "Entrapment" starring Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones. We spent one hair-raising hour on a skybridge at the 41<sup>st</sup> floor level.

I was also privileged to have my Waterloo colleague, Dr. Ken Seng Tan, who was born and grew up just on the outskirts of KL, at the same conference. Whenever we had a sufficient break time, Ken Seng showed Andrea and me the local scenery. Malaysia, for those who have not been there, is an extremely beautiful country, even without man-made buildings.

The conference focussed on the problems that the developing world has creating and keeping actuarial talent. Representatives of actuarial organizations were on hand from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and, of course, Malaysia. There were also senior actuarial representatives of the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore.

I was able to announce the new SOA initiative whereby students in

developing nations are able to pay reduced exam fees and get their study materials at cost.



*The Petronas Towers*

This received an enthusiastic response. I was also able to introduce the new ideas that the SOA is working on, with all of the English-speaking actuarial organizations, to build a new international syllabus and credential that, today, is called QRS — Quantitative Risk Specialist. Again, these ideas met with a warm response.

This conference was a huge success, which was greatly due to the hard work of its organizer, Hassan Kamil. The conference itself was sponsored by Bank Negara Malaysia (who also hosted the main banquet) and was opened by the bank's President.

Time just flew by, and soon it was Monday morning, and time for Andrea and me to board our flight back to North America. We have some great pictures of our adventures, and fond memories of our time in Taipei and Kuala Lumpur.

A sincere thank you to everyone who made the trip such an outstanding success.

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