

NZCA Guangzhou Winter Camp Summary

By Jason Cho

Having been to China before, the main purpose of this trip for me was to see it with a different group of people, Kiwi Asians, which were brought up in New Zealand. Over the course of the 5 weeks, we got to know each other very well, not just on the account of long bus, train and plane trips, but also because we lived and played together across the mainland. The 24 of us experienced china the way not many people will ever experience; with people we now know and can call family.

Having previously seen my own ancestral village before, I naively thought that most of the other China tripper's villages would almost be exactly like mine. Boy was I in for a shock. Different areas had different buildings, especially the watchtowers which really did have a defensive purpose. Wells were not in each individual house, but were shared between the whole village. Even back in those days, with the ancient building materials, 3-5 story houses were built and are still standing. It was also interesting to learn of how the other New Zealand Chinese migrated to New Zealand and how different areas went at different periods in time.

At Xintang, I experienced how jeans are really made. Buying jeans will never be the same again, knowing how they are made. Huge mountains of rolled up jeans; sitting next to the public toilets that ran directly into the river. The intense putrid smell (ambiance as we called it) only added to the experience. I've said enough.

Kung fu was definitely a highlight of the trip. It's not everyday that you are taught Huang Feihong, Kung fu, by a world champion, at the Huang Feihong memorial hall. Just watching our masters perform their daily performances was very inspiring. An old disciple to a disciple of Huang Feihong came to visit from San Francisco. Movie quality performances were given to honor them and we were lucky enough to be there to see this.

As one of the few fluent Cantonese speakers, (and also a meager mandarin speaker) I quickly became a wanted translator that helped out in general translating, shopping but most importantly bargaining. The fact that most goods on the streets were reduced to less than 25% of the first quoted price was a constant worry that at one point, we would get ripped off. It was not long before everyone learnt the simple basics of bargaining. Complaining that the goods were too expensive and then continually walking away. When the storekeeper doesn't call you back anymore, you know that you have hit the sweet price of the goods.

One of the more memorable moments in my mandarin speaking attempts, was having a conversation with a shanghai taxi driver. The whole conversation more or less consisted with "I don't understand what you are saying" after each question that we asked each other. Luckily we had the business card of the hotel so the taxi driver knew where to take us.

As a young New Zealander, no trip to china would be complete without a trip to the clubs to experience the nightlife. The most unique club award goes to the club in Taishan

where the whole dance floor bounced when you danced to the music. We China trippers took out the mini dance floor out the back and it was good that the DJ also played some familiar (yet outdated) english music. The larger dance floor, which we later joined, was definitely overpopulated with males with at least 8 guys to every girl. KTV (or Karaoke TV was yet another must and we had a few loud nights singing till the sun came up. Old classic songs were all that were available and it was fun singing with our kung fu masters in Foshan. The best night however goes to KTV in Beijing where a few of us sang till around 5.30 in the morning, waited a little while then had breakfast before going to bed.

The big cities of china are all growing up. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou are all built up, with huge skyscrapers covered in tiles instead of glass or metal (as they would be in the western world) The night cruise along Shanghai's river was a sight to see and the history of these cities definitely surpass those of New Zealand. China changes every year, and each time I've been back I've learnt and seen something different. This time was definitely one of the best experiences and well worth it, not only for seeing the grand majestic China, but also because of the friendships that were forged during the course of these 5 weeks.

Thank you, Kai, Janet and the NZCA for organizing such an incredible journey for us.