

Report: NZCA Wintercamp China Tour 2007

By Paul Wong

China looms as being an economic powerhouse in the future; their future lies within their people. They have the desire, aspiration and are intent in becoming a force to be reckoned with in the commercial world. For 26 young adults, the feeling of amazement, astonishment and respect for those the Chinese people grew as we ventured in the wilderness of China. The group assembled in Sydney from all parts of New Zealand from the little towns of Whangarei, Invercargill and the bigger cities of Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin. While completely unknown to each other the entire group had at least one thing in common; we were all New Zealand Chinese. For the majority of the group the visit to China was the first. The trip presented me with an opportunity to educate and familiarise myself with Chinese culture, ethics, morals and values. The trip was made even more special because my cousin also attended; it was the wish of our grandparents that we attend this China trip experience.

The first taste of Asia was in Hong Kong where we arrived at the International Airport for five hour stop over. Along with the Sydney stop over this presented an opportunity for me to bond with the other group members; I found many similarities with the majority of the group, with accounting being a dominant feature among some members. Foshan was our first stop in which we were able to experience the true Chinese experience in Kung Fu at the Huang Fei Hung Academy; it was unquestionably an experience of a lifetime. The Kung Fu Master and students with the help of Janet (translator); were very helpful in teaching us a simple routine in which we were to perform at the closing ceremony along with our own special performances. Not only did I find Kung Fu a physical activity, it demonstrated the patients, technique and skill required to perform such a delicate martial art, something that I at times struggled with. Our performances following Kung Fu was also a moment to remember, the girls demonstrated their dancing skills with the Macarena and the boys the shirtless Haka.

Never before had I along with the majority of the group experienced a mind changing experience when we visited our ancestral villages. Not only did it open my eyes about the underprivileged people living there, but the realisation that I could have been one of those children or adults struggling to survive. The visit to both my parents villages was special, I was able to take many photo's to take back and show the family, but also experience the conditions and feeling of village life. The visits to the villages enabled me to gain an understanding and appreciation as to why my grandparents and great grandparents would want to move their entire life to a foreign country such as New Zealand. Although the seriousness was not completely bound to our own villages, the visits to other villages gave the rest of the group a chance to mix and mingle amongst each other and village people, play the occasional game of basketball and a chance for others to relax and rest on the bus.

The centre of attention remained at Guangzhou Technical College where there was an air of expectation, the feeling that maybe this year the boys could out play their rivals and finally win their game of basketball. The challenge was laid, with a fierce pre-match Haka; the game was close, but eventually won by the local students. The group did not leave empty handed, with the girls demonstrating their class against their Chinese opponents, winning convincingly. The fun and games were short lived, with dinner and then an opportunity to communicate using our Mandarin, Cantonese and English language techniques with some local students; this presented us all with the possibility to swap gift and email address before we left as well.

Much similar to the landscape found in New Zealand, Hangzhou illustrated to me that underneath the smog and millions of people, that there is beauty within China. History in China is unbelievable; the main attraction in Hangzhou was the West Lake which we enjoyed a cruise and stories about the love and romance that made it so famous; the beautiful scenery provided backdrop for many photo's to be taken. Being in China and such a scenic area such as Hangzhou meant that we could not leave without hiring bicycles and riding around the lake; this proved to be a challenge as I willingly encouraged a couple of members on the trip who had limited experience on bicycles to join everyone and cycle around the lake as well. A special treat which I was about to experience was toffee strawberries, a real highlight in terms of food. Later while all the fun and games were put on hold, we visited the Lingyin Temple and also the Dragon Well Tea Village, where we had the opportunity to taste and purchase high quality green tea.

The journey to Shanghai via the Wuzhen water town was remarkable, again the history was astounding. The village made famous by several movies including the most recent in Tom Cruise and Mission Impossible 3. Shanghai was startling with over 17 million people living in such a confined space. The visits to the Jade Buddha Temple, Yu Gardens, a Silk Factory were intriguing; while the Old Shanghai Bazaar was where we had some free time and were able to try the famous Shanghai Dumplings. That night we witnessed an amazing acrobatic show, which show classed skill, patients, technique, precision and flexibility. Our free day was fairly chaotic; I was on the road with a few other campers, and the first stop after a 9 o'clock start was the Taylor's Market, then onto the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum where we spent the majority of the day. The museum showcased some of the biggest exhibition, new science phenomenon and gadgets; it proved to be amazing.

The bright lights of the capital city Beijing was unforgettable; the blend of history and modern, contemporary architecture was amazing. From the sights of Beijing, a feature was Tiananmen Square; it is the heart of the historic landscape and history of Beijing. Surrounding Tiananmen Square was the much publicised Government building, Mao's Moseleum and the Forbidden City. I felt that whilst visiting these important and historic sights, I lacked the level of knowledge to fully

understand and appreciate the importance and meaning of them. Beijing was probably my most favourite city that we visited, although every place had a special place within the trip that made it so memorable for me. I enjoyed the atmosphere and excitement of the markets, the cold and fresh air that awaited us early in the morning and also the 24 hour McDonalds down the road, was also inviting at 1.30am. The most memorable monument of China was the visit to the Great Wall of China; this was not only a fantastic opportunity to see one of the worlds largest man made structures, but also on a personal note for my cousin and I having family history based on the Great Wall itself. The experience of just walking along the Great Wall was incredible, beyond belief; a dream for some, reality for myself and the rest of the group. Included in the whole package of sight seeing was the Ming Tombs, Scared way and the Summer Palace, all featuring and holding their own place in history.

The unorganised feature of the trip was Hong Kong; the time spent in Hong Kong was useful for the group, as it gave everyone, including myself an opportunity to finish the shopping activities and also catch up on some much needed rest. It was also an early indication that the trip was nearing its end, the inevitable goodbye talks and hugs were approaching, but not before some fun. The group went their separate ways, shopping in Mong Kok, Karaoke with the group; Ocean Park and the Peak were the features of my stay in Hong Kong. The trip was topped off by the majority of the group dancing and drinking at one of the local bars down Kimberly Road.

As a New Zealand Chinese, the trip was a memorable experience of a lifetime. I learnt more about my culture, history, language and family in a month than ever before. The comparison of lifestyles, values, morals and ethics are vastly different from normality for me. The trip enabled me to bond with other fellow New Zealand Chinese, and make new friends, it also gave me the opportunity to try and explore things that were foreign to me before. The trip also presented me with a chance to visit and pay respects to family, and an Aunt whom will always be remembered. More importantly the trip will always be remembered for the huge amount of fun and sight seeing we did; though this would not have been possible without the huge amount of help, time and patients Janet Joe put in before and during the month we had together. The effort she put in will forever be greatly appreciated by myself and the rest of the group.