

Prior to the 2007 NZCA China Trip, I had no preconception of the sights, sounds and experiences that I would be exposed to. The land of my ancestors had previously held no interest, nor sparked any desire to learn about it, in anticipation of the trip, or in general. Whilst my membership of NZCA was a direct correlation to participation of the China Trip 2007, therefore my fellow campers were all new acquaintances and the adventures we were to embark on, although similar to previous NZCA China trips were unknown to me. One of my first experiences of 'real life' China was seeing women washing dishes in buckets whilst sitting on the sidewalk outside a restaurant. It was a moment I consider an 'only in China' scenario and a reminder of the types of pictures you see in viral emails. This was quite a stark introduction of the vast differences between the lifestyle I am accustomed to and that of the people of China.

An unsavory side of 'real life' China that I observed is the number of beggars on the streets; in particular those with deformities sitting with cardboard signs were a big shock. Just the sight of these unfortunate people brought feelings of discomfort and a yearning to ignore them as their obvious misfortune is overwhelming and there are many people in the same predicament. Although to learn that people purposely harm themselves and others purchase deformed people and both actions are with money making ventures in mind shows a completely different way of thinking and that exploitation is a sad aspect of the nature and life that is common for those in China.

Perhaps the fore mentioned lifestyle of the Chinese was one of the motivations that led to the migration of my grandfathers to the distant land of New Zealand. The opportunity to return to my ancestral villages was a huge incentive in participating in the winter camp 2007 and definitely created a lifetime memory for me. Being able to stand in the villages of my grandfathers, both of whom had passed on before my birth was unbelievable and to have existing members of the villages remember my maternal grandmother as they chatted and reminisced about the past was incredible.

In and amongst the areas of our ancestral villages I saw many other 'only in China' moments including insane quantities of well, whatever, including rubbish, baskets, mats, etc piled ridiculously high onto motorbikes and transported, as well as seeing people cycling whilst holding an umbrella up as a sunshade and the strangest looking three wheeled cart/tractor type contraptions.

Then there were the cute moments; like the sheepskin handlebar covers on motorbikes to keep hands warm in the wet and cold weather as well as seeing babies and toddlers all bundled up in numerous layers of clothing and posing for photos with the cutest smiles and of course, holding their fingers in the v sign. Other moments include seeing clear shrink wrap on shoes to protect them from dust whilst on display and the shop assistants who literally become your shadow.

This trip was truly one of a lifetime, the number of things tried for the first time are countless ranging from the food eaten, the kungfu routine learnt, the ride on a rickshaw, the game of mahjong learnt and having a suit custom made. Being part of a group to experience and see China was thoroughly enjoyable as we shared, laughed and joked with each other. Forever I will remember with fondness, the millions of posed photos, my new 'Wong family', the cheap foot massages, the delicious strawberry toffee sticks, the hotel slippers, the 'macarena' song being the trip song, and I will always wish that my group was together again in China. I will definitely treasure the memories and be thankful for the friends I've made.

I have reconnected with my roots and feel just as proud to be Chinese as I am a New Zealander as a result of this overseas trip and recommend that any other NZ born Chinese, no matter how 'white', embrace their Asian roots and participate in the NZCA China Trip 2008.

As someone who has travelled before, this trip was expertly organised, with various activities well spread out, the range of sights seen, catering for all interests. There was plenty of time to shop, relax and enjoy each others' company.

Janet was awesome and I really appreciate the hard work, both in preparation and on the trip, her endless patience and numerous translations on our behalf, as well as her valuable local knowledge and the informative history lessons. Thank you so much Janet.

Best regards  
Paula Wong

February 2008