

I have always been involved in our Chinese community; growing up in Wellington playing in the local Chinese basketball tournaments and participating in many sports every Easter. I had also heard so many positive things about this trip from friends and my brother who went in 2006. So applying to go on this Chinese Winter Camp was an easy decision for me. Applications started in March if I recall correctly, but it wasn't until early November when I realised the trip was just around the corner. I remember then starting to watch all my old triad movies and Chinese comedies, and playing Mah Jong to get me more in the right mind set for the trip. It kind of worked. This report will tell a tale of my experiences in China and my most favoured memories of the trip as opposed to the repetitive stories of it being dirty and a culture shock.

I only knew a handful of people before disembarking on this journey of a lifetime. So initially I was quiet and kept to myself and the people I knew. Upon arriving at our first destination Foshan, I was informed by Janet Joe that I would be rooming with Kane Yee. I had never met Kane before, but I had seen him around at Easter tournaments. My first impression of Kane, I thought to myself was; "man he's way chubbier than what I remember!" I later found out he had a skateboarding accident the week before the trip and actually had stitches on his cheeks. Hence the swollen face and the Nelly plaster on his cheek. I got along well with him because we were into similar things. For example we bought cheap skateboards and skated the streets of the Guangdong Province which was a pretty cool experience. So it was a good start to the trip.

The first whole day in Foshan was a scorcher; Chinese winter is like New Zealand's summer. We arrived at the Foshan Ancestral Temple where we were treated to a wonderful display of kung fu and a dragon dance worthy of gold. Amazing. In the afternoon we started the real test, learning kung fu with the masters. This was perhaps the most intense physical activity I have ever done. My legs felt like jelly afterwards from the constant horse stance (Mar Bol).

After two days of kung fu lessons it was time to perform what we had learnt from our Sei Fu. With eager eyes watching, the nerves were high, but overall the performance went well. However, I can't say the same for the other group, although most performed well, I think Patrick Leong was a little nervous during his performance because he didn't execute the moves correctly and he wasn't in synch with the rest of his group. But one thing he succeeded in was having me in hysterics and making me shed tears of laughter. After the kung fu performance, we gave the audience a taste of New Zealand culture, the HAKA. It probably wasn't the best haka they've seen but I thought we did pretty well considering the time we had to prepare. Later that night we had dinner with our Sei Fus then we all went to karaoke, it was really awesome seeing the masters relax and have fun. They are great role models and I have the upmost respect for them.

On Friday 28th November we visited my Dad's Mum's village in Taishan. This was also Kelly Wing's Village (Ng). This was an amazing experience as I met my Grandma's Cousin. He took us into his home and made us feel very welcome. I was disappointed with myself for not bringing a photo of my grandma and the family to share with him. That night we went to Freedom City, three words: IT WAS AWESOME.

Sunday the 30th November we did a day trip to Shenzhen. Here we got to go to Magnificent China and Minority Village Cultural Park. This was basically a Mini China and the mini Great Wall was just a tease, it made me even more eager to see the real thing. For me, one of the highlights of this park were the shows. The Chinese really know how to put on a performance. At times the show was so intense and at other times it was subtle and done with finesse. The girls were pretty good looking too. However, I can only assume because I didn't have my glasses on and we were seated about 30 rows back, so they may have been rats.

One of my favourite places in China is The Xitang Watertown, which has been classified as "The Venice of China". This place is so serene and beautiful; the locals look so happy carrying on with their everyday lives. The food here was delectable and so flavoursome, I ate till my stomach was spherical. A memory of this place that will stay with me forever is when Patrick, Kane and I all piled into ONE rickshaw with me sitting on Patrick's and Kane's knee and we would have been packing over 200kgs easy. The guy that pedalled us around would have been over 60 years old and I must say, he was pretty fit as we made him take us out to the main road and all the way back. At times he struggled and his pick up speed was that of a snail, but it was very amusing and comical as he was a good sort. He even started copying our lingo (words underlined). He took us through the narrowest of alleyways and when he hit the wall and nearly toppled us over he yelled out "Ooooo BEBE". Hilarious. We paid him a generous sum for his mighty effort.

Hangzhou is also another city that is very beautiful and I can see why it was included in our itinerary. For me, the highlight of this city was the bike ride around the lake. Cruising around on a pink bike with back suspensions was gangs as, however the place wasn't well sign posted at all. We found ourselves getting denied from certain routes and at times having to ride on the main road. But it was fun and part of the reason why it made it such a fun experience. I remember Kieran bunny hopping and getting mad air off gutters, surely not good for the bike's suspension.

The lights in Shanghai at night are striking with the use of contrasting neon colours; this made the boat cruise especially memorable. In this city I roomed with Nick Chan; he is an intelligent individual, but he lacks common sense and is pretty weak. However overall he is a pretty alright guy, we often had humorous conversations at night and our laughter could be heard by Patrick and Greg two rooms down from us. When we left Shanghai for Beijing, I saw Nick sobbing with watery eyes as we were checking out of the hotel. Since I am such a good friend I asked him what was the matter. He told me he was sad because we weren't sharing a room anymore. I told him that is weird and creepy.

Beijing has many historic attractions that make this city so special. Of course there is the Great Wall of China, which surpassed everything I had expected. The sheer size of it was simply mind blowing, the steps often were uneven and difficult to scale and the air was thin which made it difficult to breathe but once you reached the pinnacle of the Great Wall, it was all well worth it. It gave you a sense of accomplishment. To say you have climbed the Great Wall is something unique and unforgettable. "You're not a hero until you've climbed the Great Wall" –Chairman Mao. But what really impressed me was the Forbidden City, the architecture of the temples and how rafters intertwine to hold the structure together as opposed to using bolts and nails. Each temple got bigger and bigger as you made your way through from start to finish. Another attraction that I was eager to see was the Olympic Bird's Nest Stadium, this did not disappoint and the architecture of this stadium was also impressive. The Chinese vision and their attention to detail when building structures is just remarkable, as in the case with the Temples and Bird's Nest. Bigger is truly better.

The night life in Beijing is the best I've experienced all trip. A particular night was good when it was just Kane and I who decided to go out. We taxied to a place which had three consecutive clubs in a row in which we gradually made our way through each. At the first bar we met these locals, they were pretty laid back and poured us

drinks. Verbal communication was minimal, but boozing was plentiful. The locals are always interested in conversing with Kiwi Chinese. The next morning was our free day which was just as well, because Kane and I were feeling ill and drained. The hotel we were staying at was very luxurious and had a swimming pool. So the Lowe's, Kane, Aaron, Jo Taing, Sam Lay Yee and I took advantage of that and all went for a swim, a spa, and a sauna.

Hong Kong was always going to be the best, and from the start it didn't fail to impress. I'm not usually one for shopping and hadn't bought much for myself in China but it's so easy to spend money in this city, so I recommend saving your money for Honkers as some stuff can be Tai Gway La. One of the days a few of us went to Ocean Park and if you want my honest opinion; it's not worth going. The rides are unexciting, the food is expensive, the pandas are cute but just sit there and you will be done looking at them in two minutes. It's far more productive to go shopping at Times Square or visit Causeway Bay or spend the day at Macau. If you want electronics go to Mong Kok, everything you want will be there from cell phones to laptops. And someone own up to the wasabi.

In conclusion to this report, China is a destination full of rich history and culture; my culture; our culture. Most of us started off as strangers, but are now lifelong friends bound together by this trip and the culture of our motherland. I am truly blessed to have been a part of the 2008 Guangdong Winter Camp, and would like to thank ALL who were involved in making this trip possible. A special thanks to Janet Joe for the organisation of this trip and putting up with us. I know it's not the easiest job to organise 30 people (and at times 'children') but you did a really great job. I will be returning home humble and grateful and even more proud to be Chinese and will be spreading the good word about this positive experience.

Again, many thanks,
Tim Yee