

New Zealand China Friendship Society Inc.
Prominent Persons and Leaders Delegation to China
21 – 30 September 2013

Visiting China was not something I imagined I would do but when the opportunity was presented to join a group of New Zealanders on a 10 day visit, I did not hesitate. The visit was sponsored by the New Zealand China Friendship Society, a group dedicated to building awareness of China through friendship and cultural exchange. It has connections to central and local government and is an important link to the Chinese communities within New Zealand.

The Society in New Zealand is community based and voluntary and gathers together people from all walks of life with a common interest in China and a desire to build closer relationships with Chinese people. In China the relationship is reciprocated through The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, a branch of the Chinese Foreign Office.

Our guide, Ding Li (Lesley) who accompanied us throughout the tour is an employee of the Association which is headed by Madam Li Xiaolin the daughter of Chairman Li Xiannian the 3rd President of China.

Lesley was responsible for organising the tour and she said that her intention was to show us the cultural diversity, a sense of China's history and how Chinese people live today, particularly in rural communities. The choice of activities was also influenced by the membership of our group which included a primary school principal, a senior's carer, a Mandarin tutor, a city Councillor and a museum professional.

We visited three provinces and were based in the capital city of each: Kunming, capital of Yunnan; Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi; and Wuhan, capital of Hubei.

The programme included visits to museums, schools, major visitor attractions, a retirement village, rural villages, a major pharmaceutical corporation and cultural performances. We were hosted at each location by the provincial association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and enjoyed thoughtful, generous hospitality that included 5 star accommodation, sumptuous culinary experiences including formal banquets and comfortable transportation. We were always accompanied by English speaking guides and with the help of our Mandarin tutor added new Mandarin words and phrases to our repertoire each day.

The Chinese people were the highlight. Everywhere we went we were treated as honoured guests, we felt safe and there were no incidents to disabuse us of this feeling.

Most of our time was organised and we spent a fair amount of it in transit (planes or buses). However, there were opportunities for retail therapy.

The diversity of the group made for an interesting time as we got to know each other and by the end of the trip we were good company, which contributed to the enjoyment of the tour.

Overall impressions are of an immense, complex economic and cultural world force. Although slowed by the global financial crisis, economic growth in China, if assessed purely on the number of

high-rise buildings under construction, is extraordinary; e.g., we estimated that in Kunming there were more cranes than currently operating in the whole of New Zealand.

The focus and volume of new construction also highlights what seemed to be an aversion to building maintenance; e.g., the Yunnan Provincial Museum established in 1951 and housed in a somewhat run-down, but seemingly sound 1959 building, was constructing a new museum building.

As a consequence of the number of construction and demolition sites, dust covers everything and adds to the pollution from coal-fired electricity generation, industry and the chaotic traffic of the cities. Contrast this with the natural beauty, particularly of Yunnan, and the commitment to parks, formal gardens and plantings (even alongside motorways and under motorway off-ramps).

We visited three provincial museums, a village museum, a memorial museum and the Yunnan Baiyao Group's museum.

The provincial museums visited were collection rich traditional displays, although replicas are used possibly due to original material having been looted or destroyed. Highlights included the Hubei Provincial Museum's Tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng and the Shaanxi History Museum which is regarded as the "treasure house of China".

On a completely different scale was the community museum in Shiliuhong Village in Hubei Province which was a simple display of home wares and farming implements, a collection of memorabilia including copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* "The Little Red Book", a private collection of propaganda posters from the Cultural Revolution and photographs of visitors to the village including delegations (such as ours). The museum doubled as a community hall and gathering place for the village of some 900 inhabitants which was one of four nestled on the banks of the Yangtze River each devoted to horticulture: two growing vegetables, one flowers and our host village, pomegranates (shiliuhong).

The display of Cultural Revolution memorabilia was treated with amusement by our local guide Hu Liwan (Elvis) born in the 1980's recalling the practice of people at political rallies waving the little red book in unison to demonstrate their commitment and devotion to Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution.

Shiliuhong Village's most valuable side-line enterprise is tourism which it has developed through home-stays for city dwellers keen to experience country life including working in the fields or just to take a break in an idyllic environment. As one of our group commented, a bit like a weekend in Martinborough.

The museum devoted to Chairman Li Xiannian was interesting because it provided a snapshot of the 3rd Chinese president's early life and political career which was notable for the rekindling of diplomacy. We saw photographs of Chairman Li and world leaders such as Richard Nixon, Margaret Thatcher and closer to home, Keith and Norma Holyoake taken at Government House in Wellington.

The park in which the museum is set has been developed through the influence of Chairman Li's youngest daughter Madam Li Xiaolin who is the President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and by all accounts a very influential woman.

The Yunnan Baiyao Group museum is a corporate showcase for this multi-billion RMB Yuan pharmaceutical company that has developed on the back of Qu Huangzhang 1902 herbal invention. The Qu Huanzhang Panacea is famous for stopping bleeding and credited with saving the lives of many Chinese soldiers. The recipe is owned by the Chinese government and Yunnan Baiyao Group is a state-owned enterprise.

The museum serves to tell the story of the herbal invention, to celebrate the corporation's success, to convey its ambition for the future (first [pharmaceutical company] in China and first in the world) and to promote its products which include the original Qu Huanzhang Panacea through to plasters and throat lozenges. We were keen to purchase samples to bring home.

Of all the museums visited this was the most innovative and the only one to use audio visual. It also had a "peppers ghost" portraying an operation, presumably using the Qu Huanzhang Panacea.

We visited three schools: a model state primary/intermediate school in Kunming, a private primary/secondary boarding school in Xi'an and a village primary school in Hong'an County, Hubei. The two city schools were large, well-resourced educational establishments with clean well-kept buildings and grounds compared with the much smaller village school which had few resources and was housed in a building that had seen better days. The children in these schools matched their surroundings; the former: tidy, uniformed and well behaved; the latter: somewhat unruly, curious and fun-loving.

The retirement village in Xi'an (described in our itinerary as "the nursing home") was not that dissimilar in concept to retirement villages in this country. The main difference was that this was a series of apartment buildings with some common facilities.

The residents were participating in various activities or being entertained by what resembled a line-dancing group and a belly dancer. We were shown the nursing home and the models of the various apartments for sale; targeting families with the resources to buy the apartments and it was unclear if this was a state or private enterprise. The residents were very pleased to see us and they were keen to shake our hands and to show us around.

The tour's visitor attractions included the Ethnic Village and Stone Forest in Yunnan, the Terracotta Warriors and Horses and the Xi'an City Wall in Shaanxi; and the Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan.

The Ethnic Village was a large park on the outskirts of Kunming where the 26 ethnic groups of China present their cultures in food, performance, costume and retail (individually crafted items through to souvenirs). It would be unkind to compare it with theme parks around the world but the concept was similar. The park, however, was a tranquil setting showcasing the city's lush vegetation amongst a series of lakes and other water features.

The Stone Forest is an area of limestone formations and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2007. Many of the formations look like petrified trees and our charming guide, Alice, was keen to point out the various stones that look like animals and birds. She also told us the story of Ashima with a warning for the men in the group to be careful not to touch the head of any Yi women or girls because this was as good as a proposal of marriage.

A very popular destination and on this particular day there was standing room only in some parts of the forest.

The Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan was built in 1981, however, there have been Yellow Crane Towers in the same, or close to, the current location since 223 AD. The original Tower was on the banks of the Yangtze River – the current Tower is a little further away on Sheshan (Snake Hill). Towers have been built by successive dynasties variously representing the power of the Emperor and reflecting the era through subtle changes in design. The Yellow Crane Tower was made famous in the 8th century through a poem written by Cui Hao.

The visitor experience highlight of the tour was our visit to the Terracotta Warriors and Horses. This is a truly amazing story and recognised internationally as the most significant archaeological excavation of the 20th century (the 8th wonder of the world). The masterpiece of Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China (240BC), the Terracotta Warriors and Horses is an 8,000 strong army in battle formation created to protect the Emperor's mausoleum which stood 1.5 kilometres away.

The excavation is enclosed in large hanger-like buildings and visitors are able to view three of the pits currently being excavated. This is a long-term project and the current focus is on improving excavation techniques so that the glaze and/or painted surface of the warriors and horses is preserved.

Conclusions:

This was a once in a life-time opportunity and I am very pleased that I accepted the invitation to join this tour. The experience has whetted my appetite for China and it has reinforced with me, China's importance to New Zealand economically, socially and culturally.

China is a fascinating country with so much to offer. While our group did not visit Beijing or Shanghai we were provided with a taste of China's diversity, its significant place in history, its ambition for the future and its commitment to building relationships through friendship and diplomacy.

Most of what we experienced and saw is designed to meet a growing and economically important tourism market. The visits to museums highlighted their growing importance in presenting pre 20th century history and Chinese culture for locals and visitors alike. Apparently the growth in new museum developments in China is among the fastest in the world and as one commentator describes, they are at the forefront of the "new cultural revolution".

The tour provided opportunities to glimpse the lives of ordinary people, to make new contacts with provincial representatives of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and with our hosts at museums and other tour destinations. We also made new friends of the other members of the group.

I would like to thank the New Zealand China Friendship Society for selecting me for this tour and The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries for hosting the group.

Pat Stuart
Chief Executive
Wellington Museums Trust

The Programme

Kunming 22 – 25 September local guide Ms Sun Yunhua

Yunnan (population 45 million) is the southwest frontier of China and borders Viet Nam, Laos and Myanmar; and because of this location is strategically important in maintaining close economic and cultural ties with Southeast Asia. It is also culturally diverse with 26 ethnic groups, 15 of which are unique to Yunnan. Kunming (population 7.3 million) is often described as the “City of Eternal Spring” because of its temperate climate.

- Yunnan Provincial Museum
- Yunnan Nationalities (Ethnic) Village
- Gao Xin Primary School
- Banquet
- Yunnan Baiyao Group
- Stone Forest
- Dynamic Yunnan (fusion of traditional ethnic dance and music with modern choreography)

Xi’an 25 – 27 September local guide Ms Wang Jingjing (Jane)

Shaanxi (population 37.6 million) is in east of north-western China. The guide books describe it as incomparable to other provinces because it was the capital city of so many feudal dynasties; 14 dynasties and regimes and 79 emperors established their capitals in Shaanxi Province during a span of 1,100 years. Xi’an (population 7 million) is the starting point of the Silk Road and with other major attractions such as the Terracotta Warriors and Horses, a growing and important tourism hub.

- Terracotta Warriors and Horses
- Islamic Street
- Xianyang Yinxing Sanatorium (retirement village and nursing home)
- Xi’an Bodi School
- Shaanxi History Museum
- City Wall of Xi’an
- Banquet

Wuhan 27 – 30 September local guide Mr Hu Liwen (Elvis)

Hubei Province (population 57 million) is described as the heartland of China and in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. Wuhan (population 10 million) is described as the “Heart of Chinese Economic Geography” because of its central location.

- Yellow Crane Tower
- Banquet
- Memorial Park of Chairman Li Xiannian (Hong’an County)
- Families of local peasants and local primary school
- Rural Enterprise (vineyard and hydroponic strawberries)
- Shiliuhong Village
- Hubei Provincial Museum

The Group

Bernie Richmond – National Vice President New Zealand China Friendship Society Inc. (NZCFS) and immediate Past President of the Wellington Branch of NZCFS

Elaine Richmond – Member, Wellington Branch of NZCFS

Pat Stuart – Chief Executive, Wellington Museums Trust

Hilda (Fay) Hobday – Member, Auckland Branch of NZCFS

Helen Carey – Support Worker Enliven Elderly Persons Trust, Tauranga

Peter Vautier – President of the Hamilton Floral Society

Sally-Anne (Sally) Buck – Christchurch City Councillor

Robert (Bob) Okell – Member, Rotorua Branch of NZCFS

Anna Lu – Mandarin Tutor, Christchurch

Andrew King – Principal, Oropi School Tauranga



The Group at Shiliuhong Village, Hubei Province

Back Row: Bob, Peter, Pat, our host, Helen

Front Row: Fay, Sally, Andrew, Bernie, Elaine, Anna



