

Eniola's Notes from the GHI Seminar Abroad China Travel 2016

This trip was life changing for me and allowed me my first visit to the continent of Asia which was long overdue. This introduction to Asia showed me a nation that has the world's largest economy, and that has made great advancements on a world scale in terms of development, infrastructure, business, international trade, etc. all in a fairly short period of time.

1. Important Discoveries

I was surprised that the Chinese people I saw were a lot taller & bigger than I thought they would be. My ideas about the physical stature of Chinese people were strictly based on the Chinese people I saw in the USA.

The Han people are the largest ethnic group & they are in the ruling class in China. It struck me that many times the minority group rules over the majority in many countries, but not in this case.

Most Chinese people have Feng Shui as a main theme & preoccupation throughout their lives. It tends to dictate almost every move in the culture.

The Chinese will do whatever they can to make sure that you see a good image of their country presented before you. As a visitor, they want you to leave with that good image in mind. They will even stage a situation/ place to make sure that happens.

They have put a tremendous amount of money into the arts and are spending more money on preserving and excavating their cultural heritage.

Chinese food seems watered down in terms of taste & substance in the areas of the city that we frequented which would be considered commercial/ tourist areas. It may be like that in most places in the northern areas of China but I believe if you go to the right local places maybe you can taste something more flavorful. I also noticed that the rice that they serve with meals, although it's plain it isn't very flavorful. I have tasted many types/ varieties of plain cooked rice and even the rice that is grown in the southern US has more flavor in my opinion.

Before going on this trip, I had heard people say that in China the toilets were just a "hole in the floor". I was surprised to actually see what the toilets looked like. The squatting porcelain toilets are something that I could use because I have strong leg muscles but still felt that they were awkward. I was surely glad to see the handicap sign in the bathroom which indicated there would at least be one toilet with a seat.

2. Please refer to number 1

3. The most powerful personal experiences for me were when I saw what I thought were mountains but I was told they were royal tombs & mausoleums. I had heard several Egyptologists and archeological scholars talk about other pyramids in parts of the world like China but it was mind blowing seeing it and the buildings & other edifices from these great ancient civilizations in person.

I realized that we are not sure how these places were built back then, with all of the skilled and detailed craftsmanship, masonry & other work even until this day. I felt that most likely skilled slave laborers were used. I also understood that while the royal households & dynasties lived in luxury the majority of Chinese people lived a difficult life especially under the rule of some of the emperors/empresses.

Seeing the Great Wall was also mind blowing. I was surprised to see that the Great Wall of China is quite treacherous in certain areas and that one has to be in excellent shape to navigate the part of the wall near Beijing.

4. Unpacking A memorable Moment: What Awareness Lies Behind It?-

I felt that China had seen change happen very rapidly. Cities built up with the modern buildings and highways in the same spot where small villages were just 5 years ago. I became aware that the unique cultural environment that makes China so special could be lost if the Chinese aren't careful. The Chinese need to take care to preserve more everyday cultural heritage other than just the popular sites such as temples, palaces & antiquities that are considered wonders of the world or World Heritage Sites.

5. I would like to further explore the following: Chinese dynasties & ancient Chinese civilizations; Chinese minority ethnic groups; Chinese art; descendants of Macanese people who live outside of Macau & China & the future of Philanthropy in China.

6. I plan to connect new knowledge & experiences to the classroom & workplace through hosting a Global Connections program that features an aspect of China in the next academic year. I also plan to help with the Chinese exhibit at our next International Flag Festival. I hope to participate as much as I can in the "global classroom" with Xi'an University and any other seminars/conferences that involve Montgomery College and our academic partners in Xi'an & Macau.

Section 2

Personal & Social Responsibility:

Gentrification and development that is happening rapidly in the DC Metropolitan area & other larger cities throughout the USA tends to displace people and make it harder for them to be able to have a reasonable existence. It appears that China is experiencing similar problems.

Governments and individuals must keep these things in mind as they move in the direction of development in their countries. A workable plan must be put into place to help the people who will be affected the most so that they aren't marginalized. They will need help in being incorporated into a much more expensive, modern society that they call home.