

000321 Guanxi

Guanxi for a green card.

I still have not received my residence card (green card). My visa requires that I must have both a foreign experts card and a green card within thirty days of my arrival in China. I have my foreign experts card (I can speak English), but my green card has been a challenge. I have seen the paperwork for my green card and Jason and I even received a visit from a person from the Public Safety Bureau (PSB) at our apartment. However, that was weeks ago. Lisa (our director) has paid several visits to my school because without the green card, Jason and I are technically illegally in China. It is unlikely that we will be deported, but it did happen to a volunteer in the past. Rather than being concerned about it, Jason and I are actually looking forward to a vacation in Cambodia or Korea.

As it turns out, my school does not have enough guanxi with the PSB to get our green cards. Lisa has told the administration at my school that they must lose face to get our cards, lest we be deported. This is a big deal to the school, but they have little choice. They have asked another school for help because they do have more than enough guanxi with the PSB to get our cards. We shall see what happens.

Travel to Nanshan

This past weekend, Jessica, Jason and I traveled to Lonco to visit some of the other volunteers who are teaching there. The trip was my second excursion out of Yantai, so I want to describe the countryside as best that I can. The countryside around Yantai is not a place to go to get fresh air. There is a haze in the air that limits the view of the horizon. You can make out the outline of the surrounding mountains, but just barely. The mountains themselves look as if they were originally rounded like the Berkshires are, but then someone took a file to them. The tops of the mountains are jagged where big chunks appear to be missing. As we rode in a crowded bus to Lonco, the sun hung like a big, orange ball in the sky. The cause of the pollution were hundreds of small fires along the way and many smokestacks. The fires were mostly where people were burning trash or the cutting from trees. The smoke in the air was not of the same magnitude as that shown in Malaysia or Indonesia, but that is what it reminded me of.

The countryside itself was mostly employed for agricultural uses. There were large orchards of what I think were either apple or pear trees. The trees themselves were pruned back to a trunk and a handful of branches. Most of the fields were barren in the expectation of spring. I want to say that the view could be imagined as the rolling fields of the Midwest, but the comparison is not accurate. The land was much more rocky and jagged. The hills were broken into lattices, but large rock outcroppings were left untouched. The land was punctured by small, brick, one story buildings where people lived or which were used as storage sheds. There were people all about pruning the trees or working the land. The dominant color was a grayish brown.

I am looking forward to spring when the countryside should take on new life. I really miss green. Even the mountains and hills lacked trees. There were patches of trees here or there outside of the orchards, but not very many. However, despite the air pollution, the fields and the orchards were meticulously cared for. There were places where there was garbage strewn about, but certainly not in the fields.

Nanshan

The school that our friends work at is in a commune that is for a company called Nanshan. Nanshan is called a commune, but none of the people that we spoke with could explain what that exactly means in regards to the distribution of profits. Nanshan produces textiles, aluminum and other goods. The community is self-supportive with its own schools, stores and even a power plant. The workers live in company housing. There are row upon row of apartments. We also saw some very nice "villas". The streets were immaculate without a piece of trash to be seen. Basically, people are born in the commune, go to school there and return to work there after university if they go. In return they have housing and jobs and other benefits.

The most startling benefit is the recreational palace and the golf course. The recreational palace is a huge, pyramid shaped building of glass. Inside are stores, restaurants, a disco (of course!), a bowling alley and a large pool complete with waterslides and hot tubs. According to what Alex (one of the volunteers) was told, workers can pay 15 yuen for dinner and a swim or dinner and bowling. The interior of the building was beautiful with plants and flowers, waterfalls and plush carpeting. It was like being in a ritzy hotel in the US. The golf course had twenty-something holes and was plush. It was so pleasing on the eye to see so much green and so many nice ponds. A round of golf is 50 yuen. There is also a driving range. I am not sure who uses the golf course, but it did not appear to be the workers. I think that it is geared more towards the management of the company.

Apparently, Nanshan has a lot of money and they are using it to build like crazy. There were cranes everywhere as they rushed to build a giant grocery store and who knows what else. They were also building beautiful temples that we could see off in the distance. Near the temples, they are building a gigantic Buddha that at 28 meters tall is one of the largest in the world.

Riding Horses

On this past Sunday, the headmaster of my school asked to take Jason and I on a tour of Yantai. The headmaster did not actually go, but his wife, his son, Communist Party Secretary Ho and her daughter and an English teacher went with us in a van. We traveled to an island to the east of the city. Sunday was a simply beautiful day. Strong winds the night before had blown out most of the pollution in the air and we could actually see the horizon over the ocean (this is the first time that this has happened since I have been here.) The sky

was blue, not white and the sun was out. It was nice to get out of the city. During the drive we were constantly fed with chestnuts, gum and coke. They always lavish us with food whenever we meet. The road to the island straddled man made lagoons where people breed fish and shrimp. The island itself was nice and the ocean views were great. On the island is a little village of one-story white washed houses. It was nice, but there were little, plastic bags strewn everywhere. The bags were from the street markets in the village and the city. It was sad to see them just everywhere.

Jason saw a ferris wheel off in the distance and told them what the english name for it was. The next thing that we knew they were trying to figure out if the ferris wheel was running and if we could go. Jason and I have learned just not to ask about things because otherwise people will bend over backwards to do things for us that we never wanted them to do in the first place. The people from the school are so kind that it can get a little overwhelming at times.

Somehow, they got the idea that Jason and I like to ride horses. We believe that this is because Jason has a picture of himself on a horse in Mexico. They asked us if we had ever ridden before and we both replied that we had (I had once at my friend Renee's place in Louisiana). The next thing that I knew I was at a horse track, riding a horse in China while Celine Dion blared over the PA system. Not something that I never expected to be doing. The horses themselves were not in the best of shape, nor did they take will to being directed. But everyone rode and we had fun.

Difficult Questions

After the horse riding we returned to Yantai where we were greeted by.... an unexpected banquet. The headmaster met us at the same restaurant at which I was so ill after eating there last time. Not that it was the fault of the restaurant (or was it?), because I was already ill. The headmaster went all out and ordered a type of shrimp that I had never seen before, muscles and lobster. What was more intriguing was the conversation. The headmaster asked Jason and I for our opinions about Taiwan. Needless to say, it was a little uncomfortable to talk about Taiwan since another WT volunteer had been removed for speaking of such things to her class. Now here was our headmaster asking us about the same forbidden subject.

The question was directed at Jason first so it was amusing to watch him decide how to answer the question. They wanted to know if the US would intervene when China invaded Taiwan. They wanted to know our views on human rights abuses in China. We answered diplomatically, but honestly with our opinions. Basically we said that we hoped that the threat of war ruining the Sino-American relations would prevent anything from happening militarily. At one point Jason said that he hoped that things could be worked out between the two countries (China and Taiwan). He was quickly corrected that Taiwan was not a country.

The Chinese at the table were adamant that Taiwan should return to the fold. This is an opinion held by all of the Chinese that I have spoken with in private and seems to be the

general public opinion. Being of one mind, I do not think that the Chinese understand that people in the US have all sorts of differing opinions on the subject. Nor do I believe that they understand just how easily public opinion in the US can be swayed by the media and by a single point of view. How many people in the US understand China's position on Taiwan? For that matter, how many people in the US understand the US position on Taiwan? We explained that the US policy can be determined by what the media represents (eg: Somalia). Therefore, the threats that China has been making damage the US public's opinion of China. Nor do they understand that the policy can change with the next administration. China wants Taiwan very badly. I just hope that the desire does not manifest itself in the fruition of the threats that China has made.

Teaching

This week I have been teaching about the grocery store to my junior 1 classes. I went to the store and bought several things that I brought into class with me. The kids love it when I pull out bread or chocolate or a toothbrush from my bag. Fortunately, most of my classes are right after breakfast or lunch, so they are not too hungry. The students made the immediate leap to needing money during a game that we played about the grocery store. Therefore, my lesson plan for tomorrow will be about money. I will go to the market next and have them "buy" things with "money" in class. We shall see.

For my Junior 3 classes I will try to get a debate about environmental issues (close to my heart in China) going today. They are just so disinterested as I imagine my 8th grade class was many years ago. I hope that it works.

Odds and ends

My phone has been disconnected for the past several days because our headmaster moved his office and they needed to rewire the system. So, for anyone who called and could not get me, that is why. By the way, if you do call, you need to wait until the message is over and then dial my extension. Otherwise, you get a guy in the office who will not relay messages to me.

Of course, this is my sick week. Fortunately my body is being consistent and this time it is just a very sore throat and nothing big.

Take care,

Jeff

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