

A trip to China speaks to diversity

A generous grant from the Assistant Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity allowed me to participate in the People to People Ambassador Program, the Guizhou Province Education Forum.

After one day in Beijing, our delegation flew to Guizhou Province to visit a seldom frequented province by outsiders in southern China. People to People attracted social studies educators intent on learning about "off beaten paths" and minority ethnic groups. The delegation went to several ancient villages recently recognized by the Chinese government as worthy of special attention due to population paucity and continuity with their historical traditions. Enticing visits to ancient sites included Chang Jiao, Qingyan, and the nearby Tumpu Fortress Village, a World Heritage Site. It was the village of Chang Jiao where we stayed for the greater part of one day and were entertained by the Buyi peoples. The small village (179 families, a total population of 894) could only be reached on foot and while walking along a roughly made path, we passed irrigated rice patties and tiny stone houses used for burials. The villagers believe that once a person has died, the body is burned to prevent the soul from disturbing the living.



As the delegation neared the ancient site, male dancers welcomed the delegation; their elaborate masks illustrated ancient beliefs preserved by the Buyi peoples.



Inside the village, female dancers wore green and black dress and performed the scarf dance.



The one room school house and family dwellings had no heat. The main occupation was farming. The surrounding area of rocky terrain was home to water buffalo viewed as a sacred animal by farmers, who house them in special quarters. They are costly to buy as one could run as much as \$1,000, so several families might share in the purchasing and housing.

So unique was this experience that I was reminded of ways today's traditional Cherokees (focus of my research) celebrate their customs by all night dances and ball play (similar to Lacrosse). Cross-cultural comparisons have prompted a talk addressing both the Buyi and Cherokees. In the near future, I plan to speak before the Edwardsville Community Center focusing on Chinese and Cherokee cultural preservation in addition to other requests to share this comparative study.

Expanding topics of interests to Chinese and American educators, Guizhou Normal University, Guiyang, capital of Guizhou Province, hosted the Sino - U.S. Education Guizhou Forum. The governor of Guizhou Province opened the forum comparing educators and their unending influence on young people to silkworms continually spinning silk. He reiterated that true educators never end their teaching tasks. Proudly the governor included the fact that in 2007, Guizhou Province had reached a literacy rate of 97 % of their citizens. In Guizhou Province 11.5 % of its population had attained a degree in higher learning.

The delegation broke up into small groups and interchanged with Chinese university counterparts and shared the following:

1. University professors involved in teaching students to become teachers emphasize competence in teaching and extensive research in ethnic education. The aim is to produce a well informed citizenry with emphasis on diversity and complexity. The ways they do this is by emphasizing civic education and responsibility. Since the Chinese government mandates nine years of compulsory education, their educational focus is on the primary and middle schools. For grades 3-6, Chinese educators highlight morality and social ethics and grades 5 and 6 stress Chinese and World History; the Social Studies curriculum pin points civic education. Chinese professors stressed community rather than individual progress. Accentuating moral and ethical concerns, Chinese professors placed attention on global understanding of issues such as pollution, war, poverty, and illiteracy, and how present wars exacerbate problems of pollution, war, poverty, and illiteracy.

2. These themes surface also through the spiritual leadership of Confucius whose tenets under gird the advancement toward social morality and Chinese self-identity within the wider world community. Chinese educators encourage social morality by spawning the advancement of social justice, protecting the environment, analyzing the effects of war and industry on polluting the universe, and developing a sense of civic responsibility. Absorbing historical significance and promoting the embodiment of truth as bars to measure self worth and self awareness, Chinese educators inculcate classroom learning with the crucial meaning of world citizenship and responsibility. Embracing Chinese history, tenets of Confucius, and ancestral heritages including the appreciation and understanding of multiple minority groups such as the Buyi, Dong, Miao (known as the Hmong in the west), Hui, Yao, and Zhuang peoples within the Chinese majority Han population, Chinese educators have developed the modern Chinese Social Science curricula. Visiting grades 3-6 and an Experimental High School #3 for gifted students, the modern Chinese approach was most apparent. For example, second graders had painted wooden spoons with masks on them as gifts to the delegation and along the walls of the high school, murals depicted east and west scientific discoveries and notables in those discoveries. Actualizing lasting global friendships, the result of these valuable encounters fostered continuing relationships with the United States that had begun in 1972. Expressing functional relationships among state, nation, and world communities addresses National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) standard 1.10, citizenship, and what it means to be a citizen of the world and the responsibilities encumbered by participatory actions.

For more information on China today, see

<http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/6.1/Weston.html> "Forum on China in World History" with Introduction by Timothy B. Weston and articles and reviews of interest to world history and China specialists.

Sheila Onuska, "China as a Subject for Study and Thought," History Matters! Vol. 21, Number 4 (May/June 2009): 3-8.

For Chinese history, see Jonathan Spence, Mao Zedong: A Life (New York: Penquin Books, 1999) and Spence's The Death of Woman Wang (New York" Penguin Books, 1979).