

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

Dear Family and Friends:

Greetings again from Huaihua, Hunan Province, China. Hard to believe that my time is more than half over. I leave here Friday of next week (April 7th) and there are still a few things to be done. I didn't mean to be so delayed in writing this second update letter but I have been so busy recently. I've been on three trips, finished four courses, added a fifth one, and have given three big presentations in the past week and a half. By the time I get back to the hotel where I am living, I am ready to just collapse so I am behind on my writing (and grading).

I'm at Huaihua University as part of the Chinese National Overseas Teacher Program. One of the key points to this program is the opportunity for us to visit some of the Chinese minority groups and to experience part of their different cultures. I had opportunity last week to visit the Dong village of Silu which is high up in the mountains near Xin Huang – about four hours from the University. After a hair-raising experience of lovely scenery – but washed-out roads, avalanche piles, and hair-pin turns through the mountains, we came to the “gate” of the village. Always impressive!

There didn't seem to be any roads or cars in the actual village so we parked and then walked the rest of the way. The fences designed by people of different cultures always fascinate me. I regretted, back in Guinea, not making more of an effort to get fence pictures as I toured around the country. The fences in Silu seemed to be made of stacked slate/rocks.

We found all of the townspeople at the Temple at the top of the hill and were introduced to the town elder before we were entertained by a Dong Opera production. Evidently, I was the first American to visit this village so we had many pictures taken together. A photographer from the local media took pictures and interviewed me for the government and local websites.

I have learned that the word “Opera” has a much broader meaning here than in western culture. Different Dong villages seem to have different interpretations – but this village's “opera” was a sing-song chanted-play accompanied by a drum, gong, and two pairs of cymbals. As we watched, some of the villagers fixed a fire for us and then brought out these ‘dough-y patties’ that looked like cheese [although I knew better – no cheese in China]. As they heated over the fire, the patties expanded and got toasted. Not a *lot* of flavor, but perfect when you're sitting outside, in the rain, freezing, and watching a Chinese opera production!



Entrance to the Silu Village – Dong minority



Houses (barns?) with amazing rock fences



Acted like cheese but made of sticky rice

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The production lasted about an hour with the band playing the part of the 'Greek chorus' and adding some musical interest. The Dong culture has only one rhythm pattern: Dong-dong-twee (read as 3 quarter notes followed by a quarter rest) and each of the repeating rhythm parts fit into that pattern. Although you wouldn't think that cymbals/gong/and drum would make an ideal ensemble, it really was rather fun to see and hear.

After the opera the village treated us to lunch at the government building. As always, the Chinese consider it a necessity to fix *way too much* food – and to serve rice alcohol (or stronger) with everything. A few dishes were so spicy that I couldn't eat them. I also recognized a few of the dishes – seemed to be more 'South China' than Dong specific. Most of the foods I enjoyed thoroughly. I have created a short-list of things that I just don't want to eat any more: chicken feet and pig's blood are at the top of that list!

In my remaining two weeks there are a couple of more trips, a bunch of African drum lessons, and one more big presentation. They have treated me like royalty here – and I've had a great time.

Janice Haworth



How do you decide who plays the cow in the show?



Masks hanging in the temple



Actors, in masks, from the performance



The Band.



Me and the cooks

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My favorite of the masks/costumes



Silu Village, near Gongxi town



It was SO COLD! The fire under the table was a blessing!



Terraced farming all through the area



Intestines taste pretty good - unless you know what you're eating



Considered an insult if there are not lots of leftovers