

Chengxian, Gansu Province, China

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你们好!

(*Nimen hao!* = Hello!)

Greetings friends!

Since we wrote last, we have been in Huzhou and then Nanjing, attending a conference, and getting to know the Amity Foundation and our Amity teaching colleagues. In the weeks we were in Huzhou together, we became friends with several of our Amity colleagues and we will keep in touch with them.



After months of preparation, we have now finally arrived at our final destination: the city of Chengxian, in Gansu Province, China!

The trip to Chengxian was a long one. We flew from Nanjing to Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province, and there we spent the night. Then the next day we drove down to Chengxian. The drive was very interesting, because Lanzhou looked like a mountainous desert, and as we drove, we could see the landscape changing and becoming greener and greener. When we arrived in Tianshui, which is about 2 hours from Chengxian, we loved the nature! It was green and lovely, with terraced hills and some mountains in the background with pine trees. Our drive was also interesting, shall we say, since our driver seemed to be half crazy...I don't know how many prayers I said as he honked and then pulled out to pass in areas where there was absolutely no way of seeing if he would meet a car or not...But thankfully, we arrived just fine, about 7 hours later.

We have now been here for about 10 days. Upon arriving to Chengxian, we were told that I would begin teaching on Monday, so about 36 hours later, and not Oral English, for which we have been preparing, but something else altogether: Extensive Reading. We are still not sure that this is the best way for the college to use us, so we will see if any changes are made in this, but for the first week of classes, we think it went well. We have about 40 students in each class, which is okay for China, (we know that some of our Amity colleagues have 90 per class!) but the classrooms are quite poor. There is a homemade wide podium for us to stand on by the blackboard, and we



have both wondered how long it will take until we fall through it! The acoustics in the rooms are not so good, and we can hear the other classes through the walls, so both of our voices have been very tired when we have come home. One good thing is that for this first semester, we are both done teaching by noon everyday, leaving time for planning of lessons, relaxing, and getting to know our area. We like to walk around campus and town.



View from a classroom

The city of Chengxian has about 20,000 people we have been told. This is very small for China! It is a poor city, but there is a mix of poorer houses and nice buildings (such as the one we are in). There are tiny shops all over the city, selling anything from engine parts to clothing, or small beverage shops, teashops, small eateries, etc. But at some places in town one can even see a tiny cornfield! The city is surrounded by green mountains in the background and very high hills

nearby, and there is a brownish stream running through the area. In general, our first impression of the city is that it feels like being in a town in the Wild West! Chengxian does not seem to have a big problem with pollution, although it is dusty. Unfortunately it does have a garbage problem; on a walk through town there can be garbage piled up, and it does not seem that they have a good system for handling garbage. We feel bad not being able to recycle anything here, and we hate contributing to the problem. One thing that does not contribute to the garbage problem here, however, is that babies and young children do not wear diapers. Instead, their pants are all split and there are bare bottoms everywhere!

Sometimes we feel like we are at the local fair, because of all of the activity all the time. In the evenings, for example, we often walk into town, which takes about 15 minutes. There are so many people out and about! Small fruit stands on old carts are always set up along the roads also, as are little metal wagons where men or women stand and grill corn on the cob. At one very large market in town they sell almost only fruits and vegetables, and some fat hens run around, pecking for dropped food. At another market right in town, with tents strung up, there are several tiny booths where people sit and prepare and serve food. At our favorite little booth a Muslim woman sells bread, a cross between flatbread and a pancake, which she makes right there over an open flame and on a frying pan, and which she then fills with potatoes and many other vegetables, and then wraps up like a pita. This pita “sandwich” is delicious and for 2 we pay about 30 cents for both of us, and it is quite filling!



Tomas getting a wrap sandwich

The weather was quite a change for us, after 2 months of subtropical heat in southern China. All of a sudden we have fall! And no fall clothes...but these are being sent from Sweden and should hopefully arrive within a few weeks. Luckily we have light jackets.

We have had some terrible rains since we arrived, and one night we had the worst thunderstorm we have ever experienced! Even Tomas was a little scared actually. The thunder was so loud, and even with thick curtains drawn and our eyes closed, the bright lightning woke us up as well! But since then we have had some better weather, which is good because we have solar-powered water right now.

Daily life so far consists of getting settled in our apartment, which we are very happy with. We even have a spare bedroom for guests! We have found two small supermarkets in town, but they really do not have that much that we want to buy. Things are much more sparse here than they were in bigger cities in the south. But all of the little restaurants we have tried so far have been very good, so even though it is very difficult to order, we end up getting some good and interesting things. Most days we eat lunch and maybe supper at one of the small, local places that serves noodles in soup, (hand-made noodles which are famous and delicious, from Gansu). This weekend we went to a nice, pleasant restaurant, where they first presented a “Tea List” (like a wine list, but different teas!) and we asked for some flower tea. The tea was delicious, and we drank it throughout the entire meal. It looked like there were chrysanthemums in the clear glass, but it was also a little sweet. Delicious! Then the nice waiter helped us take our order, which was a bit difficult shall we say, but he suggested a few vegetarian dishes and we said “okay!” not knowing at all what to expect. One dish looked just like KFC fried chicken! We asked them several times what it was, but they just kept saying it was not meat, not meat... it was good, but I was a bit hesitant, not knowing what it was, since I am a vegetarian. (When we returned home we looked up the word, and it turned out to be a type of mushroom!)



Carts at local market



Fresh food (do you see the pig?)

But getting used to daily life here means that whatever we manage to accomplish, feels like a minor success. (But it also means that handling daily necessities can be a bit tiring). Just going into the grocery store, and not understanding anything, means that purchasing even the simplest things becomes a challenge (unless we can see through the bag what is inside). Today, for example, we went into town and with the help of our phrasebook, we found salt for the first time. Finding snacks is a challenge (since Chinese people often eat noodles or rice as a snack). Today we found some dried fruit. We might have found fresh yoghurt as well today, which would be wonderful! We’ll see when we have breakfast tomorrow... The grocery stores are quite different than what we are used to also. They do not have a frozen foods section at all, and hardly any fresh food (people buy that at the markets).

Yesterday an old man was pushing a wooden cart, laden with green plants, something that I have wanted to find to brighten up the apartment. A small crowd quickly gathered around to watch as I tried to ask questions, and then chose two plants. We are getting used to constantly being stared at...



Unfortunately, we do not think that Chengxian has a Christian church (we have heard there is a Muslim mosque and a Buddhist temple). If we ever travel we will attend church, but otherwise, we will have to have devotions ourselves. So if anyone has any good tips, please send them our way! I had hoped there would have been a church with a church choir, but for now it will have to be the Stenback Family Choir...

Today when we walked up to our apartment building, a family was leaving. An older lady said to us, in English (which is very unusual) "Welcome to here!" and she looked so happy. We said, in English, "Thank you!" and then we said in English that we like it here, but we could see that they didn't understand, so I said it in Chinese, and they looked very happy. But as we walked on, we both wondered: when was the last time, either in Sweden or in the U.S., we tried to welcome a foreigner or a new immigrant to our home area, and even attempted it in their language? What a nice gesture by that lady!

That is all for this time. We hope you are well. Also, we love hearing from people back home, so please e-mail or write to us! Please print the following address if you wish to write to us, and tape it onto a letter, so that both the English and Chinese are included.

再见!

(Zaijian! = Goodbye!)

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