

Longzhou, Guangxi Province, China  
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Dear friends, 你们好!

This past month has been a busy time of everything from getting settled in our new school and area, to a flood, to interesting travels. While most of our family and friends from the US and Sweden have been either lamenting or loving your fall weather, here in southern Guangxi the heat continues! It is still about 90 (32 C). Teaching in the heat was difficult at first. Several days in a row when Tomas came home from class, the bottoms of his pants were soaked. I asked him what he had walked through, but he didn't know. Later he realized that it was his own sweat! Needless to say, we are beginning to look forward to a little cooler weather.

Now that we are in our second month in Longzhou, we are starting to feel more settled. Having already lived in China for two years, I don't think we were really expecting our lives in southern Guangxi to be very different from our lives in Gansu, but it has actually been quite an adjustment. China is a big country with similarities, but also regional differences. The local language is Cantonese, rather than a dialect of Mandarin. So far we miss Gansu's food; here in Guangxi we eat rice every day, whereas in Gansu we enjoyed the northern wheat-based noodles and dumplings. The climate is unlike anything we have ever lived in before. Now after several weeks, we are starting to feel more at home in the area. It helps that we have gotten our apartment in order now (you can watch a new video of our apartment on our web page). The school bought us a small toaster oven, so now we can bake bread, since people here do not eat any wheat bread at all. We have bought bikes, so now we can get out and explore the area a little more. We have also started studying Chinese again with two new tutors, and we have found and attended the local church, and we feel very welcomed by the small, yet enthusiastic church congregation.



Teaching has been going well—we enjoy getting to know our new students and teacher colleagues. People here are extremely friendly and excited to see us. Whenever we walk on campus, people call out greetings to us. It is a bit surreal actually! (My dad joked, “You know it won't be like this when you get home again in the future...”) Also, here people think that we are tall! Last week in a restaurant, a

woman asked me, “How can you be so tall if you don’t eat meat?” (At 5’4”, we thought that was hilarious!)



A few weeks ago there was a typhoon to the east of us that brought heavy rains. One evening we walked by the river, when to our surprise we saw that it was flooding over the banks! We asked a man there and he said that in one day, the river had risen over 8.5 meters! The next day when we awoke, the water was rushing onto the campus. As the floodwaters came so quickly, while people were sleeping, the students quickly became trapped in their buildings. Unable to go down the water-filled stairwells, and trapped behind the metal bars of the windows, the frightened students were forced to await rescue by the local fire department. (I was praying that a more major crisis would not happen while they were all trapped behind bars, such as a fire). Once everyone was rescued, we were worried about all of the people wandering around so near the

floodwaters. Most people here cannot swim, and falling into 6 feet of water could be deadly. At night the school sectioned off areas, so that people would not unwittingly fall into water in the dark.

Our apartment is on high ground, so the water never hit our building. But the stench from the bathrooms, caused by the flood, (no amount of incense could cover it!) and since we had no electricity for 36 hours in the heat, prompted us to leave the school. We knew everyone was safe, and since the flood came right before our October Holiday, we were actually going to leave then anyway.



First, we joined the throngs of Chinese tourists in Guilin, the touristy but drab city that is the gateway to the famous karst Guangxi mountains. From Guilin we took a tourist river boat to Yangshuo, which is a nice city but it was totally overcrowded! The National Day Holiday is one of only two times Chinese people have time to travel so there were people everywhere. Walking around the city and shopping were difficult, as was finding any peaceful countryside roads to

bike on, as we had planned. Although we did find some beautiful scenery, and enjoyed some good food, in general the traffic and noise of the holiday week made it difficult for us to have a very good Guilin or Yangshuo experience.



After Yangshuo, we traveled north to the famous Dragon's Backbone Rice Terraces area, and a tiny, picturesque mountain village called Ping'an. Although it was also the peak season there, the village is so remote and since it can only be reached by first driving on a curvy mountain road and then also walking on narrow paths (no cars), we were able to enjoy two quiet and fascinating days there. China has 56 ethnic groups, 55 minority groups and then the Han majority group, and several of those ethnic

groups can be found in Guangxi. Ping'an has many Zhuang and Yao minority people, and although it is certainly exaggerated for tourists' benefit, it is a colorful and unique place. The Yao minority women are especially interesting, with their colorful hand-woven clothing and their long hair. The Yao women traditionally only cut their hair twice in their lives, so many women that we saw had masses (often 2 meters!) of shiny black hair wound atop their heads. One day a local Yao woman guided us on a long walk (15 km) from Ping'an to another mountain village. For seven hours we hiked through beautifully golden terraced rice paddies on our way to our final destination. Along the way we stopped at our guide's home, a traditional wooden house with some livestock living on the ground floor, and our guide's family living on the second. She showed us how the floor was covered in dried corn, and when it was time to feed the pig below, she simply lifted a floorboard and pushed down some food to it! (See a video of this trip and her home on our web page).



It was very interesting to walk with our guide and ask questions. For example, she told us that it takes her a full hour to wash her hair, and when she does, she uses the water left after boiling rice as a kind hair rinse. She also told us about hardships in her life; her husband had passed away, so she was alone supporting her two teenaged children and elderly mother, and she did this through her little shop, acting as a local guide, and through farming her rice paddy. We found it a little disturbing to hear what kinds of things some tourists apparently pay for, however; almost right away when we met her, she asked us if we wanted to pay 50 RMB extra to watch her wash her hair! But from what we have understood, this traditional life is disappearing as the society develops more and more. I have a Yao minority student in a class, and I asked about her hair. She cuts her hair, and her mother does as well, but she told me that her grandmother has the traditional Yao long hair.



Ethnic minorities in China are a source of pride for the Chinese, but sometimes we find that we do not understand some tendencies here. For example, this week we were asked to “star” in a promotional short film of the school. We ended up posing like we were chatting amongst a large group of students, all dressed in different minority costumes. When we asked these students questions about which minority group they belonged to, they responded, “No, I am Han Chinese” (the majority group in China). We found it a little sad that the school did not find and highlight actual minority students (we have several in each of our classes), but apparently they thought that the appearance of minorities was good enough.



The school has an English Center that was created a few years ago by previous former foreign teachers. Student volunteers run the room, and it has a TV and DVD-player with some English movies, and lots of books, but most are much too difficult for the students. We have visited the room and offered our help. Based on our positive experiences with helping to create the Book Nook in Chengxian, we would like to help the English Center, using several Book Nook ideas. We have already encouraged the volunteers to create an “English Only” rule, and we would like to help them procure some better English reading materials as well. We have already kindly received donations from the Fair Stand through Concordia Church in Fertile, MN, and through the local Church of Sweden, Dala-Järna, Sweden, church, and we plan on using this money to purchase books for the room. Therefore, if you would like to help support the English Center by sending books or magazines, please use the address label on our web page. In the Book Nook many of the most popular books include Chicken Soup for the Soul, fairy tales, the Boxcar Children, simple biographies, etc. Also, I am happy to report that we have heard through students that the Book Nook in Chengxian is continuing through student librarians and that feels wonderful for us.

This week we look forward to our first visitors, from the Church of Sweden, and next month we are especially excited that my dad and Tomas’s parents will be coming.

Please visit our web page for new videos and photos, and please keep in touch! As always, we cannot stress enough how much we love hearing from people from home, and how much your greetings and prayers mean to us.

再见! (*Zaijian!* = Goodbye!)

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