

Blog 48 Discover China Trip Week (part one)

“Everyone, hurry up!! Our train’s going to leave without us!” our head teacher Ms. Weatherly called out. Everyone was lugging their bags behind them, lurching it up and leaping onto the train. It had only been a month since the end of summer yet we were leaving Nanjing once again. Everyone was ecstatic for their second official middle school Discover China trip week. This year, the seventh graders took a train to Shandong province. We toured three different cities (Taian, Jinan and Qufu) and stayed at the peak of Tai mountain for the last night. As my last trip week with my friends from NIS, I really wanted to just grab every chance and thoroughly enjoy it. Ultimately, I think I truly did reach that ideality.



The day after we arrived, we visited a local school, planning to teach some sixth grade students English. Unfortunately, we failed. Though I have to admit, it did fail pretty awesomely. Our attempt to teach them the Months of the Year Macarena Dance went lightning fast. They knew *every* word, even the spelling and pronunciations! When we took out our fruits and animals posters we prepared at school before trip week and I swear I saw their eyes light up with familiarity. They could recognize them all, shouting each and every word out in unison. Those English mega-minds left us stunned and speechless. Our teachers visited this school annually with each seventh grade group for trip week. They probably knew of these kids’ mastery English but only kept their mouths sealed for us to see for ourselves.



Since their English was already of such high superiority, we decided to take them out and play with them. We were told by the teachers that these students didn't have much free time to just play their hearts out, so we made sure that's exactly what we gave them within the limited amount of time we had. Afterwards, it was a game of tug-of-war that bursted my adrenaline out'a the roof. I enjoyed the feeling of just letting myself sink in the shouts of encouragements and releasing my strength and everything within me into tugging the rope. The late afternoon sun was like an orange paint drop in the hazy pollution-filled sky above and beating down on our backs, but the heat didn't bother us a bit. I could feel my entire face scrunching up like a wrinkled napkin, my toes crushed up against the front of my sneakers and the gravel beneath my feet grinding and shifting, stuck under the weight and pressure of the pull. Although we were of the same age group, when our sizes were compared, most of their students were in the petite range while most of the students from our school were more of an "XL"! In the end, NIS had won most of the games but with a chest full of good sportsmanship, everyone was beaming, patting each other on the back, foreheads gleaming with well spent beads of sweat.



At that school, the atmosphere was much different from ours. In our school, kids normally had the freedom to slouch back in their chairs, prop their heads on their hands, or even bang their heads on the desk. But at the school we visited, I observed that none of that was displayed at all. The students sat, stood, raised their hand and spoke with intense military standard. Everyone sat with their backs straight, raising their hands straight as a flagpole. When the school bell rang with a shrill, all the students stood at the same time and marched out the room into the courtyard. We were organized into many lines, everyone staring directly at the head straight in front of their eyes, all preparing themselves for a good morning exercise (though we were well on our way into the afternoon). A man climbed onto the roof of the building and started blasting this loud, piercing music. I was guessing that in order to abide by our "foreign taste" in music, they purposely chose to play that heavy metal rock that they did instead of their regular morning exercise music. It was practiced so meticulously, most of us couldn't keep up. Some of the trouble-making boys even ended up enthusiastically dancing the disco instead.

When I told my mom about our little visit over the phone on that night, all I could hear from her was "mm, mmm, yep, mmm. Wow, it's been decades and the schools haven't even changed that much."

