

I had a very privileged stay in Hangzhou: A grove of small banana trees led the way to my generous host family, and next to it was a distributary of the Grand Canal leading to Beijing. Every evening I enjoyed a walk near that river while recapitulating all the new Chinese words I had learned that day. I am really grateful towards my host family that they offered me such a wonderful stay, with an own room and own bath room, and we were able to enjoy many activities together where I got to know many of her Chinese friends.

The classes were small and of a very high quality – we did not only learn the language, but we also learned a lot about Chinese culture; not only about Chinese everyday culture, but also about more or less popular Confucian quotations and about splendid anecdotes from two thousand years ago. The classes made visible a historical path reaching into the ancient times, which taught us how to spot the continuities and discontinuities in Chinese history. At the same time, my vocabulary increased at least four- or fivefold. My initial goal was to pass the HSK 3-language test once I came back to my home country in Austria; that seems too easy to me now. The classes were so good that I unexpectedly seem to be much closer to the higher level of HSK 4.

I was especially fond of Chinese poetry. Everyone I met was able to recite at least a few of them – what a wonderful world of a sensual emotions and precise, lofty language! They were visible on many aesthetic calligraphies in public spaces. During my walks around the flowery surroundings of the West Lake I often could not help but translate some of those poems so that I can spread them to my friends back home.

My stay in Hangzhou deepened my understanding of Chinese everyday life. I learned that many of the not so good stereotypes that Westerners perceive of the Chinese people may have a true core until a certain extent; but those stereotypes completely obfuscate the wonderful goodwill of the Chinese people who were all of an extremely kind-hearted nature, always contending for understanding the other, always eager to make the other feel well and always desiring to convey the beautiful aspects of their culture.

My stay made me love China and the Chinese people; but at the same time, my uneasiness about certain aspects – mostly the detours in the domain of political history – were also intensified since I could vividly experience them every day for almost two months. But I will now naturally incline to defend the beauty of Chinese culture, whenever there is a chance to do so. And I have

enough opportunities to act in such a way since I have quite an amount of Japanese friends and acquaintances who are naturally opposed to China for political reasons. The background of their opposition is mostly a one-sided character of Japanese newspapers which are always agitating against China. But I made my Japanese mother visit Hangzhou for a few days, and she could not believe how generous and great China and its people are. This is a first step in conciliating two cultures which are, unfortunately, rather inclined to feel hostile towards each other.

To my European friends I will mostly show the poetry which I translated for them. The reactions I have received so far were all encouraging since everyone of my friends – most of them love literature and arts – did not know that such a wide, sensual beauty of poetry existed in an „exotic“ culture from the, say, 8th century. They may serve as an inspiration to many of my artistic friends, and as a bridge to understand Asia to many of my politically or diplomatically active acquaintances.

I am especially grateful towards AMBergh and the scholarship „Building Bridges“ - without your service and support I would not have been able to have such an unique experience full of vivid beauty, which opened a new world and mindset to me. My intensified love for the language, culture, poetry and people of China already indicate a lasting change in my personality and interests. Thank you, thank you so much - !

Andreas Pacher 10 November 2014 from Vienna