

A trip to Lanxi

New Year's holiday in the countryside

Hunan Province

12/31/2010 - 1/1/11

(Dark, heavily overcast days - a snowstorm was on the way.)

One of graduate students in my class, Chen Tao, invited me to his home in the countryside for the New Year's holiday.

His home is in a small town called Lanxi ('lon-see'), about a 2-hour drive south of Changsha.

Wasn't sure what to expect other than the fact that no one would speak English.

But, wow!...did I get educated!



*Lanxi is located on a part of the Xiang Jiang (jiang = river).
Xiang Jiang goes right through the middle of Changsha.*



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Until about 10 years ago, when a bridge was finally built, this was the only way to get from one side of town to the other

-----Some history-----

In the 1950s, China was a feudal-based land, with many rich landowners. Chen Tao's grandfather owned 10s of thousands of acres of land.

But the peasants barely survived.

During the peasant uprising and eventual Communist takeover, grandfather was branded a traitor and treated poorly.

*The land was divided up.
Grandfather's health suffered severely.
Grandmother begged and somehow survived.
The 5 sons and 2 daughters were not allowed
to get an education.*

----More of the story----

But, by being smart, and working very hard, Chen Tao's father was able to start a business, which slowly grew until he now owns four rice processing plants.

His Lanxi plant processes about 175,000 lbs of rice/day, removing the hulls, polishing the rice, and loading sacks.

His numerous large warehouses are filled 35 ft high with sacks of rice to be processed.

Chen Tao's mother and uncle run a building supply business.



*View of the rear of Chen Tao's home (white)
from his uncle's home and business.*



The vegetable gardens at the rear of Chen Tao's home



Giant open trucks are piled 20 ft high with sacks of rice hulls from the processing plants to be hauled away.

Some of the hulls are charred and used for fertilizing the vegetable gardens



*The main room in Chen Tao's home.
In stark contrast to the outside of their home,
the interior is absolutely spotless!*

*(Chen Tao kept apologizing for the trash
and filth in the streets and shops.)*



*The object at far right is a new heater/airconditioner....their first one.
(no furnaces or central heating in Hunan)*

*But this heater barely takes the chill out of the room -
the masonry construction drains all the heat away.*



*The main heat source, in front of the sofa, is a long box with a quartz electric heater in it.
(can purchase these at Walmart)*

People place their feet on wooden slats in the heater, and cover the box, feet, and legs with a substantial comforter.



The other end of the main room

Chen Tao is standing near their mah jong/cards table



The master bedroom



Another bedroom



*Looks like an eating area -
but rarely used as such.*

*Cooking and eating done in Chen Tao's uncle's
home in a tiny kitchen and a small eating area.*

These rooms are all on the third floor of the house.

The second floor is empty!

*And the first floor is completely stuffed with
bags of rice to be processed.*

*The higher the living quarters,
the more prestigious the family.*



*Behind the Chen family gardens - a lotus pond.
During much of the year, fast-growing lotus
fills the pond to overflowing.*

*To harvest, one wades into the pond
and digs the lotus roots out by hand.*



Behind the Chen family gardens - a fish farm pond.



Lanxi's hospital (white)



Typical farm outside of Lanxi



After Saturday breakfast, we went to a tiny set of buildings quite a way outside of Lanxi in the middle of some farm fields to visit Chen Tao's grandmother.

She doesn't like the 'city life'.



Grandmother's living area

We spent the morning sitting close to a large round metal dish in grandmother's living quarters wherein scrap bamboo and other items were burned for warmth (of a sort).

Grandmother lives to prepare meals for her family and other visitors, and she prepared one of the best meals I've had here!



*After lunch -
in front of grandmother's little abode.*



*After lunch -
farmer uncle, a cousin, Chen Tao, his father
And who is the one with biggest, happiest smile?*

*You guessed it!....the 75-year-old woman that
raised her big family in poverty conditions!*

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