

Chengdu, China Summer 2013 Journal – Honors Project #3

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Entry 5/22/2013

I'm sitting at my gate for the flight from San Francisco to Hong Kong as I write this entry. I'm a little amused and a bit worried that I'm the only one sitting here. Yeah, my flight leaves in four hours, but I figured that some people would be here as early as me.

I blame the weather. Seriously, the storm system that spawned those tornados in Oklahoma delayed flights into and out of Chicago O'Hare for at least three hours. My flight from Grand Rapids to Chicago was supposed to leave at 12:10pm and ended up leaving at 3:30pm. I missed my connecting flight to San Francisco, but I was able to get on the next plane and get a window seat.

During the flight to SFO, there was some in-flight entertainment in the form of *Oz: The Great and Powerful*. I didn't watch it at first, preferring to doze and listen to music. I started watching it at about the halfway point (I hadn't seen it before so this is just a guess) and watched it to the end. It was a decent movie from what I saw. I also saw an episode of *Community* for the first time; it was somewhat amusing.

The SFO airport is interesting to say the least. The international airport is quite a ways away from where I got in. There are conveyor belt walkways and monorails. The gates (in my area at least) are a level below everything else. The food is quite expensive, but that's sort of expected in an airport. For dinner, I bought a tuna sandwich, a cup of fresh fruit, and a bottle of Sierra Mist for \$16 (crazy!).

That's all for now.

Entry 5/25/2013

The Flight

Well, the flight from San Francisco to Hong Kong had both surprising and unsurprising elements. The unsurprising elements were that the flight was extremely long and uncomfortable. The surprising elements were that the meals (breakfast and supper) were really good and that each seat had its own LCD screen on which you could watch movies, TV shows, and play games.

The flight was about 14 hours long, but felt like it went on forever. I slept a small amount (maybe 3-4 hours) after they fed us supper (at 2-ish in the morning!). For supper I had some kind of beef with a nice sauce, rice, an interesting vegetable I think was called chok poy, ice cream, and water. After sleeping, I played some chess and solitaire until I discovered that "The

Fellowship of the Ring” was available to watch. After those 3 hours were over, I discovered that they (the airline) had the sixth season of “The Big Bang Theory” of which I was only able to watch 6-7 episodes before we landed in Hong Kong.

I noted in my previous entry that no one else was waiting at the gate and so hadn’t met any other USAC students. I did meet some other USAC people before the flight: students (boy and girl) going to Shanghai and five guys (including myself) going to Chengdu. Once we landed in Hong Kong, four of us (the fifth disappeared for a while) just wandered around and hung out until we knew where our Chengdu gate was.

Hong Kong Airport

If not for all of the Chinese and Chinese writing on the signs, I would swear that we were in an airport in the United States. It kind of looked like the San Fran airport. We (the four of us) stopped at a McCafe and two of us (Jesse and I) bought some water. It cost something like 15 Hong Kong dollars which translated to 3 US dollars. It was interesting; we could pay in US dollars, but they would give us change in Hong Kong dollars. Needless to say, I now have some neat souvenirs.

The four of us wandered around the airport while waiting for our gate number to be announced on the displays. We talked while waiting and I learned the names of Evan, a mechanical engineering major; Gabe, a philosophy and religion major; and Jesse, an English major.

The flight to Chengdu was much shorter than the one to Hong Kong; this flight was only 2.5 hours. They gave us a “snack” but it looked more like a small meal.

Chengdu Airport

The airplane we were on was definitely your standard modern-ish plane, but the airport itself gave off a developing country vibe. At this point, there were about eight of us and we all shared doubts that our checked bags had gotten to Chengdu with us. We needn’t have worried, though, because all of our bags showed up. Getting through customs/immigration was really easy which was unexpected.

Wentao Song, the USAC on-site program director, was there to meet us, as well as some Chinese girls from the Southwest University for Nationalities who volunteered to help us go shopping later in the day.

The Dorm

Everyone, regardless of homestay, stayed in the dorm the first night (Friday) in Chengdu. I'm very glad that I decided to stick with the homestay because the dorm room I was given for the night is not what I expected. Michigan Tech's dorms are about ten times better. [Note: upon reflection during the second session, I concluded that the dorm rooms are actually a lot better than Tech's dorm rooms in a couple aspects (though in one very important aspect the Chinese dorm room is much, much worse), the major improvement being that they are single rooms. The major detriment was that the Internet speed is horrendously slow.]

Tibetan Cuisine and Jet Lag

The night we arrived in Chengdu a few of the USAC students from the spring semester took us to a Tibetan restaurant. The one who ordered overestimated how hungry we all were and we ended up with twice as much food as we could eat.

While waiting for the food to be served, several of us were trying hard not to give in to the jet lag and fall asleep. At that moment, I had probably been awake for at least 27 hours (rough estimate). I in particular was really feeling the effects of jet lag. One of the girls in the program commented the next morning that I had looked ready to faceplant into one of the meat pies.

The food was pretty good! I don't have any pictures, unfortunately. There were meat "pies" (they looked more like thick quesadillas) and dumplings.完了

Meeting My Host Parents

I met my host parents and host brother on Saturday afternoon after orientation in the USAC office. Before I met them I learned that I would be staying with them for the first five weeks. While my host mom talked with Wentao, my host dad told me the four tones of Chinese and then told me everyone's names. My host dad is Wang Wei, age 45 and a business professor; my host mom is Song Qing, age lower 30s and who works at a bank; and my host brother Richard (his Chinese name is Mumu), age 6. Thankfully my host family speaks a decent bit of English; Song Qing's English is better than Wang Wei's English. After speaking with Wentao, they drove me (nice car) to my host home which is located in a gated community near the second ring of Chengdu. When we got home, they got me all settled into my room which was quite nice, much

homier than the dorm (as it should be). Later on we had dinner and I gave them my gift to them. (Note: It's customary to give a gift in Chinese culture when you stay with someone.) My gift was an English alphabet book of things specific to Michigan. I read this book to Richard later that night and several times in the weeks that followed.

My host parents hosted me because they wanted Richard's English speaking ability to be developed further (though he already knows more English than a six year old living in America!). To this end, I read at least a partial book to Richard every night I stayed with my host family.

People's Park, Tianfu Square, and More - June 2, 2013

Today Eli (a girl in the same program), Lulu and Yueyue (both Chinese girls who go to the university), and I explored a bit of the city center. We met at the east gate of the university at 9am and then headed north to People's Park. Unfortunately, my camera's battery died as we entered the park. So I don't have any pictures (an incentive to go again).

The park was a welcome change of scenery from the concrete jungle. The entrance led to a large rock outcropping that subsequently led to a small lake. Some people were enjoying the lake in the form of paddleboats and motorboats. Eli and I declined to opt-in to this enjoyment because we didn't want to risk the possibility of falling in and soaking our electronics.

There were a couple tea "houses" (not really houses since they were outside) as well as a small amusement park for kids. In one part of the park, there is a square (really a circle, but performs the function of a square) where people hang out, play poker and majong, and practice martial arts. Of those practicing martial arts, about half were doing Tai Chi. The other half were practicing with blades on ropes (think ball and chain, but with blades).

After People's Park, we checked out Tianfu Square which wasn't very exciting (today). It's pretty much your average large square, but with a giant Mao statue pointing south. Next we went to Chunsi Lu which is a road with a ton of nice shops and food vendors. While there, we were stopped by several Chinese college students who wanted to take a picture of me and Eli holding their sign. They're part of an animal rights group and the sign said something to the effect of "Save the homeless animals." They also wanted us to say a line or two in English on camera. I said something like "Save the homeless animals. Adopt from a shelter." They thanked us and gave us several postcards with, presumably, homeless animals on them.

Next we checked out more of Chengdu's shopping district. We went to several really, really nice multiple-story (one of them was five floors) malls as well as some not-so-nice malls (the kind where you need to watch your pockets). These lower-class malls were interesting; there were tons of tiny stores all jammed together. Eli had a great time identifying all the knockoffs of famous brands.

During a lull in the window-shopping, we ate lunch at a small restaurant called "Ego". I had a bowl of rice and a plate of twice-cooked pork (it was okay). Later on in one of the nicer malls, we stopped at a Dairy Queen (now I've seen a Dairy Queen, a McDonalds, a Pizza Hut, and a Subway). Eli was adventurous and got a green tea Blizzard; I was a bit tired of being adventurous and so went with the familiar Oreo Blizzard. Hey, you know Dairy Queen's Blizzard slogan "Served upside-down...or it's free!"? The Chinese guys working there actually served every single one upside-down! So those people reading this should go to their local Dairy Queen and ask the workers to serve Blizzards upside-down.

At about 3:30pm we decided to call it a day and head for home. When I get home, my host dad (Wang Wei) tells me that I'm invited to go to my host brother's (Mumu or Richard) classmate's birthday party with him, my host mom (Song Qing), and Mumu. This may seem odd, but it made sense once I learned that the classmate's mom is the one who introduced my host family to USAC (she also taught Chinese for USAC eight-ish years ago). The main reason my host dad wanted me to go was because there was a lot of food, maybe too much. There were some...interesting dishes there. Apparently chicken feet is a popular dish in China. At one point during the meal, Song Qing drops a bit of meat in my bowl and says it's a type of fish. The classmate's mom leans over and says that it's eel. Inwardly I grimace, but outwardly I pick it up with my chopsticks and eat it (it was okay). Right after, Wang Wei drops another type of meat in my bowl and says that it's rabbit. Instantly my mind flashes back to the night before: After eating dinner at a nice restaurant in celebration of kids' day, we went to the Yin Du garden square (Yin Du garden is the complex where they live). I remember seeing a white rabbit in a cage being held by some children in the square. I'm wondering if that rabbit is the same rabbit that was being served to me now (the host lives in the same complex). Not wanting to offend anyone, I eat the rabbit meat (it was decent).

My Chinese Name

I was pleased to find out that my name translates almost perfectly! My Chinese name is 比萨威廉 (Bìsà Wēilián), which is William Pisa in English. [My name isn't a very good Chinese name apparently.]

完了

Trip to Xi'an - June 28, 2013

The train ride from Chengdu to Xi'an was pretty interesting. The duration of the ride was 16 hours so we left Chengdu Friday night (6/28/2013) at 9:15pm. I found it interesting that nearly all of the people who were staying for session 2 were in the same car while everyone only staying for session 1 were in another car. We were in a hard sleeper car, which is pretty much exactly what it sounds like (hard beds that you sleep in). All of us were assigned top sleepers so it was a bit difficult (and annoying) to get to the beds. We met some Chinese college students who were going home to Xi'an for summer vacation. Among them were Anna, an English major, and Gao, a fan of American football. Stephen (one of my classmates) amazed Anna with a few magic card tricks and Steve (another classmate) talked sports with Gao. I bought a small container of lychee for ¥15 and shared with those around me.

When the lights went out at about 11pm, I went up to my bunk and listened to music until about 12:30am at which point I decided to attempt sleeping. I didn't sleep very well which is what I expected given the hard sleeper. I had a blanket and a pillow and the A/C was pretty close (set in the ceiling between the top bunks) so I wasn't burning up. But my backpack was up behind my head so my feet were off the end of the bed if I straightened out and the bed was essentially a plank of wood securely bolted to the wall. I wasn't very comfortable. When I got up in the morning, it was light out and we were passing through a lush green mountain chain. It was quite the sight!

When we arrived in Xi'an, Andrew's wealthy Chinese aunt (by marriage) met us at the train station. She had a couple drivers take some of us to our hostel. Those of us who knew for sure which hostel we were staying at (I still haven't forgiven them for not sharing the information with everyone) went there directly without help from the aunt and so the rest of us arrived at the wrong hostel. After 15 minutes of calling the other group and discussing, we (or rather the aunt) figured out where we needed to go.

I'm told that the hostel we ended up staying at was pretty much the best in Xi'an. It was the first hostel I have ever stayed at so I really didn't know what to expect. It was quite nice. Anyway, when we first got there we checked out our rooms and dropped off our things. I was alarmed to find that possibly two people not part of our group would be staying in one of our two rooms. I was under the impression that we would have two rooms of just USAC kids. I went down to the front desk and found that only one other person would be in that room. That person turned out to be a lovely Chinese girl whose English name was Debbie. [I still picked up a lock for a locker in my room to be safe, though.]

After we dropped off and secured our things in our rooms, the aunt took us out to lunch (a nice lunch with ~9 dishes). I ended up sitting at a table with Andrew, Steve, the aunt, and the two drivers. At one point, one of the drivers gets each of us laowai a beer. I looked at Steve and was like "ummm..." and he said that I had to drink it to be polite and because the aunt was the host. It was branded "Hans" and was ~600 mL and had ~4% alcohol. I ended up drinking the whole thing; it was decent-tasting. Both Andrew and Steve said it was the best beer they had had while in China. [Turns out the beer was made in China by a German company.]

After lunch, the aunt dropped us off at the Big Wild Goose Pagoda museum and told us that she would meet us at 7am the next morning for breakfast and the Terracotta Warriors. We explored the museum for about an hour and a half. In that time, Emily, Eli, and I, as well as a few others, climbed to the top of the pagoda. Each of the four windows at the top offered a great view of the city. After the pagoda, we went to the fountain next to the pagoda. It is the largest musical fountain square in Asia. We watched the show when it started at 6pm until it end at ~6:20pm. More than a few of us got wet. It was pretty refreshing!

We took a bus back to the hostel which is located near the south gate of the Xi'an wall. [Fun fact: This is the only example of a complete wall dating back to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (1368 CE).] I'm sure the locals on the bus had an amusing time watching the 11 laowai.

Once we got back to the hostel we decided that would meet for dinner in an hour or two. I decided that that would be a good time to attempt to use the squat-style toilet (or as it shall forever be known from here on - "squatty"). That attempt and the following two attempts were in vain. I just couldn't go! The position was too unfamiliar (I don't think I was even squatting properly). That was the first time I had to use a squatty in my five weeks living in China. I went to dinner feeling uncomfortable. We wandered around for a while, bickering about where to eat until someone just decided that we would eat at the restaurant right in front of us. It was

interesting. One of the waitresses gave each of us a bowl and a thick round (kind of like a pancake) "loaf" of bread and instructed us to rip the bread into small pieces. She then took our bowls and filled it with a form of noodle-meat soup. It was pretty good and cost about ¥15 which is \$2.50 (at the Summer 2013 exchange rate of 1 USD = ¥6).

After dinner, Andrew, Emily, Eli, Stephen, and I went exploring to find an Italian gelato place. While exploring we came across a bootleg TV series DVD vendor. Stephen discovered that they were selling the full ~10 seasons of "Friends" for ¥30 and he was trying to haggle the price lower. I could tell that the vendor wasn't going to go lower (combined with my annoyance of not being able to void my bowels) so I snapped and said "Dude, it's ¥30! That's about \$5 back home. Just buy the damn thing!". The others weren't too happy with me at that point. Once we moved on (Stephen did end up buying it for ¥30) Andrew asked what my problem was and I revealed that I was having a hard time with the squatty. That revelation attracted some words of advice. I made the mistake of calling the squatty archaic which drew the ire of both Andrew and Eli. I promised them that I would try using it again. We ended up reaching the gelato place as it closed so were out of luck. We still wanted ice cream and luckily we had seen a Dairy Queen during our search, so we went to Dairy Queen. I got a medium Oreo Blizzard (quite adventurous, I know). Afterwards we walked back to the hostel. I tried once more to use the squatty, but I failed. I went to bed.

The next morning (Sunday) I woke up before 6:30am to give the squatty another go. Like the four preceding it, the fifth attempt resulted in failure. These five failed attempts set my mood for the morning. When the aunt met us at 7am, we learned that since the South Korean president was in town, the Terracotta Warriors would not open until 12pm. This news greatly increased my annoyance because I was banking on the Terracotta museum having at least one Western toilet (or Westie). [The Jinsha museum in Chengdu had one and that is nowhere near as famous as the Terracotta museum.] Instead of going to Terracotta in the morning as initially planned, we went to some hot springs located within a half hour's drive of Terracotta. The aunt dropped us off and told us that she would meet us at 12pm outside the main gate. We bought our tickets (about ¥80 each) and went in. [The Huaqing Hot Springs was a pleasure palace during the Tang Dynasty and later on the living quarters of General Chiang Kai-shek during the Chinese Civil War.]

As we entered the palace, someone said that they wanted to climb the mountain (there's a small mountain called Lishan behind Huaqing) and asked if anyone wanted to join them. I said "You go climb it. I am NOT climbing it." No one climbed it (not because of me, though). We walked around a bit then stopped at a shady spot. A couple others weren't feeling their best either and

Andrew asked each of us in turn what our problem was. I said: "I can't poop! I've tried on five separate occasions, but I can't go! I can't use a squatty; I need a Westie!" He proceeded to tell me that it was all in my head; that it was a mindset issue. (Andrew loves the squatty.) Eli leapt to my defense and said that it couldn't be just a mindset issue if I had tried five different times.

We walked around some more and eventually Raul told me that he thought he saw a Westie in a bathroom nearby. He gave me directions and off I went. When I reached the men's side of the bathroom, lo and behold! There was a Westie! The stall was pretty dirty and the toilet seat was marginally cleaner. There wasn't any toilet paper (common in China), but I brought a pack of tissues. I used one tissue to "clean" the seat and then sat down. The frustrating inability to defecate that plagued me in the squatty vanished. It was glorious! Well, except when some guy started opening the door and I yelled "hey". [The lock on the door was broken.] After squeezing out a decent-sized log, I decided that I might be able to, if need be, wait until arriving at the hotel in Beijing Monday afternoon to finish. When I left the bathroom, I almost felt like a new person. I still wasn't at 100%, but I was much happier.

The aunt took us to lunch and I ended up drinking another Hans. [I told Jesse that I would drink the beer that was passed to him if he really didn't want it. He had gone out drinking the night before and wasn't feeling too great.] After lunch we went to the Terracotta Warriors museum. It was absolutely amazing! Life-size unique soldiers and horses over 2,000 years old (221 BCE) are quite breathtaking. Stephen, Raul, Eli, and I walked around each pit (three pits have been excavated so far) together. Stephen found a volunteer tour guide who offered to give us a five minute tour of pit 1. She was very interesting. She had green eyes, a long nose, and a darker skin tone than most Chinese. She said that she was full-Chinese, but I'm guessing that she meant Chinese as in both parents from China because there is no way she was Han (the ethnic group that makes up 90% of Chinese people).

After Terracotta, the aunt drove us back to the hostel and we thanked her for everything. Someone told me that there was a Westie in the 1st floor restroom of the hostel so of course I had to see it for myself. They weren't lying. Needless to say, I utilized that Westie several times during the remainder of my stay at the hostel. The reason why I wrote so much about my toilet problems is because those problems were my culture shock. For five weeks I was on the honeymoon train and then a toilet derails me. I have since accepted that other perspectives on defecation exist and are just as valid as my perspective. As long as there is a Westie, I'm happy.

That night around 9pm I was back in my room reading about the history of China when Grant suggested that those of us in the room go check out the wall of Xi'an. I agreed to go because seeing China is a hell of a lot better than reading about it. The hostel was located a short distance from the south gate which was convenient. Entrance to the wall at that point on the wall wasn't free, but a student discount price of ¥20 (about \$3.25) wasn't anything to complain about. There was a courtyard-like area that held several large drums that you could hit with your hands. My immediate thought upon striking one of the drums was that it would be awesome to have an orchestra play a song in that area that utilizes giant drums. I'd love to acquire a sound library of those drums. After playing around with the drums, we climbed the stairs to the top of the wall.

Xi'an's walls are quite tall - 11.89m or 39ft. The walls are quite wide, too. We walked a ways until we reached a bike rental shop. We talked to the cashier and she told us that we didn't have enough time to ride the 14 km around the city. (It takes about 90 min and at that point it was 9:30pm and they closed at 9:50pm.) Initially we were discouraged, but then we decided that riding a bike for 20 min was worth the ¥40 and ¥300 deposit. It was nice to ride a bike again! We rode from the bike shop west to the southwest corner. All of us expressed a desire to return to Xi'an someday. I want to ride the whole wall. Xi'an is not as developed as Chengdu so there's a lot less pollution (I had never seen a more blue sky while in China).

After our wall adventure, we were hungry and so we decided to try out the hostel restaurant. The hotel's restaurant (cafe is probably more appropriate) was pretty homey for international travelers. Nearly every inch of the walls and ceiling was covered with pictures drawn by previous travelers. Most of them followed the same pattern: their country's flag, their name, school, and year of visit. The cafe had several styles of food to choose from, including Mexican, breakfast, Italian, and a couple others. I knew I wouldn't find any Mexican food back in Chengdu so I ordered the chicken quesadilla. It didn't hold a candle to any of the Mexican food my mom makes, but it was still delicious (especially considering I hadn't eaten any Mexican food since I arrived in China.)

The next morning we left the hostel at 7:30am and walked to the nearest subway stop. This was the first time I had ever used a subway. It was somewhat interesting. It was extremely crowded for the first six or so stops (we were going to the north train station which was the end of the line for this subway line). After arriving at the station and going through security, we ate breakfast at a McDonald's. I had the Big Breakfast which was essentially a do-it-yourself Egg McMuffin, but with scrambled eggs. There was also a Dunkin' Donuts so I got three donuts for the five hour train ride to Beijing. On the inside, the seating area of the high-speed train looked like an

airplane, but much more spacious. I sat at the back of car 14 between Raul and Eli. The top speed of the train was 300 km/h or 186 mph. The average speed was about 295 km/h.完了

The Great Wall - July 3, 2013

Today we went to the Juyongguan portion of the Great Wall, a Ming Dynasty tomb, and an acrobatics show. We left around 9am to begin the one and a half hour drive to the Great Wall. On the way there I listened to some songs from OCREMix's Final Fantasy 6 album. There were only a couple (out of the ten or so I listened to) that I didn't like. The zircon-Jillian Aversa collaboration was amazing, of course. When we arrived at the Great Wall, it was 10:30am-ish and we were told to be back at the bus by 12:15pm. The area of this portion of the wall is mountainous so there were a ton of stairs. Climbing the wall was more tiring than climbing emeishan because the climb is a lot steeper and the step size is really inconsistent. It would be like small-big-big-small-small-big-big-big. (Was it too much to ask the peasants being worked to death to make consistent steps? (sarcasm)) After climbing for about 45-ish minutes, I reached the third-highest tower. The view was stunning! Lush green mountains all around. If we had been given more time, I would have climbed to the top. I, along with 5-ish others, was at the bus at 12:15pm, but most of the people who climbed to the top didn't get back until 12:30pm and a few until 12:45pm. I'd like to go back and climb that entire diamond-shaped section of the wall if given the opportunity in the future.

Next we went to a touristy place for lunch because the wall is so far away from other places. The restaurant was set in a cloisonné ("enamelware") factory, essentially a sweat shop that produces classic Chinese vases. We were given nearly two hours to eat and then browse the store, which was stupid because nearly everything being sold was super, super expensive. One pot/vase thing was ¥78,800 which is about \$12,000. Crazy! After lunch, we drove to one of the 13 Ming Dynasty tombs. This one was the only one that had been opened and it was opened before the Cultural Revolution which meant that it was fair game for the Mao minions to raze. I thought the tomb was really underwhelming. Pretty much everything had been cleared out of the 3-ish story deep "palace". I wish I could have seen what it was like when it was constructed. I think the Chinese government should carefully open the other tombs and see what's inside.

After the tomb, we drove back to Beijing for dinner. For the past couple days, those of us from Chengdu have been complaining that the food isn't as good here in Beijing as it is back in Chengdu. The food here isn't spicy at all, which is upsetting to say the least. I have really been craving the spicy hand-pulled beef noodles (牛肉炒拉面) of secret alley. That will be the first

dish I eat when I return to Chengdu. Being on this trip to Beijing has made me realize how much I love Chengdu. I, along with several others, am feeling homesick for Chengdu. I can't wait to return.

After dinner we went to see a Chinese acrobatics show which was fantastic! The best act, in my opinion, was the one where a guy climbed and did one-handed hand stands on an increasingly taller stack of chairs. Other acts included: straw hat, where a bunch of guys did tricks with straw hats; bicycle skill, where a bunch of girls rode bicycles and did tricks - at one point there were 12 girls on 1 bicycle; ring flips, where a bunch of guys did flips through a gold ring - that was my second favorite; bowl twirlers, where a bunch of girls twirled bowls on long sticks - 4 in each hand; two-man stair climb, an impressive act where two ripped guys climbed up and down these stair pegs using a one-handed handstand; and the last is motorcycles in a ball, motorcycles would enter this steel ball cage one by one and ride loops where they were horizontal to the ground going upside-down. There were 8 motorcycles in the cage at one point! 完了

Various Topics

Sichuan Cuisine 四川菜

The numbing and spicy food of the Sichuan province is usually what comes to mind when one thinks of Chinese food. There are dozens of dishes specific to Sichuan, but I'll talk about some of the most famous. Also, this session I'm taking a Sichuan cuisine class and have had the opportunity to prepare these dishes.

The first dish I made was egg and tomato, which contains, as the title suggests, eggs and tomatoes as the two primary ingredients. If you know how to cook eggs and cut up tomatoes, this dish is easy. Pretty much make scrambled eggs, add tomatoes to the pan, and add salt and MSG to taste. My first attempt resulted in a 4.2 (out of 5.0) given by my 老师 (lǎoshī teacher) due to burned eggs (they burned as soon as they hit the pan!).

The second dish I made was potato and green pepper. Cut a potato into long, thin strips and do the same with a green pepper. Throw both of them into a wok with some oil and let them cook, stirring occasionally. Add salt to taste. Quick, simple, and tasty. My 老师 gave me a 4.6 because my potatoes weren't quite cooked completely (tasted fine to me).

The third dish I made was fish-flavored pork which doesn't actually have any fish in it. The fish flavor is achieved through the use of ginger, garlic, green onions, and one or two other ingredients. I don't really remember how to cook this dish, but you cook the pork first and then add the rest. My 老师 gave me a 4.8.

The fourth dish I made was Beijing sauce pork. The same type of pork used in fish-flavored pork which is the back meat of the pig. The only flavoring used is Beijing sauce, black in color. I was given a 4.7 for this dish.

The fifth dish was Kung Pao Chicken (宫保鸡丁). This dish is comprised of chicken, fried peanuts, hot dried red pepper, and green lotus. The chicken and lotus are served (and cooked) as small cubes. While preparing this dish for the first time, I made a mistake that, in my opinion, turned out pretty well. I added some hot pepper powder that was supposed to be used in the next dish. I thought it was the best Kung Pao Chicken I had ever eaten (and I've had Kung Pao Chicken many times)! The hot pepper powder gave it a kick that was sorely needed. My cooking teacher didn't even notice the kick and just said that I needed more sugar. That one was also a 4.7.

The sixth and last dish that I have made so far is Mapo Tofu 麻婆豆腐 má pó dòufu. Mapo is the name of the woman who invented it. Mapo Tofu is tofu squares that have been cooked in a red, spicy sauce and some powdered numbing pepper sprinkled on top. I can't remember what the flaw in this dish was, but I received a 4.9.

Food I eat on a regular basis

我常常早饭吃的一杯，一根油条，和一个香蕉。For breakfast I usually have one cup of soybean milk, one deep-fried twisted dough stick, and a banana. I don't usually have the 包子 (steamed stuffed bun) because I don't care for the meat-filled ones. Today I tried the 土豆包子 potato stuffed bun and it was really good! 特别好吃! I will definitely be eating more of those. For lunch and dinner, I have multiple options. Until about a week into the second session, I could have 牛肉炒拉面 beef and hand-pulled noodles stir-fried at a Muslim restaurant. It is my favorite noodle dish. Unfortunately, due to Ramadan I could no longer get my favorite noodle fix. There are plenty of other great noodle dishes, but so far none are as good as those noodles. Another noodle dish that I have grown quite fond of is 担担面 (dàn dàn miàn). I was introduced to this dish by Lulu, a Chinese friend from Inner Mongolia. It's her favorite noodle dish. 担担面 is served as a bowl of standard (as opposed to knife-shaved or hand-pulled) noodles with some

bits of fried pork sprinkled on top and a sauce below the noodles. Once served you don't just start eating. You must coat all the noodles in the sauce by picking up the noodles at one side of the bowl, pulling straight up, moving to the opposite side, and pushing down which shoves the noodles and the bottom through the sauce. You continue this circular motion until all noodles are coated. (One time when I was served 担担面 I started by picking up some of the fried pork to see what it tasted like sans sauce. The waitress looked back at me like "Does this 老外 lǎowài know how to eat this dish?", but when I started flipping the noodles, she left.)

Here's an interesting fact about ordering dàn dan miàn and most other noodle-like dishes. The measure word for 担担面, 饺子, and other wheat-based noodle dishes is 两 liǎng. The interesting part is that 两 is usually used to represent two (only two, for twos higher than two, like say 12, you would use 二 èr). So until I asked my Chinese teacher I was confused by the menu at that restaurant. 两 when used as a measure word means 50 grams of noodles/wheat. 我常常点一碗担担面三两。I usually order a bowl of dàn dan miàn which contains about 150 grams of noodles. Another kind of noodles is 牛肉刀削面 (knife-shaved beef noodles). This dish is essentially the same as regular beef noodles except the noodles are a different shape. Knife-shaved noodles are flat strips about an inch wide and various lengths whereas in regular beef noodles the noodles are your standard spaghetti noodle. Both dishes are served in a 辣椒 làjiāo (spicy) broth with bok choy (白菜 báicài) and some beef chunks on top. Lately I've been avoiding eating the beef chunks because their quality is inconsistent. One day they all might be solid meat, but the next day some may be mostly fat. Another type of food that I'm quite fond of is 炒烧烤 chǎo shāokǎo or stir-fried Chinese BBQ. Outside the West gate of the university there are three small restaurants (when I say small, I mean maybe 16 people can fit inside with barely any room to spare) that serve this kind of food. At each restaurant there is a refrigerator containing meat and vegetables on skewers. The procedure for ordering is as follows. First, you grab an empty "clean" plastic colored basket and begin filling it with the meat and vegetables you want. Second, you hand the basket to one of the owners and tell them if you want the rice separate or stir-fried together with the basket contents. They will probably ask you if you want làjiāo and/or huàjiāo. That's it! About five minutes later you will be served a delicious meal. The following is what I've been ordering recently: 2 sticks of broccoli, 2 sticks of cauliflower, 2 bundles of leeks, 2 sticks of red onion, a green pepper, and 2 sticks of winter melon. I ask for stir-fried rice with làjiāo. I don't order meat because I can't identify it. I could ask, but meat would add a lot to the price and I already love what I order.

Food Prices

Nearly all food served by small restaurants is dirt cheap. A large bowl of 担担面,牛肉面, or 牛肉刀削面 is ¥10 which is about \$1.50. [Note: Summer 2013 \$1 = ¥6] My usual shaokao order runs about ¥9.00 (for a giant plate of rice and vegetables). Most food items in convenience stores are also dirt cheap. A 550 ml bottle of purified water is usually ¥1.50 and a 1.555 L bottle of purified water is ¥3.00. A 500 ml bottle of honey-sweetened jasmine tea (one of my favorite drinks) is about ¥2.80. Imported/foreign brands made in China are more expensive than their Chinese counterpart. For example, a pack of six Oreos costs ¥3.00 while a Chinese sandwich cookie package containing 10-12 cookies costs ¥3.50. There are places where the food costs about the same as it would back in America. From my experience at a McDonald's and a KFC, prices are definitely about the same. A chicken burger costs about ¥25. A tangent regarding KFC: they don't have mashed potatoes and gravy, but they have fries. They have adapted the menu to better suit the tastes of the locals. This means that now they serve làjiāo-infused chicken burgers and numbing chicken burritos called Dragon Twisters.

I've been spoiled by the inexpensive food here in Chengdu, China and I am quite sure I will be complaining about the food prices when I return to America.

Sichuan/Chengdu Girls

My host dad has told me that girls from Sichuan, particularly Chengdu, are the prettiest girls in China. My (actual) dad's Chinese colleague, upon hearing that I was studying abroad in Chengdu, told him the same thing. After conducting my own research in Chengdu, Xi'an, and Beijing, I have arrived at the same conclusion. Having spent the majority of the past three years studying chemical engineering in the female-deficient, icy hellhole known as Houghton, Michigan I couldn't help but notice all the pretty girls when I arrived in Chengdu. Michigan Tech does have pretty girls, but Chengdu has quite a lot more. Of a population of 14 million, probably three million would fall into the category of pretty girls.

My Host Family

My host family is composed of Song Qing, my host mom; Wang Wei, my host dad; and Mumu or Richard, my host brother. My host dad is 45 years old and my host mom's QQ account (a Chinese instant messaging/Facebook-like service) says she is also 45 years old, but I don't believe that at all. She looks like she is in her low 30s. [I wasn't told how old she is and I didn't ask because I thought it might be considered rude.] Richard is six years old. Wang Wei is a

business professor (I've forgotten the university, unfortunately), Song Qing works at a bank (she has a couch in her office), and Richard was in kindergarten at Golden Apple. They live in a gated community called Yinduhuayuan which I believe translates to silver garden block. It's pretty nice. There are tons of trees and flowers. It even has a swimming pool! Within Yinduhuayuan, they live in the second area, fifth building, fifth floor, and door on the left (501). Their apartment has three bedrooms, two bathrooms with Westies (definitely dodged a bullet there), one kitchen, and one living room – dining room. As you walk in, on your immediate right is a big fish tank with mostly goldfish (good luck in China). On your immediate left is the dining table. On the other side of the fish tank is the living room containing two couches, one armchair, a computer running Windows 7, and a flat screen TV. They watched TV very rarely which was fine with me. On the other side of the dining table is the refrigerator. Near the dining table is a hallway leading to the other rooms. On the right wall of the hallway are a bunch of framed photos of Richard with his parents, Richard playing soccer and baseball, etc. The first door on the left is the kitchen, the second door is the bathroom Richard and I shared, the first door on the right is the room I stayed in, the second door is Richard's room, and the room at the end is the master bedroom/bathroom. There is a balcony attached to the master bedroom. This is where everyone's clothing was hung up to dry. There are also several plants. The Wang family had one washing machine and a maid who was hired to clean the house and wash clothes.

In my room there is a fairly soft bed, a rocking chair, a standing lamp, a desk and chair, and a desk lamp. There are windows that overlook this area of the complex. Richard's room looked exactly like what you would think a six year old's room to look like: toys everywhere. Baseball gloves, bats, Frisbees, footballs, soccer balls and other sports equipment were there, too. He also has a decent Lego collection, but nowhere near the size of mine (I was a regular Lego aficionado back in the day).

Meals, especially for the first two weeks, were very interesting. There was always a new and different dish for me to try. I'm very glad that this was the case after talking with Julie, one of my friends during the second session who had a homestay. For nearly every meal her family would serve her a bowl of rice gruel along with the other dishes. I thankfully never had that problem. I was served some dishes that were good at first, but grew increasingly more disgusting with every bite. Case in point: glutinous rice balls injected with sesame sugar or brown sugar. Sounds good, right? They were for the first couple of rice balls. After that, I became more aware of their sliminess and sickening sweetness. They became so bad that my stomach didn't feel well upon the thought of them. One of my homestay friends during session 1 had the same problem.

Gabe told me that at one breakfast he didn't even chew them, just swallowed them whole (they're squishy and slimy so they go down easily) and ended up feeling pretty sick. Thankfully, I was served that only three or four times. One dish they were quite fond of serving at breakfast was fruit salad. But it wasn't the fruit salad that Americans typically eat. You know how tomatoes are technically a fruit, right? Well, the Chinese think it's a fruit, too, and so use it in fruit salad. This fruit salad usually contained kiwi, tomatoes, melon, and grapes. The tomatoes weren't the weirdest part of that fruit salad, though. They also put in some kind of sweet mayonnaise. The fruit salad was still good, just a bit weird. [Side note: kiwi are not New Zealand fruit, they are Chinese fruit. The best kiwi I have ever tasted has come from China. My favorite way to eat kiwi is just to peel'em and then eat'em like an apple.] Other things served at breakfast include a bowl of rice porridge with a fried egg on top, a bowl of rice porridge with dates, corn on the cob (they really like corn in China – once I bought a bag of individually-wrapped corn soft candy; it tasted okay), and sometimes leftovers from dinner.

I very rarely ate lunch with my host family. I usually ate at one of the restaurants near the university with my USAC friends. I remember one time, though, when my host dad and I went to meet my host mom for lunch. We had to cross a somewhat busy street in order to catch a cab. Wang Wei gave me the front seat (Chinese custom to give the guest shotgun) and proceeded to give the cabbie directions from the backseat. I think we headed into the center of Chengdu. During the next 25 minutes, Wang Wei had the cabbie change directions three times (I don't think he knew which street it was on) until we finally stopped, seemingly near our destination, and walked the rest of the way there (like 3 or 4 blocks). I was relieved to see Song Qing because it meant that food wasn't far off – I was hungry. The dish that I remember most clearly from that meal is Mapo Tofu 麻婆豆腐 mápo dòufu, tofu cooked in a spicy and numbing sauce. The reason I remember that dish is because, according to Wang Wei, that restaurant makes the best Mapo Tofu in Chengdu. I think the woman who invented Mapo Tofu may have started that restaurant, but I'm not sure.

At dinner there was almost always a dish that I hadn't encountered before. I always gave it a try, but didn't always enjoy it. One of my favorite dishes was sliced beef with spicy powder seasoning. I can't remember what its name is or what most of the food I ate is called. I would

always ask what a dish is called and they would tell me, but I would forget it because I didn't write it down. In hindsight I should have asked them to write it down for me.

Trip to Dayi

On the day of the Dragonboat Festival, my host family took me to Dayi, a “small” (pop: 200,000) city outside Chengdu, to see my host dad's mom and brother's family. Dragonboat Festival is a holiday celebrating the life of Qu Yuan, a highly regarded poet during the Warring States period in China. Dragonboat Festival brings with it zongzi, a triangular prism of rice with a sweet or savory filling, and dragonboat racing. We left early in the morning and drove for what seemed about an hour. When we arrived in Dayi, my host mom remarked that the current state of Dayi is what Chengdu used to be about ten years ago. The tallest building in Dayi was no more than five or six stories whereas in Chengdu there are skyscrapers. In place of the green taxis of Chengdu were small red carriages pulled by motorbike/bicycle. According to my host mom, the original plan for Dragonboat Festival was to go to Wang Wei's mom's place, but she had to move in with Wang Wei's little brother after an earthquake left her apartment building unstable. Wang Wei's brother (hereafter known as “my host uncle”) lives in an apartment complex that is sort of like a gated community, but not quite (no guards at the gate).

My host uncle's place isn't as nice as Wang Wei's, but it's still nice. The apartment has wood floors and is sparsely furnished. There is a decent sized TV in the living room, a balcony which contained potted plants and a clothesline, a squatty in the bathroom, and what appears to be a silkworm cocoon in one corner of the living room. I met my host uncle, host aunt, and host cousin when we arrived; my host grandma was out shopping for the day's meals (lunch and dinner). My host uncle is taller than Wang Wei and is fairly muscular and well-built for a Chinese man living in China. He had a goatee if I recall correctly. My host aunt is tall, slim, and very pretty. My host cousin is five or six years older than Richard (who is six years old) and has the same physique as Richard albeit much taller. Richard calls him gege or older brother (common in China due to the one child policy). We hang out at the apartment for maybe 20 minutes before heading out the door to go see a small mountain within walking distance of the apartment (to use up time until lunch). There are several Buddhist temples on the mountain that we visited briefly. I was only able to take one picture of the inside of one temple before my host mom stopped me. Apparently it's disrespectful to take pictures inside Buddhist temples. There were many Chinese people visiting this mountain while we were there and apparently the people

of Dayi don't see foreigners too often because I was attracting a decent amount of stares. One Chinese man wearing a soccer jersey even came up to me asking to take a picture of me. I started smiling for the picture, but my host mom pushed the guy away and urged me to continue walking. We continued up the mountain. We took a short break near the top of the mountain where a small, dirty store was. My host mom bought a few bottles of water and gave one to each of us. There was a water spigot coming out of the ground in about the middle of the area; a shaggy, grey dog was standing next to it looking expectantly at us. Richard turned on the water a little bit and the dog started drinking from the falling water. After our small break, we continued to the very top of the mountain where the remains of an ancient military outpost stood. The view from the outpost was pretty great. We subsequently headed down the mountain and back to the uncle's apartment for lunch.

When we arrived back at the apartment for lunch, I was introduced to the grandma – your stereotypical elderly Chinese woman: short, grey-haired, and wise. Shortly thereafter, lunch was served. We, all eight of us, were seated around a small square table with many bowls of a variety of interesting foods. The only dish I recognized was zongzi. The other dishes (that I remember) included: a green bean type of vegetable, a preserved goose egg, some kind of meat, and rabbit head. When I first picked up the green bean type thing, I tried eating the pod with the beans still inside (I know, such a silly foreigner). The aunt saw me, giggled, and showed me the correct way to eat it. It turns out that you kind of squeeze the pod to get the little beans inside out. I took one taste of the preserved goose egg (an unappetizing green color) and the rest of the goose egg was left on my plate uneaten for the remainder of the meal. The most interesting part of the meal was definitely the rabbit head. When I say rabbit head, I mean the actual head, brain and eyes, of a rabbit skinned and cooked. There were probably a dozen rabbit heads in a bowl, all staring with their teeth bared. My host dad and I split (literally) two rabbit heads; I got the lower half both times. Rabbit meat is surprisingly tasty, even the tongue isn't too bad (though quite chewy).

After lunch we hung out and watched “Iron Man 2” in English with Chinese subtitles. About three or four times, Richard turned off the TV because he couldn't understand the movie. My host mom was eventually able to persuade him to pursue another activity. We were going to have jiaozi (steamed dumplings) for dinner and jiaozi requires a lot of preparation so I was enlisted to help make them. It's rather difficult to make a good-looking jiaozi! The grandma made it look so

effortless, but I'm sure she has had decades of practice. The ones I made looked pretty terrible, but they ended up tasting great. We made close to what seemed like 150 to 200 dumplings. Once they were cooked and we were sitting at the table eating them, the uncle says something in Chinese and my host mom told me that the uncle's "high score" for eating jiaozi was 33. This sounded like a challenge to me so I put my eating skills to good use and broke uncle's "high score" of 33 jiaozi by four. I was quite full after that, but I managed to find the room to squeeze in some watermelon for dessert. There was still quite a lot of jiaozi left over so they wanted me to eat even more! I respectfully declined.

Conclusion

The experiences detailed within these pages are just a small fraction of everything I experienced while living in Chengdu, China for eleven weeks. Studying abroad in a country so unlike my own gave me a new perspective on the world and facilitated significant personal growth. China is a fascinating country with a long, storied history absolutely worthy of an extended visit (and in my case, a return visit). I loved living in Chengdu, China for a summer and I wish to return someday.

If you have any questions regarding studying abroad through the Universities Study Abroad Consortium (USAC), living in Chengdu, or anything else related to China and studying abroad, please feel free to send me an email at wapisani@mtu.edu.

Various Pictures



Xi'an Bell Tower

Xi'an is really a city with square walls in the center which encloses another 14 square kilometers of city. This tower is in the very center of those 14 square kilometers. I took a picture of it because it is an artifact of the Ming Empire.



Chengdu's Symbol

This golden symbol is a circle containing four birds circling a sun. A much smaller version of this symbol made up gold was found near the center of Chengdu around 2000. The city of Chengdu officially adopted the gold artifact as its symbol a couple years later.



Chinese BBQ

This is a refrigerator containing many different ingredients used to make stir-fry's and Chinese BBQ. I found this to be quite interesting.



Chinese BBQ Ingredients

This is a close-up of a few different ingredients. This type of stir-fry became one of my staples during the second five weeks I lived in Chengdu.



Chinese Train

This is a sleeper train I took with a few classmates from Chengdu to Xi'an. All of us had top sleepers (hard boards with a cloth cover, a pillow, and a blanket); it was quite an interesting experience. The total amount of time it took to go from Chengdu to Xi'an was around 16 hours.



Dujiangyan irrigation system

Originally built in 256 BCE during the Warring States period by the Qin Kingdom, Duriangyan has withstood the test of time (with a little reinforcement along the way) to deliver much needed irrigation to the crops of Sichuan.



Emei Mountain

This is a view of one of the several Buddhist temples on Emei Mountain, which has thousands of stone steps leading up the mountain. This temple is fairly low on the mountain. This picture was mainly taken to showcase the incline of the stone steps.



First Picture of Chengdu

This picture shows the view of Chengdu from my dorm room (10th floor) the first day/night I was in Chengdu.



Forbidden City

This is a view of the center of the Forbidden City, a massive palace in Beijing, China used by the Chinese emperors from the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (1420) until the end of the Qing Dynasty (1912).



Great Wall of China

This section of the Great Wall (total length: 13,171 mi) is located near Beijing. This picture was taken on a remarkably clear, sunny, and hot day. The very first part of the Great Wall was originally constructed in 220 BCE at the order of Emperor Qin, the first emperor of a unified China.



Host brother getting revenge on monkeys

On Emei Mountain there is a section devoted to Tibetan Macaques where tourists may see them in a “controlled” environment. There are people with slingshots and long sticks who use those tools to control the monkeys. In this picture I like to joke that my host brother is getting revenge on the monkeys because two monkeys jumped and landed on my head/shoulders while we went through the area.



Knife-shaved Noodles

This is a picture of a dish called 牛肉刀削面 or knife-shaved beef noodles, a dish which I consumed much of during the second term. Like nearly everything in Chengdu, this dish is spicy (which I absolutely love). Using rolls of toilet paper as napkins and having containers of wooden, reusable chopsticks on the tables is quite common in hole-in-the-wall-type restaurants in Chengdu.



Largest Buddha in World

The largest Buddha statue in the world is located in Leshan, Sichuan, China. My classmates and I took a boat to see the statue.



Look at the Chinese Money!

When I first arrived in China I had 12 ¥100 bills (the red bill) and after I went shopping for a few necessities, I had several other bills. I really like how China handles its currency. Each denomination is a different color and size.



Martial Arts Rehearsal

There was a martial arts rehearsal in Emei City while we were there in mid-June. The performance would occur after we would have left, but luckily the performers were practicing the day before and I snapped this cool picture.



Mountain-side view of the city of Dayi

On the day of the Dragonboat Festival, my host family took me to Dayi, a “small” (pop: 200,000) city outside Chengdu, to see my host dad’s mom and brother’s family. This is a view of the city from an ancient, ruined military outpost located on a small mountain nearby.



My Host Family

This is my host family on the day of Richard's graduation from Golden Apple Kindergarten. From left to right: Wang Wei, my host dad, age 45; Richard, my host brother, age six; Richard's Kindergarten teacher; and Song Qing, my host mom, age lower 30s.



My Mandarin Chinese Class

This was my Mandarin Chinese Class on the last day of the term. My instructor was fluent in both English and Mandarin Chinese and was a pretty cool lady.



My Tai Chi Instructor

This picture was taken on the day of our final exam in Tai Chi. Most of us had ordered proper Tai Chi garb and had worn it for the final exam. The man in the yellow garb was my Tai Chi instructor; he didn't know any English save for a few words he learned to help describe how to do the movements of Tai Chi.



Panda

Chengdu, China is home to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, which is open to tourists. I had the opportunity to walk throughout the facility (the layout is similar to a zoo) near the very beginning of the first term. As the panda is China's national animal, I had to take a few pictures.



Photo-ception

For many of the Chinese we encountered during our field trips (and just going around the city of Chengdu), this was the first time they had seen anyone of a significantly different skin tone. I always found it amusing that some Chinese would ask to take pictures of my darker-skinned friends.



Sichuan Cuisine Teacher

The woman on the left, Weiwei, is the assistant director of the USAC program in Chengdu and the man on the right was my Sichuan Cuisine teacher. He didn't speak any English which is why Weiwei was there to translate (she is pretty much fluent in English). The Sichuan Cuisine class was incredibly interesting and fun and I highly recommend it to anyone studying abroad in Chengdu through USAC.



Soybean Milk and Chinese Doughnut

This picture is a classic example of a Chinese breakfast. The doughnut is called 油条(youtiao) and translates to “deep-fried twisted dough stick” and the soybean milk is called 豆浆(doujiang). The soybean milk more than makes up for the unhealthiness of the Chinese doughnut. In fact, my female Mandarin Chinese professor told me that the soybean milk is the reason why very few Chinese women get breast cancer (not sure if that is true, though).



Street Cleaner

During our orientation to the program and campus, we toured the campus and I took several pictures. I found this one to be interesting because this woman was using a broom-like tool to spread out puddles so that the ground would dry faster.



Terracotta Warriors

This is a picture of the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, China. The warriors were built as part of an elaborate tomb for Emperor Qin, the first emperor of a unified China. Each warrior is life-sized (about four feet tall) and has different facial features than the one next to it. There were even life-sized horses built, pulling chariots. Chinese experts believe that they have only uncovered 1,000 statues out of nearly 7,000 statues.



View from my host room

This is the view from the room my host family gave me. It's a nice view with many trees.



World's Largest Building

This is the world's largest building measured by floor space. It's called the "New Century Global Centre" and contains many different shops and even a water park! Unfortunately, when we visited it in early August the water park wasn't ready to open.



Huanglongxi Ancient Town

This is Huanglongxi (Yellow Dragon River) Ancient Town, a tourist destination with many buildings dating back to the late Qing Dynasty period.