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## The view from China: *Ni hao!*

Every morning I anxiously arise to greet a new day, savor a new experience, and prepare for my students at China Foreign Affairs University, the only institution of higher learning that operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

At 6 a.m., I am out the door with my favorite digital camera to capture and memorialize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! There is so much to see, feel, hear, touch, taste and learn. I think of myself as a mere *observer*, always looking on, and always finding myself in a position where I can get a rather good look. I just wander around the magnificent neighborhoods of "Old and New" China, looking for things to recognize, and whenever I see something that I know is good, true and beautiful, I take a moment and express gratitude for the joy of the moment! I am reminded of one of the most important insights I have ever gleamed from Annie Dillard, in her book "Pilgrim at Tinker Creek." Try and get your heart and mind around this great insight: "There seems to be such a thing as beauty, a grace wholly gratuitous ... beauty and grace performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is to try to be there." I assure you I am trying to be there!

I suppose most tourists never really see the real China. It takes time, energy, courage and a real desire to venture out with eyes wide open. It really is one thing to visit a country as a tourist,



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quite another to actually live *with* and *among* 1.3 billion people for an extended period of time. I feel that I have met most on my early walks and subway excursions! Such encounters (even with my non-existent language skills) are enjoyable and memorable. Everyone enjoys a hearty "Ni hao," spoken with the proper tone, accompanied with a sincere smile! And the children – oh how beautiful and precious. I kid you not – the majority does not wear diapers but rather crotchless pants to facilitate potty training! There is nothing more beautiful than a baby's bottom in all its glory! We do miss our grandchildren. Thank heaven for Skype and Magicjack!

I am fascinated with the millennia of Chinese history; fascinated with ancient streets and hutongs; fascinated with the teeming masses; fascinated with my success to date of crossing the streets amidst crazy drivers of every type of vehicle known to man and then some; fascinated with a country so long closed, gradually opening to embrace itself and the world. This year marks the 30th anniversary of China's economic reforms and opening-up initiated by Deng Xiaoping!

I sigh over the turbulence encountered with change, the colossal problems of scale and density; the pressing demand and need of precious resources. Land erosion is a real threat to China's food supply. It is estimated that about three-quarters of the country's poorest people live in areas affected by land erosion. Crop output will fall and the risk of flooding will increase if desertification continues at the same rate. China is really feeling intense pressure resulting from the global financial crisis: With many plant closings, rising unemployment, social unrest, the reluctance of the people to spend rather than save, and a declining gross domestic product well below the necessary 10 percent minimum level.

China cannot afford to be complacent; challenges ahead are daunting. There are real problems of inequality and regional disparity. China is facing such challenges as uneven development between urban and rural areas, between different regions and cultures, with real and painful imbalance between economic and social development, with the ever-increasing gap between those who have little and those who have some, to the enormously wealthy elite. *The disparity is real.*

Yes, China is opening. And there is much to learn from this great people. My cup is already full! I am steadily gaining a deeper and more meaningful understanding of China's culture and traditions. On a daily

basis, I have the greatest privilege of interacting with great students (*who I remind them daily are the future leaders of China*), faculty and government leaders. These one-on-one encounters are providing me with a real glimpse into their minds and hearts. I am most observant of their feelings and thoughts as they courageously cope with their problems, fears and pains. I am in awe of their many personal triumphs and their dreams for better opportunities in the future. Their discipline, loyalty and respect for family and others, and their overriding desire for harmony is real.

And as to the size of Beijing, along with the massive investment in infrastructure and the development that is under way all over China: It is absolutely mind-boggling and literally takes my breath away! You just have to see it to believe it! Come on over! I promise you it will change your life and outlook forever!

Every day when we awake, Debbie and I feel like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, but Kansas is nowhere in sight! We are in China! Who would have thought that such a good looking guy with such a beautiful trophy wife of 34 years, from Centennial, Colo., would be in China this very day having such a wonderful experience? What a privilege!

Until next time, "Zai jian"! (Goodbye!)▲