

A Different Sense of Freedom

by Denvy Saxowsky

From the climb on the Great Wall to the drive along the coast at Dalian, from the top of the sacred Qianshan Mountain to the classroom at Anshan Normal University, China was an enlightening and inspiring adventure. While the Great Wall matched but was more alive than the picture postcards, Dalian didn't fit any preconceptions of a Chinese city. A modern city with many new cars and huge growing skyscrapers surrounding its huge (largest in Asia) town square, Dalian could have been in America except for the people, the language, and the style of driving.

There's no denying that several days of experiencing the history and culture of China through its palaces and temples is a highlight in one's life, however, the real education took place in conversations with students at the universities. Everyone is careful to respect tradition, culture, elders, and history, but it is through conversations about opportunities, future plans, past personal experiences and parental support that one fits pieces of the puzzle together to understand why Chinese students observe that American students have more freedom.

Chinese students seem to select careers similar to those of their parents even though their dreams may be in another direction. They are impressed that in America students can choose their college or university, that they can change schools midway to a degree, that they can change programs or majors, and that they can choose their own courses. Many freedoms that Americans take for granted were quite noticeable to these Chinese students.

Anshan Normal University was not a large school by Chinese standards; there were about 20,000 students including 3,500 first year students. And while this is not extraordinary at a Chinese university, in fact, it's expected, the ten days of military training at the beginning of the first year at the university was very impressive to an American professor. Seeing 3,500 young men and women stand at attention for review in the early morning, and then break into running units when they are dismissed for their daily drills, was quite a spectacle. "It's builds friendships and relationships when they first enter the university," it was said.

As visiting faculty we were treated royally, which we enjoyed and greatly appreciated. We were over indulged with food, gifts and hospitality. It was delightful! However, it did not give us the opportunity to experience the lifestyle of the masses of this culturally rich country. This trip has become a window for wanting to return and experience more deeply the diverse culture of China.

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