

# A Pǐn wèi 品味 of China

## Beyond Teaching

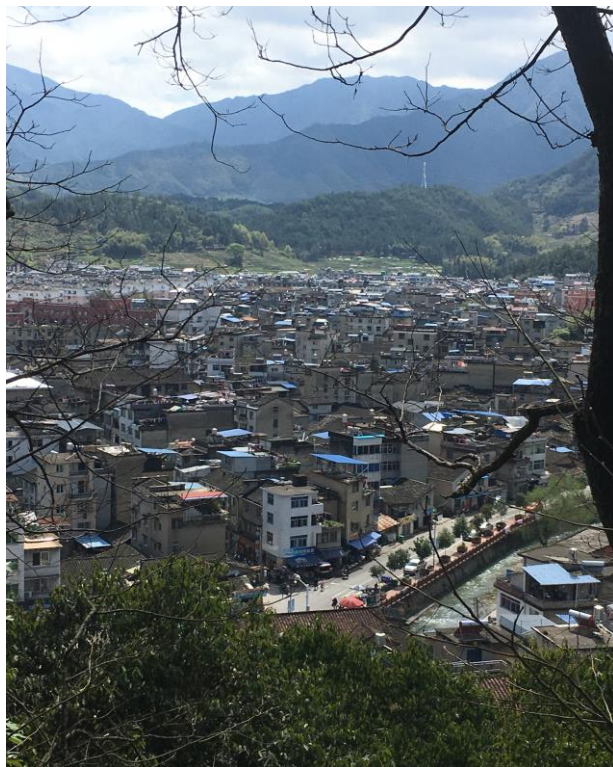
Belem Lamas



*(Classroom 204 some of the most amazing students)*

I made the decision to come to China to get a glimpse of the Chinese lifestyle and culture. I also had a strong desire to work with Chinese high school students in order to cultivate international exchange and communication. I can't describe how happy I have been since my arrival!

Qingyuan 庆元 is a small town with a population of about 40,000 people. When I first arrived I fell in love with its clear blue skies and fluffy white clouds. Unlike Beijing, I can actually breathe due to the amazing air quality. Beautiful mountains encircle the town. My second day in Qingyuan I went hiking up Xun Shan 熏山 Mountain with two Chinese friends and got an incredible view of the town! On the mountain's peak you will find an ancient temple. It was a pretty rough hike but it was well worth the sweat!



*(Qingyuan during the day)*



*(Qingyuan during the night)*





*(Left: My two friends at the peak of Xun Shan 熏山 Mountain; Right: The Ancient Xun Shan 熏山 Temple)*

Qingyuan also known as mushroom town (香菇 Xiang gu) is the third leading county in mushroom cultivation across all of China. In the States I never ate mushrooms because I found it disgusting but somehow I have grown to love mushrooms and eat them almost every day. The way the people in Qingyuan cook mushrooms is far more delicious than the way they cook them in America. Another one of my absolute favorite meals in Qingyuan is huang guo 黄粿. Huang guo is like a rice patty, thick in texture and very chewy. It is so satisfying to the taste buds! Back home there are many misconceptions of what traditional Chinese food looks or tastes like but those misconceptions do not apply to the food in Qingyuan. Beyond the amazing cuisine and specialty foods in Qingyuan, it is very easy to make friends!



*(Left: A picture of me surrounded by a wonderful mushroom field in Qingyuan; Right: cooked mushrooms)*



*(Scrumptious Huang guo mixed with green vegetables next to other delicious dishes)*

The people of Qingyuan are eager to make foreign friends and their curiosity of the American culture is immense! When shopping in the market I feel like a celebrity! Many locals ask me to take pictures with them, which I find hilarious because back in the States only close friends would want a picture with me. It is flattering that they want a picture with me even though I am not in my best clothes ninety percent of the time. However, most of the time I look flawless in their pictures because they use the popular “Snow” application to filter my face and beautify me!

During my stay here I have made many friends! My closest friends are Ye Li Fen 叶丽芬, Zhou Li Juan 周丽娟, and Wu Ling Rong 吴玲榕! These women have helped me a lot since my arrival. I know our friendships will last a lifetime! Every weekend I find myself eating dinner at their house or simply spending the evening drinking tea and eating pastries with them. The rest of the staff from my school has also been very welcoming and accommodating. I have also made many friends outside of school that have taught me how to make dumplings and baozi 包子 for dinner. The hospitality and friendliness of the Chinese people are one of its kind.





*(Preparing baozi for dinner with great friends)*



*(Enjoying dinner with my good friend Ye Li Fen 叶丽芬 and her family)*

The rest of the community has also been very kind and helpful. After a month of living in Qingyuan they invited me to join their co-ed volleyball club. At first I started off just practicing Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays but now I am part of the “Bulls” team. The league has officially started and we are now competing with other teams. When I play volleyball I use a lot of body language to communicate with my team members (since my Chinese is very poor). Sometimes I’m frustrated with my poor Chinese-speaking skills, however, the people are patient and we always end up understanding one another. I tend to leave applications like Pleco or Baidu as my last resort for communication. I dislike depending on applications for communication but sometimes they come in handy!



*(Most of my volleyball teammates and I at our first team dinner together)*



*(Some of my volleyball teammates and I before our first league game)*

Living in China can be challenging since there are many cultural differences between the Chinese and American people. However, it is far more rewarding! My role as an educational ambassador has given me the opportunity to advance intercultural communication and make a difference in the public schools of China. I have visited a total of five schools in Qingyuan with students from kindergarten to high school. Every time I teach or visit a different school I am amazed with how hard students work in order to have the opportunity to be admitted in a good university in the future. The students work tirelessly from early morning until late nights. They want a better life for themselves and for many of them education is their only opportunity for a better life. These children have given me so much motivation. I hope I have made just as much of a positive lasting impression as they have made in my life!

The people of Qingyuan are extremely hospitable and the kindest people I've met since my twenty-six years of life on planet earth. It may sound a bit exaggerated but I promise you this is the plain truth. It has been such a humbling experience to live here and co-exist with this wonderful community. The opportunity to teach, live, and learn in China has been an unforgettable one. I will always cherish this life-changing experience!



(Giving a Lecture on Intercultural Communication for Qingyuan High School Chinese English teachers)





(Great moments of laughter with my students)



*(In Longquan's sword factory wearing traditional Chinese clothing and striking my best pose)*