

# Seven Kings School, Ilford

## Reflection by Kayley Shum (aged 17)



The closest I had gotten to China before this summer was the significant bold lettering that is frequently carved on the back of our school uniform. Although I consciously knew I was stepping into a pre-arranged programme for UK students, there was something much rawer about the experience than I had ever expected. Chinese people are incredible, and if anyone ever argues otherwise I have two and half weeks of experience to prove them wrong. The generations that struck me the most were the elderly and the young. And amongst the working adults I met, most worked in retail or education. Let me start by saying China is much more than a clothing label. These people work so hard yet they carry a level of peace. I will never forget the day I was personally welcomed into a Chinese student's home, and although carrying the same surname as myself we had known each other no longer than a week! Her family welcomed me as their own!



I loved the warmth of the market, literally as well as metaphorically. The vivid colours of the Chinese vegetables will stay with me... Children cling to their parents' legs at the fruit and vegetable stalls. The life of the Chinese is also survival but the young children of China have such a raw spirit. After delighting in the views from a tall Buddha tower overlooking Changzhou, I felt honoured to interact with a young girl and boy with whom I have one precious photo with. Although my Mandarin was limited to three days or so at that point, you will see how keen Chinese parents were for their young to practice their English! Thumb wars and frog jumping translate across the world regardless of language barriers! The mandarin lessons were by far the best language lessons I have had and being in a country where I could practise what I was learning gave me evermore motivation to absorb all I was being taught.

The school in Changzhou looked after us so well, and we were even given taster days into martial arts, calligraphy and paper cutting! In Beijing the night market was by far my highlight, despite aching sleep deprivation I'm so glad I took the time to go. The Beijing railway was so clean compared to the central line...! I enjoyed the sights and all the smells of the market, dedicated market vendors. Beijing was so alive at night and amongst the tasty goods selling were coconuts, caramelised fruit, scorpions, silk, fans, t-shirts, jade brackets... Anything you imagine they sell in China was at that market! In China was also my first time haggling, and once I started I was brutal with not accepting the first price.



Haggling in China is something that could be stressful yet completely entertaining. Each market stall selling a small variation of the same product yet it was to your own instinct to pick the right stall. It was by this point in Beijing I entirely reflected on the friendships I had made, from Changzhou but also from other schools and even within Seven Kings! Passing through the market I often found familiar faces at the cheapest stalls! I felt so entirely spoilt!



One of my favourite evenings was when we got to see a Kung Fu performance. Performed by real monks they displayed not only their way of life and culture but also an intricately woven story following a young monk... I cannot fully express how amazing it was but the sheer dedication shown by those performers can truly be found in all Chinese culture. I thoroughly enjoyed my trip to China, and I can't wait to go

back because now not only have I become an expert in how to chopsticks from my two weeks but I have also fallen in admiration for Chinese culture and their people!

