

Special Report: Life in China from fusion cuisine to live snakes

Written by George E. Curry, NNPA Editor-in-Chief
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(SECOND IN A SERIES)

BEIJING (NNPA) – When Julia Wilson visited China for the first time in 2002, no one had to tell the former Los Angeles television reporter why China was known as "the Kingdom of Bikes."

Wilson, who is CEO of Washington, D.C.-based Wilson Global Communications, said: "It was so different, especially with the bicycles. Imagine rush hour traffic – with bicycles. All of the bicycles would stop at the traffic light. It was a thing to behold. The cars were to the side because there were not many cars. Today, it's the reverse and the cars have replaced the bikes."

China is the world's largest market for automobiles, making it "the Kingdom of Bikes" and "the Kingdom of Cars." General Motors, despite entering the market after Volkswagen, is the best-selling foreign automaker.

Bicycles coexisting with automobiles, especially in urban areas, is just one aspect of life in China.

Lynne Coleman, who spent nine years as an administrator at international schools that cater to American expatriates in Beijing and Shanghai, gets excited when she reflects on her time in China.

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"It is a place where I can dine on delicate fusion cuisine prepared by world-class French and American chefs, or choose a live snake for dinner and watch it killed, bloodied and cooked in front of me," she said.

Her husband, Craig Trygstad, prefers reflecting on China's rich history rather than its rich – and sometimes exotic – food.

"What I enjoyed most was getting to know the people," said the former teacher. "And since I love history, it was great to be able to walk through so many of the sites I have read about –the Great Wall of China, the Terracotta Soldiers, the harbor in Shanghai where Chiang Kai-shek's army escaped to Taiwan as Mao's forces chased them down."

Carl Murphy, a 31-year-old Black businessman from Atlanta, speaks fluent Mandarin, is co-owner of a Shanghai nightclub, and operates a business with a close friend from Atlanta that assists U.S. entrepreneurs looking to do business in China.



"In major cities, you can eat foreign food every day, if you wish, live in the same areas as other foreigners, go to all English-speaking venues, and watch international news," he said. "There are some foreigners I know who have been in China for almost 10 years and don't speak the local language. Yet, many of their children are fluent. Some of them prefer to live in local housing, go to local Chinese restaurants every day and even befriend and date or marry Shanghai residents. It's definitely a personal decision."

Miles away from Shanghai, rural communities reflect another world.

"In 2006, it took about 40 minutes traveling by car beyond the Mu Tian Yu Great Wall visiting site west of Beijing to find yourself back a hundred years to a time and place where crops are harvested by hand and milled with a donkey," said Lynne Coleman, a native of Lewiston, Idaho. "People have no indoor plumbing, the whole family sleeps on one kong (a concrete, horizontal chimney that provides some heat in the very cold winters) and three-room houses are heated with wood fires fueled by sticks gathered by hand and carried on the backs of residents."

Many Chinese are moving away from such rural trappings to relocate to the city, where the per

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capita disposable income is more than four times that of rural communities.



"There are so many construction sites in Beijing, Shanghai and all over than when I was here before," said Julia Wilson, whose company organizes tours to China, Brazil and other countries to help improve the image of African Americans abroad. "They are building so many apartments because you have so many rural people moving to the city for jobs. They have no place for these people to live."

To slow China's burgeoning population, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has adopted a one-child policy that restricts the right of parents to determine how many children they can have. In urban areas, couples are permitted to have one child and can apply to have a second if each parent was an only child. The policy is more relaxed in rural areas where couples can have a second child if the first one was a girl. Each person in a couple who violates China's population control policy must pay a "social compensation fee," which can be as high as 10 times a person's annual income.

Some provinces have regulations that require women who violate the family-planning policy to abort their pregnancies. The other provinces insist on unspecified "remedial measures," which in most cases leads to an abortion. Even with its strict population control, China is expected to grow to 1.4 billion people by 2020.

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Of China's current 1.3 billion people, 91.51 percent are Han. There are 55 ethnic minorities that total 110 million or 8.49 percent of the population, according to the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. A book titled, *The Ethnic Groups of China* by Wu Shimin listed 18 ethnic minority groups with a population exceeding 1 million: Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Uyghur, Miao, Yi, Zhuang, Bouyei, Korean, Manchu, Dong, Yao, Bai, Tujia, Hani, Kazak, Dai and Li.

Government officials note with pride that in an effort to integrate ethnic minorities into Chinese society, they have what amounts to an affirmative action program. But the 2011 State Department annual report on human rights notes, "Most minority groups resided in areas they traditionally inhabited. Government policy calls for members of recognized minorities to receive preferential treatment in birth planning, university admissions, access to loans, and employment. However, the substance and implementation of ethnic minority policies remained poor, and discrimination against minorities remained widespread."

Although a communist country, laws on the books in China provide a remarkable array of individual and group freedoms, including freedom of speech, freedom of association, operation of a free press and the right to a public trial before an independent judiciary.

In practice, however, those "freedoms" quickly disappear when the state makes a broad claim of "subversion of state power" or contend an action goes against "the interests of the state," according to the U.S. State Department.

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