

City of Ancestors

By Angela C.

James Baldwin once said: People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them. That may very well be one of the most constant quotes that comes to mind when one thinks of the Ancient City of Chongwu. When locating Chongwu, a tourist first takes a flight to Quanzhou, Fujian from, in my case, Guangzhou. After landing there, I, my father, my sister, and my grandfather took a taxi to our 5 star hotel in the small town of Chongwu. This particular town can be easily described as a charming fishing town that is tucked away in Quanzhou far away from the high scale towers and quick locomotion of busy cities like Beijing or Guangzhou. After settling our small knapsacks in our hotel, we strolled down a path to the ancient city in Chongwu with the salty scent of fish surrounding us.

What I found immensely interesting was the jabbering of Fujian that I heard everywhere in Chongwu. The language is immensely different from Mandarin, which I speak, even though all languages in China are merely Mandarin twisted and bent to all sorts of tones and cadences. After a pleasant and amiable walk we arrived past burning garbage at the middle of the road to the small entrance of the ancient city. In fact, the stone wall left only a small curved hole in which to enter; I'm sure someone above 5'6 could not enter. My first impression of my ancestral home on my fathers side was really that I was completely aghast. Garbage was strewn off to one side, and untidily rowed squared houses were built completely out of stone at random places in a haphazard line.

Slowly making our way down the narrow path, the three of us 'modern' Chinese people stared blinking at the rotting doors and deteriorating conditions of the buildings while my grandfather looked on with complete amusement. *This* was where our ancestors lived?“Chongwu was built 670 years ago,” my grandfather explained at our incredulous observation at the state of the buildings. For some reason I still felt a sense of ennui at seeing the centuries aged architecture, and most of that was directed at the many Buddhist temples that I shrank away from during my walk. We wandered a little ways through the 500 meter long, 300 meter wide city, finding gateways and arches before coming to a stop before craggy stairs that led up to the wall.

“Why isn't there anyone here? There should be people keeping watch and guiding tourists along,” Grandfather muttered, looking up as we proceeded up the stairs. When we reached the top and began walking the beaten path along the wall, I noticed the slightly more modern, little houses that seemed quaint but held a Asian vintage feel. Further along the wall, two black kids (goats) scampered along the dirt path below while a ebony, matured goat was chained to a post near a garden. Nearby, snowy chickens clucked and squawked, and they naively pecked at the dirt in search of insects and other vitals to consume. Bringing my gaze towards a pair of play fighting pekingese dogs below, a sort of presumably smiling expression found its way upon my straight face. Ah, the adoration of dogs, may men never fall to letting their numbers decrease in number.

Several more conversations went on within my procession of four people,

and we wandered along the wall before coming to a stop. In hopes of walking as far away from the Buddhist temple beside the steps to the end of the city, I teetered on the *very* edge of the stairs and used 'on point' and nearly fell to my death. Happily, I eventually made my way down, and shielding my eyes with a oddly porcelain hand I looked up at my slowly moving family. When the venture along the wall was over, everything grew gradually smoother. I closely observed the cracks within the brown flecked white stone that was used to build the homes, the ancestors

of great government officials who were dressed in age old sandals with women still wearing head wraps, and the hundred year old wells.

Upon exiting the ancient city, I took one last look behind me at the home that my ancestors resided in for perhaps the hindmost time. It is not a myriad life that the citizens in the city of Chongwu lead, but it is a part of their history, and the fact that they have kept and treasured their customs and apparel for so long is remarkable. The location of Chongwu beside one of the 8 most beautiful oceans in China, their history in valorously fending off the Japanese pirates, and the sheer oriental, mystical feeling of being transported back in time makes this visit to my ancestral home one of the most lasting, favored memories that will remain with me for the rest of my life.