



A cross-cultural story of an American teenager's year in school and visiting cultural and scenic sites in China.

Jing-Jing: Adventures in China
By Dan Tannacito

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A MULTI-CULTURAL STORY OF AN
AMERICAN TEENAGER'S YEAR IN CHINA

ADVENTURES
IN CHINA

jin-q-jing

DAN TANNACITO

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Print ISBN: 978-1-959624-55-4

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-122-8

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2025

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Tannacito, Dan

Jing-Jing: Adventures in China by Dan Tannacito

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025917280

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Chapter Three: Clapping the Clouds Away

Officials from the Foreign Affairs Office (or **waiban** as we called them) informed us they were sponsoring a long weekend trip for foreign faculty as guests visiting **Huangshan** (Yellow Mountain).

Yellow Mountain (so-named for the emperor Huang Di and not the color of the mountain) were THE recreational experience in China. It was, however, an eight-hour drive by van from Shanghai to southern Anhui province in Eastern China. We would stay the first night (and the third) at a hotel at the mountain base and a second night at the summit hotel. The trip required an early departure from Shanghai for 18 faculty, 6 political minders, and three vans. The trip was intended as a special incentive for honored guests who were told “Once one climbs Huangshan, one has seen China.”

Huangshan is commonly called the “Fairyland of Earth” because of the “Four Natural Wonders”: twisted pines, seas of clouds, odd-shaped rocks, and hot springs. The top (nearly 6,000 feet above sea level) is a climb from the Beihai Hotel at the base, 20,000 steep stone stairs above. Climbers rested for lunch at a mid-way pavilion where sandwiches were available before soldiering on another four hours to a hotel destination in a forest above **Guangming** Summit.

The majestic scenery of Huangshan--60 miles in circumference--consists of 72 Yangshanian granite peaks steeply uplifted and weathered in a forest covering 98% of the landscape. The uplifted crustal formations were legendary subject matter of Chinese paintings and photography. Pheasants, monkeys, deer, and leopards are abundant which accounts for their prominence in Chinese art.

Apparently, Chinese people have been going there since the emperor cultivated alchemy (medicines from local herbs) there in the eighth century. Monks established Buddhist Temples in view of the most picturesque scenes that bear quaint names: Flying Over Rock, Greeting Guest Pine, and Cloud Dispelling Pavillion. This retreat from the heat of the city was between 55 and 68 F and has rainfall half the year and mist and fog nearly two-thirds of the time. The mist is created after the rainfall and gives the hundreds of peaks and thousands of ravines an ethereal look.

We hardly knew the human and geological history of this area before visiting. Dad had studied the paleolithic land forms but few scientists had visited the area. Before departing, Dad and I studied maps of China produced by the CIA, the only ones available outside the country. We also consulted Nagel's volume--*China*-- for information about cultural sites. Since we had yet to learn Chinese the door to knowledge about many places was sealed.

It soon became apparent that the ride to Yellow Mountain would be arduous and uncomfortable. The van was crowded; the weather in late August hot, and the bouncing and jouncing on the rough, mainly dirt roads an ordeal.

We had humorous moments. For example, I was fascinated by the French expert who came aboard the van at the residence overdressed: wearing a flowing, belted dress, a wide brim hat, high heel pumps, and black goggle sunglasses. Dad said he almost mistook her for an actress out of Fellini's movie, *8 1/2*.

We drove continuously several times for almost two hours before taking a break. We stopped in villages where we could use the public lavatories. Once in the heart of poverty-stricken Anhui province, we ate sandwiches brought by the **waiban** since no restaurants for foreigners existed en route. This was the stark reality of mainland China away from the major cities.

The minimal appointment of the lavatories might be an emblem of the condition of most rural Chinese. A countryside toilet typically was a trench above a downward slope draining into a stream. The facility was shielded from the road by a bamboo screen, with partitioned stalls above concrete slits in the floor above the trench system. Customers (and the charge was one **fen**) squatted above these openings to complete their business. No toilet paper was available unless one brought it oneself. No means but gravity available to flush.

On returning from her first toilet visit, Miss France came screaming from the building. Rushing back to see what happened, I saw her running out without her belt which inadvertently had dropped into the trench that was filled with excrement. The bus of experts stifled their laughter as they huddled in the van with tears in their eyes. The **waiban** tried to calm everyone but themselves were embarrassed.

The hot springs at our hotel at the base of Yellow Mountain were a welcome and rejuvenating experience. Several of the **waiban** referred to it as the **Tang** Spring and others as **Piaoxue** Hot Spring. Located at the 2,000-foot level, the water is an average temperature of 100-108 degrees with a ginger aroma. In service for more than 1,000 years, it was a welcome respite from the long, weary journey. We put on our bathing suits to enjoy the hot springs at the hotel. After immersing in the naturally-heated pool, we felt the benefits of the silica and sulfur minerals on our skin as well as our cardiovascular systems. Before sliding into our hotel beds, we grabbed some **guo tie** (fried dumplings filled with pork) as a bedtime snack.

We paced ourselves as best we could when we began our climb the next morning. However, the pressure of knowing the midway pavilion was four hours away plus

the absence of any benches or places to rest along the way slowed our ascent. We were embarrassed when we saw porters carrying heavy loads zipping by us as we climbed. The steps were easier for Dad because he had longer legs. But I seemed to have more vitality—at least in bursts of energy-- so I was usually ahead.

At the mid-point pavilion, the view was breathtaking. Many foreigners who planned to return below instead of continue on took photographs of their party. I was asked by a young boy about my age:

“Excuse me, can you take a picture of me with my dad?”

Surprised by this Chinese youth who spoke perfect English, I asked “What’s your name? Mine is Sophia.”

He replied “Ricky Chen. We’re living in Beijing while my dad works at a petrochemical plant there.”

“Are you,” I hesitated while snapping their picture, “uh... Americans?”

“Yes, we’re from Texas working on a joint venture in Beijing with the Chinese government,” Ricky’s father continued.

As they spoke my dad came forward to say “hello.”

Ricky returned the greeting and asked me: “Do you want to go see the Jade Lake Pool, not far from here? We’re going to visit.”

I looked at Dad who nodded and said, “Yes, you two go ahead while I talk with Ricky’s Dad.”

Ricky and I looked at each other, then bolted down a side trail to a nearby pool of dark green water. Walking completely around the pool, we fell into conversation about our lives in China as well as back in the U.S. Time passed quickly until Dad came to collect me to continue our journey. Our new friends parted and we promised to visit each other in our respective cities.

The sites on the upper part of the climb continued to be wonderful. We passed lookout points signed in English and Chinese. These included “Flying Over Rock,” a unique rock formation that looked like a spear thrown from abroad into one of the 40-foot-high rocks. Another site called “Buddha’s Light” was a long view of the sun setting amid a sea of clouds beyond **Aoyu** Peak over 4,000 feet above sea level. Rainbows formed from the light reflecting off the recently fallen rain.

The summit hotel was a three-story brick building, unimpressive except when we considered that the porters we saw running up and down the stairs with huge loads on their backs must have carried every piece of the hotel up there. We were so thankful when we surrendered our passports and were given our rooms. We hardly looked around but did find bowls of water to wash up. We devoured the Beggar’s Chicken and **you tiao** (fried bread sticks) on the side table before collapsing with fatigue.

We slept soundly after our very long climb to the summit hotel on Celestial Peak at 6000 feet. A cool breeze blew through our window as we slept through the night. Maybe around 6 am, we woke to see clouds outside our window. At first disappointed, nonetheless it seemed very mystical. Then, we heard the sound of people clapping hands although we could not see them in the mist. The clapping came from various locations in the mist and grew louder by the minute. The sun rose dispersing the clouds. The clapping continued until the mist was driven off for another day. Then we saw on the slopes and ridges in the forest below people sitting or standing and clapping, as it were, the clouds away.

We had an uneventful return trip to Shanghai. This trip to Huangshan proved to be more than a means to relax. We began to understand the natural beauty of China.



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