

**UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG  
CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE**

***OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA***



*UJCI students attend the Confucius Institute  
Summer Camp, 13-30 June 2018*



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Cover: The UJCI Summer Camp Group in the foyer of the Confucius Institute headquarters in Hanban, China.

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*The UJCI Summer Camp Group with Dr David Monyae, South African Co-Director, before leaving for China.*

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## **Introduction**

THE Confucius Institute Headquarters in Hanban, China, hosts an annual Summer Camp for all registered Confucius Institute students worldwide, which gives them the opportunity to visit China and participate in language and cultural activities. This year, 27 students at the University of Johannesburg Confucius Institute (UJCI) attended the camp, departing on 13 June 2018 and returning on 30 June 2018. They spent a week in Nanjing, seat of the UJCI's partner institution, Nanjing Tech University, and another week in Beijing.

The students ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate students, while others were professionals in their fields, reflecting the broad makeup of the UJCI student body. They experienced China to the full, and saw many sights will they will never forget – certainly far too much to capture here. This is a brief rundown of their busy fortnight.

### ***First week in Nanjing***

The students spent the first week in the city of Nanjing where they did everything from visiting an entrepreneurial innovation centre to seeing the Old East Gate and Zhonghua Gate Castle built in 1368, when Zhu Yuanzhang was crowned Emperor of China, and made Nanjing his capital. The five-day immersion saw the students leave their hotel at nine in the morning, and return at five in the afternoon. The hours in between were crammed with activities, guided by

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an expert on the city, including visits to the Nanjing Tech Campus (Day 2), a tea culture experience (Day 3), visiting Nanjing Yunjin Museum (Day 4), visiting the mausoleum of Dr Sun Yat-Sen (Day 4) and visiting markets and shopping centres (Day 5).

### ***Moving on to Beijing***

The group spent its second week in the famous city of Beijing. Sticking to the daily nine to five routine, they visited Tian An Men Square (Day 1), the National Museum and Beijing Zoo (Day 2), the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall of China (Day 3), the Lama Confucian Temple (Day 4), the Beijing Science Museum (Day 5), and the Temple of Heaven and the 789 Art Centre (Day 6).

Reflects Refiloe Moatshe: 'Exciting, eye-popping, interesting, adventurous, compelling, informative, overwhelming,' are some of the terms I could use to describe my experience of China. I have always dreamt of visiting China, and to be there physically has made me believe that dreams sometimes really do come true. And, like they say, 'experience is the best teacher. I have truly learnt a lot during my visit to China'.

Experience also taught Reitumetse Lekhoe, who humorously recalls: 'I remember days before the trip looking at the picture of how to eat with chopsticks. Instead of practising, I told myself, this is easy, – but, hey, it was difficult. Then first lunchtime was showtime, and eating with chopsticks for the first time was like climbing a mountain. By Day Three, though, I had adapted,, and realised I could type my emails with one hand while eating with the other.'

### ***Extreme contrasts***

Lucky Tsotetsi solemnly observed: 'A world of extreme contrasts, thought patterns, and ways of living, China is not what you think it is, no matter what your expectations and assumptions might have been. Nanjing has a fascinating history, delicious street food, and very relaxed. After the whole trip, and having experienced Beijing, I felt Nanjing was a good 'starter' city if you've never been to China before. It's not as big as Beijing, but big enough so that I never ran out of things to do.'

Thato Malaisha, a second-year Engineering student, spoke highly of the experience, which he said confirmed many of his expectations, and even exceeded them in some ways. A keen student of Chinese economic policy and Chinese history, he summarised his experience as follows:

'The first of the three biggest highlights was the food. Duck was emphasised in Beijing, which was a big deal. But for me it was more than that – it was more about preparation, with two types of fresh, alive fresh and dead fresh, and that almost anything is edible.'

### ***Ancient architecture***

The students arrived just a week after the Festival of the Dog, which was the second of his highlights. He was particularly impressed by the ancient architecture and the use of space in the Confucius Temple, the Temple of Heaven Park, the Forbidden City, and the Juyongguan Great Hall.

The third highlight was 'coordination between the government and the people, how the party philosophy engages with the masses, and how people interact with one another.' He intends to double his efforts at learning Mandarin in the second semester so that he can take full advantage of all that China has to offer.

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'I would love to study in China to further understand their cultural systems and equip myself with the scope of artificial intelligence and international business relations from the second largest economic engine,' he says. Lessons were learned by Matozi Mthethwa who, speaking to the country in anthropomorphised fashion, states 'As an engineering student, I learned a lot from you [China], not only in your technology, but in your way of life and the way in which you look at the world, and the world that you have created for your people. I can only dream that the rest of the world experiences you in the way that I have.'

### ***Need for mutual understanding***

Addressing the group prior to their departure, Dr David Monyae, Co-Director of the UJCI, said the importance of the Summer Camp was heightened by the need for mutual understanding across cultures and languages, the more so because 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of South Africa-China relations.

'Learning a new language and immersing yourself in a different culture is a good move on your part, which will reap immense dividends in the long-run. As you are no doubt aware, we live in a diverse country and a diverse world, and language is a bridge for mutual understanding, and a path-opener for cooperation. Mandarin in particular is a great language to learn because of the fascinating and storied history of China, as well as its increasing strategic importance.'

The people-to-people element was also appreciated by Phumi Setiloane. 'Beijing – the cosmopolitan and big capital – was another shock. The buzz and the much faster pace than Nanjing required us to catch up quickly. Between visiting different dynasties, empire buildings and the Olympic park, I could not stop wondering how wonderful China is. The book exhibitions, the interviews, and the Hanban headquarters were true five-star experiences, and five-star treatment.'

On behalf of the whole group, she expressed her gratitude to the UJCI and to Leo, their guide in Nanjing. 'A special mention of our dear beloved friend Leo, who touched our hearts and showed us love in a memorable way. We felt like we had a true guardian angel when he was in our space.'



### ***Television interview***

The students were interviewed by Xinhua News, China's leading news agency. To view the insert, scan this QR code.



*The UJCI Summer Camp Group with their hosts at Nanjing Tech University.*

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## **AN UNFORGETTABLE TRIP**

### **Phumi Setiloane**

The UJCI group arrived at the Keyuan Hotel in Nanjing – the calm and quiet capital of Jiangsu Province – in the late evening on 14 July 2018. It was hot and humid. Coming from our winter cold, it was a shock in many ways. We drove through the streets of Nanjing in a bus full of curious and foreign faces, not wanting to miss a thing, and trying to figure out whether life at the other end of the world was the same as we knew it.

Nanjing Tech University was our destination for the day. Among the hosting staff, we saw the familiar face of Prof Peng, Chinese Co-Director of the UJCI. Everyone was very happy to see her and interact with her enthusiastic and welcoming team. What a warm welcome in that heat – it was really refreshing.

Walking around Nanjing Tech University - with its spectacular landscaped gardens, ponds, buildings, and the group of students I was part of – it felt as if I was where I was supposed to be at that particular time. Mealtimes were an adventure – we looked like overgrown toddlers with our taste buds trying to navigate the tastes and textures of the food in front of us. By the second week, we all had our favourite dishes.

One of the things that stood out for me was the highly committed, innovative and creative minds at the university. It gives hope when young people of both genders are committed in that way.

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The martial arts session gave us a chance to engage with Chinese culture, and of course to stretch those muscles which were stiff from all the walking. We were also involved in other practical activities that ended in a show-off contest.

### ***Heritage site***

Visiting the heritage site was sensational. The art and the relics were breathtaking, not to mention the examination museum. As we walked around enjoying the beautiful surroundings, we were unaware that we were becoming local celebrities. Local people made us instant movie stars, which we enjoyed for a while until we grew tired of being snapped every other second. We were inquisitive about the opera night, which, unsurprisingly, was very different from the opera we know.

Beijing – China’s massive and cosmopolitan capital – was another shock. The buzz and much faster pace than Nanjing required us to catch on quickly. Between visiting different temples, Empire buildings, and the Olympic park, I could not stop marvelling at the wonders of China. The book exhibitions, the interviews, and the Hanban headquarters all formed part of true five-star treatment.

### ***The Great Wall***

The Great Wall and the temple visits were on another level for me – to be specific, a spiritual one. I could not stop feeling a sense of energies around me. They were clean, good and positive. It felt as if there was a higher power over me, as my mind told me that the people who lived there long before us really gave their all to create those spaces we enjoy today.

I’m very grateful to have had this opportunity to visit China. It was more than learning. It was more connecting with God’s creation from a different perspective, as well as a culture embodying wisdom, harmony, loyalty, honesty, and much more. At the same time, I was proud to be a member of our group, and to experience its amazing spirit of Ubuntu. They not only flew the UJ flag high, but also flew the South African flag with dignity and pride.

A special word of thanks to our Nanjing guide, Leo, who touched our hearts and showed us love in a memorable way. We felt as if we had a true guardian angel when he was in our space. I would also like to thank Dr David Monyae and his team, and Prof Peng and her team, for their contributions to the unforgettable UJCI Class of 2018 Summer Camp.



*A group photo at the Confucius Temple in Nanjing.*

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## **GATEWAY TO CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE**

***Thato Tshepang Sekgoele***

One of the biggest highlights of the China experience was the food. Duck was emphasised in Beijing, which was a big deal, but for me it was more than that. It was also about preparation, and two types of fresh – alive fresh and dead fresh – and that, given proper preparation and treatment, almost anything is edible.

A second highlight was to see really ancient architecture, and the use of space in the Confucius Temple, the Temple of Heaven Park, the Forbidden City, and the Juyongguan Great Hall. The third highlight was the coordination between the government and the people – how the party engages with the masses, and how people interact with one another.

### ***A deeper understanding***

I would love to study in China in order to gain a deeper understanding of its cultures, and to equip myself with the scope of artificial intelligence and international business relations from the second largest economic engine in the world. This year we are celebrating 20 years of South Africa–China relations, almost as long as our inclusive democracy. Our efforts to embrace Ubuntu will benefit from an understanding of the Ntu philosophy, with all things emanating from Africa, and returning to Africa as well.

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This trip has helped me to understand that not knowing where Ubuntu comes from is one of the main reasons why we are failing to practise what we preach. The Chinese have a deep understanding of their cultural heritage, because they sense-know-how where they come from. History is vital to the rejuvenation of this huge nation. Cultural intelligence is a technique that needs to be employed on our own road towards becoming a developed country.

### ***Vital engagements***

In a speech about our journey, I said:

'This year marks 20 years of official South Africa–China relations. It has brought Chinese pedagogy to our doorstep. We welcome the vital engagements about culture, heritage, art, technology and science that have opened the gateway for us to the Global Village.

'We have learnt to embrace our differences, but to engage as brothers and sisters, and share and celebrate our diverse competencies. We are a Rainbow Nation that respects and honours our unique and traditional ways, at home and abroad, but becoming a global family in the process.

'Today we gathered here with an understanding of diversity in social integration, and to express our gratitude for an engagement that has pierced our armour of lack, limitation and scarcity, helping us to rediscover and realise the spirit of Ubuntu in the process. Humanity does not recognise race, colour or creed, and sees above and beyond man-made constraints.

### ***Economic emancipation***

'We take it upon ourselves to be responsible family members during this engagement, and to enjoy the spirit of economic emancipation – a new opportunity for the world, guided by Chinese diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the best sense of the term.

'We are looking towards a scenario in which South Africa, China, and other role players are able to pursue a new form of international relations characterised by mutual respect, objectivity, justice, and win-win cooperation, aimed at building a global community with a joint vision for a shared future and a shared vision of humankind –an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world in which all people can enjoy peaceful, secure, and prosperous lives.'



*Instant celebrities ... the UJCI group being photographed by curious locals at the Confucius Temple in Nanjing.*

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## **THE WORLD BECAME SMALLER AND MORE FAMILIAR**

**Siphelo J J Mtuse**

One young person with a suitcase and an empty passport, a mind full of preconceived ideas, but accepting that expectations may detract from what life offers in the moment – off to China for two weeks with only one level of HSK, the standard test of proficiency in Mandarin for foreign students and others. So what happened ?

On Day One, our group and students at Nanjing Tech University introduce ourselves in the hall, passing around a microphone. One of them, just a few before me, pulls out a prepared speech in Mandarin and proceeds to deliver it for the next two minutes, even though it feels much longer. Day One in China, two weeks to go, and only HSK Level One. Am I ready for this?

By midday, the China reality had set in. Chinese people were around us from Dubai to Beijing and from Beijing to Nanjing – this didn't matter, because they will always be normal people to me. But the first meal was a culture shock – many bowls on the table, and all of them overflowing with dishes that were entirely foreign to me and the rest of the group. This was the start of an opportunity to learn above and beyond HSK, and to step up to a practical level of learning that would prepare me for any HSK test that would follow in the future.

Trying to come to grips with the unfamiliar dishes on the table, and navigating them with chopsticks – not chow mein and sushi at the nearest Chinese fast food joint, but eating everything with chopsticks, from vegetables to rice. The tastes were unfamiliar, and the saving grace was bottles of soft drinks which resembled those we were familiar with in South Africa. The labels were in Mandarin, but what a relief to find that they tasted the same.

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This characterises the formative phase of our journey – experiencing a new culture, but holding onto the small things one is familiar with, like the taste of coke to wash the palate after every attempt to try something from a different bowl.

From then on, we learnt a lot about Nanjing, its people and its history. Highlights included our experience of the wonderful tea culture, which resulted in my going home not just with a picture and story of the event, but an entire tea set as well.

### ***Kungqu opera***

Another highlight was the Kungqu opera, an enriching way to learn about life in China from a Chinese perspective, instead of via books and movies. Again, I took home a copy of the book (and CD) the opera was based on.

There is no way I can talk about this amazing experience and not talk about Dora, our Nanjing tour guide, who was very proud to be Chinese, but also welcoming of people from other cultures and their expressions of those cultures whether in poetry, song or dance. The UJCI group became bigger than just the UJCI, proudly expressing a broader South African culture, which Dora engaged with and appreciated. The world became smaller and more familiar as everyone became better acquainted.

On our last day in Nanjing, we became more than South Africans in another way as well when a student from Ghana delivered a powerful speech that our group could relate to on many levels. It was light-hearted and amusing, but wonderful to hear the small things we had all been thinking all along, like missing using our fingers for eating, and local people being fascinated by their African visitors. This made us more African rather than just being South African as well.

Beijing was a wonderful experience, providing an amazing window on Chinese history and culture. The fact that the Forbidden City had a room dedicated to enriching the mind just blew me away. Visiting some of the wonders of China, including World Heritage Sites, highlighted how privileged we were to have been on this trip. Visiting Hanban, the Confucius Institute headquarters, was also a privilege, and seeing all the national flags in the reception area served as a vivid reminder of the rapid globalisation in our time, which is likely to accelerate in the future.

### ***Where is all started***

Nelson Mandela once remarked: 'When we read, we are able to travel to many places, meet many people, and understand the world.' This certainly holds true of the 2018 UJCI group, whose journey began when they developed an interest in Mandarin, and began to grapple with their first ideograms. A quote from Confucius is similarly apposite, and remarkably reflective of our experience: 'It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring it, to put into practice what you have acquired. A greater pleasure still it is when friends of congenial minds come from afar to seek you because of your attainments.'

Thirty individuals with varying levels of proficiency in Mandarin, some of it rudimentary, set off to China, and soon became a solid group. Two weeks later, they left China with a broader experience of South Africa, Africa, China. and the world at large. A lot can change in two weeks, and those two weeks will always be appreciated and treasured. We climbed to the top of the Great Wall to see the world, and came back more enlightened – an honour and a privilege.



*With our hosts at Nanjing Tech University, and our contribution to the Dragon Festival in the background.*

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## **MY JOURNEY TO CHINA**

### **Refiloe Moatshe**

Exciting, eye-popping, interesting, adventurous, impelling, informative, overwhelming – these are some of the words I could use to describe my experiences in China. As a child, I often dreamt of visiting China, and doing so in reality has made me believe that dreams do sometimes come true. As embodied in the saying 'experience is the best teacher', I have truly learnt a lot from my journey to China.

The heat was overwhelming, especially at the beginning. To put this in perspective, we left South Africa in winter with daytime temperatures of 15 degrees Celsius or less, and entered a country in summer with daytime temperatures of up to 38 degrees. And then there was the humidity. Nevertheless, I adapted quite quickly. I would like to believe the excitement of being in China had something to do with this. My skin began to glow, more so than in South Africa. This has led me to believe that there is some nutritional value in the Chinese atmosphere,.

My first meal in China was a total culture shock (I suppose I still had my home-cooked meals in mind). I was overcome by the hugely varied dishes drawn from various regional cuisines we were able to sample. It was also an eye-opener to see how Chinese people enjoy their food. Ultimately, my taste buds adjusted themselves to the new and unfamiliar feast set before me, and I began to savour sweet and sour pork, pork stir-fries, Beijing roasted duck, and long noodles.

### ***Our battle with chopsticks***

I also adjusted rapidly to eating with chopsticks. I was genuinely proud of myself. Something odd but also educational was the fact that meals did not end in desserts. Instead of the usual puddings and custard or ice cream I was used to back home, we were offered healthy slices of watermelon – maybe that's one of the reasons why Chinese people live longer and healthier lives. Another interesting feature of Chinese meals were the round tables and the carousels which one could turn to access the various dishes. This was an additional window on Chinese dining culture.

In my view, after visiting various historical sites and museums, Chinese seem to know who they are as a people, and are rooted in their history and culture. It was fascinating to see so many younger people visiting the museums and other historical sites. It was evident that Chinese people start learning about their history and culture from a young age onwards, and accept this as a foundation for building their lives and identity instead of pulling away from it. This speaks to the adage that it is easier to educate young minds.

It was also impressive to see how Chinese parents allow their young people to be exposed to innovation, science and technology – again, when they are young and eager to absorb knowledge. I got to see this at first hand at the Creative Industry Park in Nanjing and the Beijing Science Technology Museum, and came to believe that this must be one of the main reasons why China is doing so well economically. This is definitely something that fascinated me.

I was also fascinated by the clothing and fashions – practical and functional, but stylish. It's an effortless look, but also forward-looking, and as a designer and stylist I found it practical and appealing. I believe the Chinese are setting new trends for ready to wear apparel. For example, many women wear miniskirts and printed t-shirt with sneakers or short-heeled sandals. Another popular combo is dungarees with flip-flops and oversized t-shirts, again worn with sneakers.

### ***Negotiating skills***

During visits to the Xingjiekou Market in Nanjing and Hongqiao Market in Beijing, I was surprised and impressed by the stallholders' negotiating skills. Chinese salespersons never turn customers away – you would think they live by the motto, 'what the client can afford, the client gets'.

Visiting stores like WOO (a scarf boutique) and 3D.JP (a puzzle shop) exposed me to innovative products. WOO is filled with stunning and elegant printed scarves. 3D.JP offers a wide range of puzzles like 3D cloaks, 3D photo albums and 3D flower jars. I was impressed with what they managed to do with scarves and puzzles.

To conclude, my experience of China was phenomenal. Even though it lasted for only two weeks, I developed significantly in its course. It was an experience that captivated my mind and my senses, and one I will take with me in my life's endeavours. I mean, who could ever be the same?



*Students actually studying ... a library at Nanjing Tech University.*

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## **THE CHINA CHRONICLES**

***Nqobile Marisheni***

IN THE course of two and a half weeks, every myth and stereotype we harboured about China were obliterated. Disembarking in Nanjing, we were met by intense summer heat and high levels of humidity. My initial conclusions were that China was a beautiful country; there were many things to discover I knew nothing about; and that, in the course of doing so, I would irrevocably develop a new perspective on this fascinating country.

Being the first member of my family to travel abroad, I was nervous but also very excited about landing on foreign soil. When I began to look around me, the first thing that caught my eye was the extraordinary infrastructure. The tall and beautifully shaped buildings were hard to miss, and are all around China. The highways and other roads were very busy, and vehicles drove on the right, but we quickly got used to that as well.

Nanjing Tech University was the biggest university I had yet seen, very well-built, and surrounded by greenery. Due to widespread perceptions of high levels of pollution and environmental degradation, the degree of nature conservation at Nanjing Tech and elsewhere was unexpected. However, we soon learnt that China is pushing towards far higher levels of environmental protection. Among other things, this is embodied in new legislation that seeks to harmonise economic and social development with environmental protection. Among other things, the new law contains harsh penalties for environmental offences.

Another highlight was the everyday use of technology, notably the way in which people use their celphones to pay for purchases. At one of the markets in Nanjing, we came across shops

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with no staff, but shoppers simply took what they wanted, and paid via We Chat. This points to another major feature of Chinese life which fascinated us, namely the high levels of trust and security.

### ***Role of technology***

Technology also play a major role in transport. Because of China's huge population, the number of cars on the roads are restricted, encouraging the active use of public transport, bicycles and electronic bikes. Encouraging bicycles is also aimed at reducing air pollution, notably high levels of carbon dioxide. Bicycle parks allow citizens to tag a bike via We Chat, and use it for an agreed period. Our Beijing tour guide, Lyn, mentioned that there were three things one had to experience in Beijing: the traffic, bird's nest soup, and roast duck.

It took a while to adjust to Chinese cuisine – from dumplings to crabs, lots of watermelon, lots of veggies, and so on – and some dishes were acquired tastes. By the end of our tour, though, we had acquired most or all of them, and some had become highly enjoyable.

Touring Beijing in the heat was very interesting. Seeing the temples and ancient buildings built by past emperors and dynasties, the Confucius Temple, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, as well as Buddhist Temples, where citizen still go to pray, was fascinating and instructive. Reaching them prepared us for the greatest climb of all: the Great Wall of China.

Climbing the Great Wall was indeed a crowning experience. While the climb was challenging, the higher one went, the more beautiful the view became. When you reach the top, you cannot help but celebrate, and savour the breathtaking view.

The museums we visited provided a fascinating insight into how Chinese culture was practised in ancient times, up to the present. The fact that China has so many museums allows children and young people to learn easily about the country's past. China has grasped the concept of the youth being the future.

### ***Children are cherished***

Children are taken to museums to learn not only about Chinese history and culture, but also about science. The museums not only let visitors view the exhibitons, but also to touch, play and experience, which particularly engages young people, and helps them to develop spheres of interest.

To conclude, China is a great country to explore, and every visitor will learn a lot in the process, including how a country with so many people can be so orderly; how culture is cherished and preserved; how the environment is taken care of; and how young people are cared for and groomed. Although it is still working towards being great, China is already a well-oiled machine.



*In conversation with a student in the highly impressive Entrepreneurial Innovation Centre at Nanjing Technological University. This approach should be transplanted to South Africa.*

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## **BEYOND THE GREAT WALL**

**Lucky Michael Tsotetsi**

A world of extreme contrasts, thought patterns and ways of living, China is not what you think it is, no matter what your expectations and assumptions may have been. While China may be many things to many people, culture shock is one promise it will always keep.

On 13 June 2018, I woke up early in the morning, bag packed, realising that I was finally off to China. After we landed, my body was on auto-pilot, half-asleep after the long flights.

The next day, I kept on saying to myself: 'I'm in China; I really am in China.' The feeling was overwhelming, and I was flooded with new sights, smells and sounds. I was fascinated by the immediate differences with South Africa (like left-hand drive), but also recording the similarities.

After arriving in Nanjing, I dropped my bag, had some spicy street food outside the hotel, and decided to take a long walk and look for a drink. Nanjing was very welcoming, and I fell in love with it immediately.

Nanjing has a fascinating history as well as delicious street food, and a relaxed atmosphere – certainly more relaxed than Beijing. At the end of the trip, I felt Nanjing was a good 'starter' city for newcomers to China. It's a lot smaller than Beijing, but large enough so that one never runs

The first few days were spent at and around Nanjing Tech University – the biggest campus I have ever seen. I had seen photographs of it, but nothing prepared me for its sheer scale. I eventually walked around most of it, and it's also lovely. This is something else I like about Nanjing – the fact that it's a walking city. We also visited a few markets, with Fuzi Miao my favourite. I went there twice – once with the group, and once by myself at night. I really liked Nanjing at night.

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We visited beautiful museums with exhibits about ancient China, as well as Dr Sun Yat-Sen's Mausoleum, reached via 392 steps that reward you with a beautiful view (which on that day was partly shrouded in fog). We also visited the City Gate, said to be the biggest in the world, which made me more curious about the Great Wall.

### ***Off the beaten path***

I got to see many other things, which I won't go into here. If you're a foreigner exploring Nanjing by yourself, it's really easy to get off the beaten path. All you have to do is keep your eyes open and follow streets that pique your interest. As in any other part of China, some basic Mandarin goes a long way, but even if you don't know any, the local people are very helpful.

'What did you eat? Did you get used to the food? Did you eat a dog? (a horrible misconception about China). I heard this a dozen times when I came back home. The Chinese have a very strong food culture, and restaurants are everywhere. For them, eating a meal 'at the due time' is close to an obsession.

People in China avoid sugar. I learnt that this is traditionally regarded as a harmful ingredient that feeds the 'worms of the intestines'. Chinese people eat for breakfast what they would normally eat for lunch or dinner, namely rice or noodles, veggies, soups, eggs, fruit, and watermelon (China loves watermelon). My drink of choice for breakfast was soy juice, which is warm and sweet.

We usually had lunch and dinner in groups of nine around a round table. My favourites were dumplings and fried chicken, and I really loved the rice, which had a nice texture to it. I was keen to try tofu, but its taste or lack of it just didn't grow on me. I also a sweet corn and cabbage soup, which tasted a bit like what Mageu in South Africa. I felt it tasted better with a bit of extra sugar, but when I asked for some, the waitrons looked at me disapprovingly. I got the same response when I asked for iced water and salt.

It took a few days to get used to the food, but by the fourth day, breakfast, lunch and dinner were eagerly awaited and were joyful experiences.

### ***The Forbidden City***

We travelled from Nanjing to Beijing on the Bullet train, at about 400km/h – but I slept almost all the way. So fast forward two to three hours to Beijing. It's big – huge – overwhelmingly so. As a result, I did not do much exploring; I didn't know where to start. Everything in Beijing is big, including the Forbidden City and of course the Great Wall, which were bucket-list items for me. Some of the coolest moments of my life. I loved the paintings in the National Museum – quite graphic, and big! I really wish I could have stayed in Beijing for longer. On our last day, we visited 798 Art Zone, one of the most artistic and vibrant places I've ever seen. Creative people, skilled craftsmen, and great ideas everywhere.

Thanks to our excellent guides, we got to see more aspects of Nanjing and Beijing than a typical visitor would. Of course, there are things that just didn't make sense to me at the time, and would probably take a while to get used to. Every country and every city have them. But, in the words of a bartender in Nanjing, 'I.C.' (It's China!).



*The magnificent Forbidden City in Beijing, photographed from Jingshan Park.*

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## **STAIRCASE TO HISTORY**

### ***Reitumetse Lekhoe***

CHINA, a place where everything is made, and yes, a place where everything is possible. Visiting the People's Republic of China was an eye-opener. Our itinerary covered almost everything that one should know, places to be, food to eat, and Chinese culture. I will compress my highlights to paint a picture of why the Chinese people do what they do to save their country.

Chinese officials are so dedicated to their work that no one messes in their country, and they take care of people because they know that the image they portray matters most. I can attest to this based on a first encounter at the Beijing airport when there was a bit of a delay on our side when checking in, but the staff did not tell us that it was our baby to feed. Instead, they worked together to ensure that we catch our flight to Nanjing.

We arrived at around 9 p.m. On our way to the hotel, I could see construction people working to beautify the city, and the streets were the cleanest I had ever seen. Three times a day, there are trucks brushing, or rather mopping, the streets and roads. Visiting China has taught me to keep time, and to adapt to zero-delay behaviour. I remember one of our tour guides telling us that eight o'clock is eight o'clock, and, yes – we made it on time.

On our first day we went to Nanjing Tech University, a big, beautiful and clean campus. What I picked up mostly is how everyone was focusing on their goals, showing great dedication. The university was in recess, but when we got to the language library, students were studying. I asked myself: Aren't they supposed to be at home? But for them, recess meant more time to study, and getting ready for the next semester.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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### ***The struggle with chopsticks***

*Canting zai nar?* Where is the dining hall? On to our first lunch at one of the Nanjing Tech restaurants. Days before the trip, I started looking at pictures of how to eat with chopsticks. Instead of practising, I told myself, this is easy, but 'heey' it was difficult – lunchtime was now showtime, and the first time eating with chopsticks was like climbing a mountain. Three days later I had adapted, and realised I could type my emails with one hand while eating with the other.

Visiting the Entrepreneurial Innovation Centre at Nanjing Tech was wonderful. I want to go there and study photography, and hopefully this will happen in the future. As we went from one project or invention to another, I became interested in a water purifying system that I aim to take to my village in the future. Yes, we have water purification systems in South Africa, but in my village not everyone can afford to buy them, or to buy purified water.

Other highlights in the course of Nanjing itinerary were experiencing tea culture, visiting the Confucius Temple, visiting the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, and Chinese martial arts. I am a tea lover, and the tea culture experience has taught me that tea time is not just a break, but a time to meditate, relax, and calm down while also appreciating the original taste of tea. Little did I know that rooibos without sugar and milk is still nice, and healthier. As we entered the Confucius Temple, Dora, our Nanjing tour guide, told us this would bless us for tests and exams in the future.

The China Imperial Examination Museum – although local people still call it the Confucius Temple – is built in the architectural style of the Qing and Ming Dynasties. We walked around the museum, gazing at the exhibits, and learning about the sorrows and joys that candidates went through during exam time.

### ***Staircase to history***

Visiting Sun Yat-Sen Mausoleum started off with having to climb about 360 stairs. My tip for conquering this is to run up, to avoid feeling the pain of ascending every stair. We finally got to the tomb of the first president of the Peoples' Republic of China.

The fun time began when we experienced Chinese martial arts. We started with Taiji and Wushu, and concluded with Taiji Chuan. I now have a reason to join the martial arts sessions at the UJCI, because I learnt that Taiji helps one to relax body and mind. Wushu emphasises speed, explosive power and natural relaxed movement, whereas Taiji Chuan is not a dance, but an internal art for health, self-defence, and spiritual cultivation.

After eight days in Nanjing, we took the Bullet Train to Beijing, the capital city of China, travelling for four hours at breathtaking speed. We met Lynn, our Beijing tour guide, who told us that the three most important things to do in Beijing was to visit the Forbidden Palace, climb the Great Wall, and eat Beijing duck. We did all three those things. We also walked around Beijing Hutong, riding on rickshaws and buying at the markets.

My first personal highlight came when we reached a point where we could look out over the whole Forbidden Palace – an unforgettable sight. Then came 25 June, the day everyone was waiting for, when we climbed the Great Wall. It took me one hour and 25 minutes to climb up to the Twelfth Fortress. Lynn said that everyone who climbs the Great Wall is a hero. We all got to the top, so now all of us 'summer campers' are heroes.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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The following day we walked around Beijing Hutong and ate a delicious lunch at a family restaurant. We picked our plates clean, and even asked for more. Soon after that, we experienced riding in a rickshaw, and I felt like a child in a see-saw. One thing I picked from all the markets we visited is that the aim is to sell, and customers survive through bargaining.

Trying to talk to people whose language you don't really know, and who don't understand your language either, is a test of patience. Sign language rescued me in most cases, not forgetting the help of key sentences from our basic Mandarin course. The only major mode of transport I did not experience was the bicycle.

China has taught me a lot, from being more patient to using marketing strategies, living a healthy lifestyle, and being considerate by taking care of the environment.



*The UJCI group on historic Tian An Men Square in Beijing.*

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## ODE TO CHINA

### *Matozi Mthethwa*

CHINA – never in my wildest dreams have I experienced such a sense of euphoria. The rich culture you carry in your food, your people and your history has left an imprint on my soul. Take me back.

In moments of intense nostalgia, I ask myself what it was that left me feeling this way about you, and I can never quite figure it out. I hope this report will help me to navigate my way through my memories, and narrow this feeling down to specific experiences.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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My first encounter with you was at the airport, a chaotic encounter, but one I would not trade. That is when I learnt my first lesson, that you are respectful of the times set for you, a lesson I will never forget, a lesson I hope to carry with me and implement almost as smoothly and swiftly as you have. I was also able to see the discipline as well as the friendliness in your people, so well executed that only a genuine and natural leader can master it.

### ***Smiling faces***

Upon landing in Nanjing, I was greeted by the smiling faces of your children, beautiful and radiant, each face, old or young, reflecting the nature of your nurturing love, given off by your natural resources, your food and your water. The sight of these warm faces made China a home, and my anxiety about being in a foreign country disappeared.

I was awed by your infrastructure, your advanced technology, and your efficiency. The details of your history are seen in your buildings, old or new; your story can be shared by just one building. The Great Wall and the Forbidden City were great spectacles – your history oozed from each brick, cemented together for us to see.

One of my favourite characteristics is how you have put the comfort of your people first, while still pushing them and inspiring them to continuously improve themselves and their country. Seeing so much passion in the faces of young people whenever they spoke about you was an indication of how much you love them, and how eager they are to give it back.

Your spirit is one I will never forget. It is everywhere and is felt everywhere, whether in the temples, with the relaxing smell of incense burning and people bowing in awe and respect, or in the parks at night with social groups dancing, or in the streets in the mornings, with older people walking vigorously to maintain their longevity.

As an engineering student, I learned a lot from you, not only from your technology but also from your way of life, the way you look at the world, and the world that you have created for your people. I can only dream that the rest of the world experiences you in the way that I have.

A special thanks to UJCI for making this dream materialise, and for helping to teach me life lessons that I will start implementing from this day forward.

## EATING BUGS IN CHINA

### ***Sagar Lakhani***

Travel has always excited me – the more adventurous, the better. Whenever I get the chance, I set out on journeys filled with adventure, fun and excitement – sometimes with a touch of craziness. I had wanted to travel to China since I was in Grade 6, mainly for the culture, martial arts, and the food, as seen on television. The night before we left, I couldn't sleep because of the excitement, and how my blood was storming through my veins.

After seventeen agonising hours in the air, we reached Beijing, where a few of us almost missed our flight to Nanjing. Now that I think of it, I can't stop laughing – it must have been a big shock for others to see seven foreigners running through the airport with their heavy check-in bags,

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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*Down the hatch ... eating a scorpion on Wangfujing Street, Beijing.*

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accompanied by security staff, to make their departure gate in time.

After two more hours in the air, we finally arrived at our first destination. I am used to being welcomed with a warm hug, but when I stepped out of the plane, it felt as if a blow-drier was put right in front of my face. It was hot ! But I was soon in a comfortable room with a very cozy bed, and a roommate who was a stranger at first but later became a good friend I had not intended to make.

Nanjing has many beautiful gardens and marvellous museums.

On my first night I went out for a stroll, and came across a food stall with many different types of food I had never seen before. I told myself, I am not leaving Nanjing until I try every single one of them. So I bought a stick of fried squid, tofu, and chicken, sprinkled with chili powder and cumin. It was better than I had expected, especially the squid, which was tough but tasty. However, I did find it too hot for my taste buds, so I did my homework, and when I returned I was able to say, 'Q ng bù'ào tiānjiā tài duō làjiā' (can you please add less chili)?

### ***Exploring the nightlife***

Every night, after a tiring day, my friends and I would explore the city, experiencing its nightlife with a freedom we don't have at home. We would ask strangers for directions, and hope not to get lost. Once, we went to a restaurant and ordered two kilograms of crayfish. I thought, we must be mad, we will never finish it. When the crayfish arrived, we were silent for a second, but then we all took a deep breath, put on the gloves provided, and attacked the crayfish. We made a huge mess, but kept going until it had all been eaten, and had huge fun in the process.

In the evenings, before going to bed, my roommate and I had a bit of extra fun by prank-calling our friends – and we got away with it (until now).

As an architecture student, Nanjing inspired me in ways my lecturers had told me about. Initially, the Librairie Avant-Garde was not what I had expected it to be – it was just like any other library. But as I kept on walking, I realised it made me feel as if I walking down a street, with bookshelves instead of buildings, and pedestrians carrying books. This was real architecture.



## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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After a week in Nanjing, we left for Beijing on a high-speed train, and the journey was over before I could take a nap. I enjoyed Beijing more than Nanjing. As in Nanjing, I again went out every night. One the first night, we discovered that the Olympic Park was within walking distance from our hotel, so we just took off, with myself acting as tour guide for a group of five. When I spotted the famous Bird's Nest stadium in the distance, our exhaustion from the day dropped away. We meandered through the city, and finally reached Olympic Park.

I had learnt about the Bird's Nest and the Olympic Water Park, but had only seen them in pictures. Now, finally, they were right in front of me. The majestic Bird's Nest, the cool-blue Water Cube, the Pagoda, and the grand Olympic Tower – no photographs I had seen online had done them justice. So the long walk was worth it – except when the others splashed water on me when they found out I had led them on a roundabout route.

### ***Wangfujing Street***

On nights to come, we used the subway to explore other parts of the city. The best destination was the Wangfujing Street, a famous shopping district. It's a popular tourist destination with many world-renowned brand outlets, but also a world-renowned place for eating bugs. I started with three small scorpions on a barbeque stick. My friends were cheering me on, and reassuring me that nothing would happen. Some even told me not to worry because they had all sorts of medication with them at the hotel.

With a crowd gathering around me, I took the first bite. I suddenly thought – what about the sting? Everyone was clapping, and my friends were going crazy. I started nodding my head, saying it was good, and offering a bite to my friends – not because I didn't like it, but because it was delicious. It tasted like cassava chips, with a fusion of coco pops. It was slightly bitter, but nice – like grasshoppers.

Later, I tried a much bigger scorpion with a huge stinger, which I did not care for. It was tougher, and did not taste as good. Next up was an octopus tentacle, which tasted like the squid in Nanjing. It was also tough, but surprisingly sweet. The last thing I ate was a snake. It had been overfried, and was very difficult to chew. Actually, it was awful.

I realised later that it must have been a rat snake, which explained the taste. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to try the spiders, dung beetles, silkworms, starfish, and many more. The following day, everyone in the group got to know I ate scorpions and snakes. When they asked me what it was like, I gave them the same answer – like a grasshopper. I later realised that eating grasshoppers is just as freaky as eating scorpions.

All in all, China was a great experience – one of my best trips yet. It was also the longest. I often go on trips for just two or three days, but this one lasted for 17 days, and was therefore much more fun. I cherish the time I spent in China, which has provided me with my fondest memories of summer holidays. I made friends I will never forget, and experienced cultures in ways I had not thought of. My only regret is that I did not try more bugs and other exotic dishes.

China is a massive country, with a vast range of cultures and cuisines that remain to be explored. I am determined to return, and carry on from where I left off.



At Zhonghua Gate, the South Gate of Nanjing City.

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## ***I WILL ALWAYS CHERISH MY TIME IN CHINA***

### ***Valentine Ngobeni***

OUR Nanjing tour guide, Dora, was lovely, funny and professional. Our Beijing tour guide, Lynn, and our driver were extremely accommodating, knowledgeable and helpful, and everything went smoothly to the end. They made sure we were safe, which really enabled us to enjoy the experience. The hotels were lovely and clean.

It was amazing to be at Nanjing Tech University, meeting other students (Ivy and Leo) as well as other foreign students, hearing about their experiences of the university, and finding out about scholarships for international students.

I loved visiting the Folk Museum – its layout, décor and fittings were all exceptional, and it was interesting to learn that some statues and other exhibits are meant to reflect the daily lives and customs of past inhabitants of Nanjing City. The exhibits include traditional handicrafts such as Chinese puppet shoes, clay figurines, and paper cuttings. That's when I realised I really was in China.

Experiencing the tea culture was also amazing – to see how Chinese people interact with tea, the respect they bestow upon it, the aesthetics surrounding tea drinking, and the history behind it. It was marvellous. Visiting the Zhonghua Gate was incredible, the views are so gorgeous and breathtaking – especially the view over the river next to it.

I was very impressed with Beijing (although I would not like to drive in Beijing traffic). Lynn answered our questions without hesitation, providing interesting background information and commentary everywhere we went. Lynn was an expert in swapping daily tours based on the

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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weather, and we were fortunate to visit the Great Wall in cooler weather. The Wall and scenery were epic.

The initial stretches up to the first two lookout towers were manageable. Then it gets much steeper, but I did make it to No 12 Fortress. Along the way I learnt the meaning of 'getting over difficulties on the way to reaching a goal'. It was a spectacular sight, and an experience never to be forgotten.

The visit to Hanban was very interesting as well. The reception area is filled with flags from all over the world. Beihai Park and Jingshan Park were beautiful, and offered incredible vistas. These are magic parks with gardens, historic buildings and lakes in the middle of a hectic city, where people go to walk, dance, play, exercise, or just relax.

The real beauty of the Forbidden City emerged when I climbed to the top of Jingshan Park, exactly opposite the city's exit gate. I took nice pictures there, and it was well worth the climbing. The 798 Art centre was captivating, filled with galleries and other attractions. It's a very chilled place. I also loved the Hongqiao market – I enjoyed shopping there, and learnt how to bargain with the stallholders, which was a very interesting experience.

My biggest highlight was the Great Wall, and I will forever cherish those moments. I would like to thank Hanban and everyone involved in organising our tour, for making this such a memorable experience.

## MY CHINA EXPERIENCE

### *Tiisetso Mokete*

UPON arriving in China, I was startled by the architecture, which is very different from South Africa's. Houses and other buildings are constructed in a unique style, with rich historical content.

The food is also very different from ours. Many different tastes are combined, but people are very careful about what they eat. We had to adjust to their unique tastes, which is good for the purposes of a cultural exchange. People eat lots of vegetables in their daily meals, and for dessert they have lots of fruit. We visited a many different places during our two-week visit. Some of them are described below.

### ***Nanjing Tech University Entrepreneurial Innovation Centre***

Here, we met and engaged with students who were passionate about entrepreneurship. One of them already was already running an online orange juice business. In South Africa, we learn about the professional side of business, but in China you come with a business idea, and they guide and mentor you about implementing it.

### ***The Great Wall of China***

Dr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, South Africa's first black president, once said, 'I have discovered a secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.'

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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That's how I felt as I was climbing the Great Wall. When I reached the halfway house along the way I realised there was still a long way to go, and the heat was also setting in.

What kept me going was the words of yet another former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, who once said: 'Those who complete the course will do so only because they do not, when fatigue sets in, convince themselves that the road ahead is still too long, the incline too steep, the loneliness impossible to bear, and the price itself of doubtful value.' Indeed, South Africa is blessed with great intellectuals. Climbing the Great Wall of China is a thrilling adventure.

### ***A personal observation***

What I learnt and liked about China is that the Chinese have a sense of responsibility and duty to their nation – indeed, there seems to be a consensus about the national agenda. This is evident from their dedication, commitment, and excellence in the performance of their work. Everyone is busy working in their respective fields, but you can tell that this is more than just business or work to them – they are working with a higher purpose, and I don't see that in South Africa (well, at least not through my lenses).

Moreover, they like getting things done, and without talking a lot. Maybe that emanates from the fact that they don't have full freedom of speech. South Africa is different in this respect; we appreciate differences of opinion, and perhaps this is what is preventing us from reaching a national consensus about the national agenda. We spend such a lot of time talking and debating that we wind up not doing anything much at all. But I guess that's one of the consequences of having a democracy.

In conclusion, there's a lot that China can learn from South Africa, and vice versa. It's not only about the meeting of governments through BRICS, but also about the cultural exchange between the two countries in the form of their citizens. Thank you to the UJCI for this great opportunity to explore the country of Chairman Mao Zedong.

## 我的中国冒险 (*My Adventures in China*)

### ***Mandisa 常甜 Mbundu***

THIRTEEN June was the very first day of my journey to the People's Republic of China. Just a day later, I would arrive and celebrate my birthday in a new country and in a different environment for the very first time. I was determined to make this my best birthday ever, despite being away from my family, and out of my comfort zone.

Three exhausting flights later, I set off to explore my surroundings and celebrate the last few minutes of my birthday in a foreign city with my roommate Tumi and a few other group members. We discovered a city that doesn't sleep, had our first encounter with street food outside the hotel, and put our Mandarin to the test by interacting with the street vendors and shopkeepers. When we faltered, people were kind enough to communicate with us via translation apps.



*The UJCI group in good spirits after scaling the Great Wall of China.*

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The late night walks became a habit, and the perfect opportunity for Sagar to torture us by making us walk further than we might have wanted to. But seeing him light up at the sight of the Bird's Nest Stadium and the Water Cube made our painful feet and sore muscles worthwhile. The happiness was infectious, and I even scored a piggyback ride back to the hotel. I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for burdening my friend!

### ***Personal highlights***

My personal highlights included the Nanjing Museum and the Beijing Science and Technology Museum, and seeing the models of Sauropods along with other fossil records. I loved The 'Spiral of Life' sculpture which features males and females in a double helical shape to resemble DNA, as a beautiful representation of humans at a molecular and organism level. I enjoyed how the museum showcased the various disciplines of sciences, and how interactive it was. I felt like a kid all over again, and was stuck in one section until Josephine and I started feeling bad about the queue of kids behind us.

Our guide, Lin, gave us courage prior to climbing the Great Wall, in the form of a quote by Chairman Mao: '去长城非好汉' (Bù qù chángchéng fēi hǎohàn), which translates as 'One who doesn't climb the Great Wall is no hero'. On 25 June, I became my own hero all over again. The uneven stairs were a nightmare for a short person to climb, and I could not even imagine getting past the first flight of stairs, but I eventually managed to reach the top, with the encouragement of my peers, and extended the encouragement in song and ululation to the rest of our group as well as others climbing the Great Wall with us.

It was a challenging but beautiful experience that rewarded me with a breathtaking view of the surrounding mountain ranges and lush vegetation. I now have a greater respect for people who built the Wall and must have climbed it on a regular basis, which certainly isn't child's play. I also realised that I had overestimated my own fitness – my legs were sore for least three days afterwards. But given the opportunity I would climb the Great Wall all over again.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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Other museums and temples also offered valuable insights into Chinese culture and history, and I especially enjoyed learning about the different dynasties and their contributions to society. One of my favourite buildings was the Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties, namely the Forbidden City. I was in awe of the size of the palace and the history behind it, and I remain amazed by the various animal structures present – the Dragon, Lion and Phoenix – and the symbolism behind them.

### ***Important things I learnt from the trip***

Among the many things I learnt in the course of the trip, five stand out. The first, of course, concerns those chopsticks. The first few days were a challenge, especially when it came to rice and slippery foods, but I think I eventually got close to expert level. I've since bought a few sets of chopsticks, and my family is in for a surprise at their next Christmas lunch.

Second, always carry your own map or directions, and if not, take an optimistic attitude with you. I learnt this the hard way. One night in Nanjing, thanks to a friend who refused to ask for directions, we spent what felt like decades walking to find a mall, but ended up at a bus station. I felt extremely frustrated at the time but 'getting lost' resulted one of the best nights of our time in that city. Firstly we encountered a picture-perfect park surrounded by a lake, with the city skyline in the background, and I never regretted leaving my phone behind.

The view alone made us forget how upset we were at Lucky and JJ. On our return journey, we ended up riding in a cab for the first time, and some got lifts on motorbikes with female riders. I don't think I have ever held on to anyone so tightly, or screamed my lungs out so loudly, but the experience was exhilarating, and gave us the opportunity to explore Nanjing at night. So I have to thank JJ and Lucky for their poor sense of direction.

Third is having an open mind. I'm still amazed at the different ways in which Tofu can be prepared, and my two most memorable tasting experiences are a 100-year egg (皮蛋), with jelly-like albumen and green yolks, and three baby scorpions at the Wangfujing street market in Beijing. Other treats included tarantulas, snakes and other insects, which I left to other, braver members of our group to explore (yes, Sagar and Reagan, I'm looking at you!)

Having studied the morphology, I did not think any good would come out of this experience, but I'm very glad that I plucked up the courage and tasted a scorpion. As promised by Sagar, they weren't bad at all; they were crunchy and I got my protein fix (or that's what I told myself, at least). Based on my experience in Nanjing and Beijing, what can be said about Chinese food is: 中国菜很好吃. And that will be one of the things I will miss most about China.

A fourth lesson is not to be afraid to rely on others. There were so many times when we were there for each other, sometimes without even having to ask from the wake-up calls to offering bag space, general encouragement, or checking to see if someone was feeling under the weather. I enjoyed getting to know each and every one of you.

Finally, I'd like to express my gratitude to the UJCI, Nanjing Tech, and Hanban for giving us this opportunity to visit China, as well as for their support and hospitality.

我爱中国 has been written across my heart.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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*The Hong Qiao Pearl Market in Beijing, where the group learnt some hard lessons about the art of bargaining.*

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## A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

### *Simphiwe Khanyisile Mfaba*

ON 13 June 2018, 27 UJCI students embarked on an excursion to China. The mood at the airport was exciting, and we were all full of smiles. We were all excited about the trip, and new friendships were formed. We arrived in China on 14 June, to be welcomed by Ivy. The weather was beautiful. We were so happy to be away from the cold in Johannesburg, and could not wait to learn about Chinese culture.

### ***Nanjing Tech University***

The first place we visited was Nanjing Tech University. It was very hot, but thankfully we had enough water. We received a warm welcome from Nanjing Tech students, who introduced themselves and then played games such as musical chairs and egg balancing, and also staged a joint talent show. Those games taught us about teamwork, and our personal strengths and weaknesses. It also allowed us to get to know each member of the UJCI group as well as the Nanjing Tech Students. I am proud to say that my team (Nontobekho, Edith, Zandi and I) won all the games we played. We called ourselves the Braid Gang, as we all had braided hair.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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### ***Tea Culture Experience***

All the ladies were excited about the tea experience, hence the joyful mood in the bus. A tea connoisseur taught us about the history and art of tea making. We were also taught about the various kinds of teas, and how they are beneficial to our health. Each of us were allowed to make tea for our peers, which I really appreciated. I made the green tea.

### ***Zhonghua Gate Castle***

The Zhonghua Gate Castle just has to be one of the most beautiful castles in the world. It was packed with tourists, so we had to stick together to avoid getting lost. Our tour guide, Dora, was extremely helpful as she gave us insights into the history of the castle and why it is so treasured today. It provides beautiful views of Nanjing, and most group members took pictures. We also purchased stunning souvenirs at the museum store.

### ***Qinhai River***

This was our first group visit to a crowded public space. Many local people asked whether they could photograph us, which we enjoyed, as it briefly turned us into celebrities. We had an opportunity to tour the river by boat, but sadly we could not all fit into one boat, and we did not understand the tour guide on our boat as he was speaking Chinese. We had to rely on previously googled information to identify some of the statues and objects along the river.

### ***The Sun Yat-Sen Mausoleum***

I thoroughly enjoyed climbing the 300 steps up to the Mausoleum, as it prepared us for the Great Wall. However, most of the female members of our group took longer to walk up the than they anticipated, as many local people were excited to see Africans, especially with braids, and kept on asking us for pictures. It was drizzling while we were walking up, but this was a blessing – far better than having to climb in the scorching sun.

### ***Chinese Martial Arts and Wushu***

I thoroughly enjoyed the martial arts and Wushu experiences, as we also learnt a few self-defence moves. As a result, I intend to join the Wushu class at the UJCI next semester, and am looking forward to it with some excitement. We also had an awards ceremony, where everyone received certificates, and pictures were taken. After the Wushu class, we were shown how to participate in the Dragon Festival, which required us to be inside the dragon and help direct it in the right direction. We also got to play basketball, girls against the guys. The game was hotly contested, but sadly the guys won, and we had to listen to them bragging about it for the rest of the day.

### ***The Beijing Zoo***

This was an exciting day for me as I was looking forward to seeing the Pandas. Luckily, they were awake, and looked cute as they ate their breakfast, so we took plenty of pictures. We also saw giraffes, elephants, lions and tigers. Unfortunately, we ran out of time, so we could not go to the Aquarium, which is one of the biggest inland aquariums in the world.

## OUR JOURNEY TO CHINA

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### ***Juyongguan Great Wall***

The Juyongguan Great Wall is the highest point on the Great Wall. As such, it was a challenging but beautiful climb, offering majestic views. Thankfully, it was a partly cloudy day, and our group was very supportive, which helped us all on the way up. I was ecstatic to be the second female member of our group to make it to the top.

I would like to thank the UJCI and Nanjing Tech University for giving us this opportunity to learn more about Chinese culture, language and history. It was a life-changing experience that none of us will ever forget. Hopefully, students at the UJCI will continue to have this opportunity.

## REFLECTIONS ON UJCI SUMMER CAMP 2018

### ***Kevin Cloete***

The UJCI Summer Camp Trip consisted of eight days in Nanjing, hosted by Nanjing Tech University, and another nine days in Beijing, hosted by Hanban. This was my first trip to Asia, so I did not know what to expect. I must confess that I did not sleep much the night before we left, as I was very excited. The following things stand out for me:

### ***Cleanliness and safety***

The first aspect of China that surprised me was the cleanliness of the areas where we spent time, as well as their safety. Coming from South Africa, where one has to be constantly vigilant, it was refreshing to be able to walk around at night without constantly having to look over your shoulder. After our formal activities during the day, most group members explored the city at night in small groups. Significantly, the girls in particular remarked how safe they felt walking around both Nanjing and Beijing.

On the flip side, I was greatly amused by the horror of group members about the ever-present squat toilets and to the expression on their faces when Chinese men routinely and very loudly cleared their noses and sinuses and spat anywhere and everywhere.

No garbage was visible, even where one would have expected it, The Beijing subway was also clean and well staffed, as were local places of entertainment away from the tourism areas.

### ***Instant celebrities***

From the time we first gathered at OR Tambo airport, I thought we were going to have a selfie overload. I could understand it, though – this was a once-in-a-lifetime trip for most of us, and it needed to be appropriately documented.

But it soon emerged that this would work both ways. From the time we arrived at the Beijing airport, one could sense that we were a bit out of the ordinary, and people surreptitiously began taking photographs as we went on our merry way. Over the next two and a half weeks, we would experience celebrity status.

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As a Ghanaian graduate student at Nanjing Tech put it: 'In my free time one day, I decided to go to one of the local tourist attractions. Within a couple of minutes of reaching it, I was the tourist attraction.'

One could feel, though, that this interest was genuine as well as benign. As one member of our group remarked: 'In other parts of the world, as a black male, people would cross to the other side if they encountered us on a dark street. Here, people approach us to take pictures with us.'

Over the two and a half weeks, hair was touched and felt (sometimes, without permission), and many many pictures were taken. The funniest moment for me was when a whole plaza came to a standstill as we were taking a group picture in Nanjing. Local people surrounded us and started taking pictures of us in turn. It was an Oscar or Golden Globe red carpet moment, and I have no doubt that this will be the closest that most of us will ever get to celebrity status.

### ***Sheer numbers and scale***

I had expected China to be crowded everywhere, since Beijing alone has half of South Africa's population, but this was not my experience at all. The only time it felt crowded was when we arrived at the Eastern Train Terminal in Beijing after our trip on the bullet train from Nanjing.

Our initial flight from Beijing to Nanjing took two hours, but only covered a fraction of the vast expanse of modern China. The dimensions of the Great Wall were also an eye-opener. The last part of the wall, built during the Ming Dynasty, is about 6 000 kilometres long – more than four times the distance from Cape Town to Johannesburg (or twice the length of the US–Mexico border). And yet it only traverses a small part of the country.

### ***Technology and education***

Before leaving South Africa, I was already told that Wifi was everywhere, but nothing could have prepared me for how pervasive cellphones are, or how cheap data is in China. When we happened to run out of data, we could immediately log on to a plethora of wifi hotspots at the places we frequented.

On the night of our arrival in Nanjing, we received take-away food at 2 am that was ordered by cellphone. Subway access is gained by swiping your phone. You can rent a bicycle on the streets by swiping a QR code, and most payments for goods and services seem to happen through Alipay and WeChatPay. I sometimes wondered whether foreigners were the only people carrying any cash.

As one of our Chinese student companions remarked: 'Why do Chinese people eat with chopsticks? So they can keep their other hand free for their phones ...'

The Innovation Centre at Nanjing Tech University caught my interest. It was a Technology Incubator on the campus, with students undertaking real-world projects to start profit-driven companies. Given our unemployment levels, we could definitely learn from this model.

The Science and Technology Museum in Beijing was also an eye-opener. Many of us commented that they should clone the facility, change everything into English, and transplant it to South Africa.

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*One of many puzzling English translations we encountered on our journey.*



The museum was entirely experiential. Most of the displays had buttons to push, wheels to turn, and games to play to bring the relevant scientific concepts to life. Many of the displays reminded me of the high school physics that had intimidated me back in the day. What a wonderful way to learn! We also found a very rare phenomenon: students in the Nanjing Tech library, actually studying ...

### **Chinese history**

Before the Summer Camp, my exposure to Chinese history was very limited, so I was pleasantly surprised to start learning about its long and rich history, about feudal times as well as modern China. The guides were excellent at making the story of China come alive. Lynn was especially good at tellings us anecdotes and stories to put the visits to museums and tourist attractions in context.

Both my room-mate and I spent time after every day's excursions to read up further about what we had experienced on that day. This attests to the efficacy of our hosts in piquing our interest in China.

### **Language**

After a year of Chinese lessons, I expected to be able to follow basic conversations, or speak a little, but I soon realised why Chinese is one of the most difficult languages for English speakers to master. It was very amusing to have someone look at you with a blank stare when you uttered what you thought was a perfectly good sentence.

I have studied other languages, and I think that there is no better way to learn a language than to immerse oneself in it in its country or area of origin. The partnership between the University of Johannesburg, Hanban and Nanjing Tech provides excellent opportunities for further study, which I aim to take advantage of in the next couple of years.

Various English translations of Chinese names or phrases provided us with endless entertainment, and opportunities for guessing about what they were meant to convey. One example appears above.

### ***Haggling***

My final thought about Summer Camp involves bargaining. I don't think we, as South Africans, are used to a culture of haggling or negotiating. Our anxiety about making sure that we had gifts for everyone at home made us buy various items at museums and tourist attractions in the course of our tour. Were we in for a shock when our guide took us to the Hong Qiao Pearl Market in Beijing on the second last day.

In our minds, bargaining involved the seller mentioning an opening price, you countering about halfway and then each party going halfway until an agreement was reached. This should work – in theory. Not so when you are following a group of American tourists into a bargaining market! Prices would start at hundreds of RMB, and after successive halving would still end up at eye-watering pricing.

I think the group learned valuable lessons fairly quickly after the first couple of exchanges, notably the following: (1) mention should be made that we are from Nanfei; (2) ditto that our currency is not worth much; (3) ditto that we saw the item around the corner for less; and (4) bargaining should start at a sixth of the initial price.

After much passing around of calculators between the various parties, many apparent bargains were concluded. However, we could still not shake off the feeling that we were still being hoodwinked. Needless to say, in the bus afterwards, discussion moved from excitement about the prices to 'I'd rather not talk about it...' after comparisons were made between group members.

I think our experience taught many of us how random the pricing process can be, and that it is rarely a simple cost-plus-profit exercise. We sometimes ended up at one tenth of the initial prices on offer.

### ***Intercultural bridges and understanding***

I must confess that many of my preconceptions about Chinese people – based on my experiences at Chinese Malls, Chinese restaurants, and various forms of news coverage – were entirely incorrect. For example, ordinary people we met in the street were friendly and accommodating. They were excited about talking to us, and keen to communicate via gestures or translations apps on their cellphones. They were also keen to learn more about our culture rather than just telling us about theirs. We stopped many people with our singing, dancing, and general boisterousness. Our first guide even had an African song composed in her honour, and sung to her on the bus.

One of my epiphanies, though, was that there is value in our own experience and culture. When interacting with other people and countries, we should stay grounded in this. We often discount where we are from because our country is not rich enough, powerful enough, or important enough. I learned that other people also want to hear our story. To conclude, the UJCI Summer Camp of 2018 was a wonderful experience, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

### MY CHINESE QUEST

*Josephine Katumba*

IN January 2018, a friend invited me to volunteer for an event hosted by the UJCI. At that stage, I had no idea that I would end up taking Mandarin lessons, let alone travel to China.

At the same time, I have always been interested in China. How does a country after only 40 years of reformation manage to become one of the world's leading economies, and its biggest producer? How do they manage to innovate and replicate in ways that other nations still struggle to and why are they so smart (no, seriously).

Thus began my Quest. When I got the news that I would be going to China, this was my main goal – to have a taste of 'how the Chinese make it happen'. I believe the only way to go forward, not only as an individual but as a society, is to observe and learn from those who are moving forward and making things happen.

A previous summer camper told me I would remember the trip for the rest of my life. So that was my expectation. Amidst the stress of sorting out my documents, buying a ticket, packing, and all the other stressful things that come with travel, that assurance was always at the back of my mind. Looking back, it was a big expectation. Was this really a trip that I would remember for the rest of my life?

#### ***Expectation versus reality***

In all honesty, the food is probably what I was most nervous about. I had no idea what to expect. The odds were not in my favour, because I hate trying new food, and I also had no idea of how to use chopsticks.

But China humbled me on both scores. The food was really good – although on my first day I remember thinking, 'I'm totally going to lose weight on this trip'. The only thing I could stomach were peanuts. However, I am proud to announce that I gained almost a kilo. While different from the food I was used to, it was really delicious. My favourites were the chicken dishes, as well as roast duck with pancakes.

I expected China to have beautiful architecture and scenery, but it turned out to be breathtaking. My favourite places were Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing, and the Great Wall of China outside Beijing. To have such great monuments amidst the beauty of nature really left me in awe.

What really baffled me there the ancient buildings, such as the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven; I was really amazed by the fact that such old buildings could be so beautiful, and could still be standing. No building materials were imported; local craftspeople used what they had. I was really impressed by the level of craftsmanship and attention to detail displayed by these great monuments.

The same can be said about contemporary architecture, the Bird's Nest stadium among them. From ancient temples to modern-day buildings, defining China's architecture would need more than words. Some of it could only be experienced via the senses, and ultimately leave a mark on your heart.

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One of the most surprising things about China was the hospitality of the people who took care of us, among them Shao Laoshi, Leo, Ivy, Dora and Lynn. I can't write about our trip without mentioning these five people.

They all went out of their way to make sure we were well taken care of, well fed, and well informed. What came as a bit of a culture shock was how surprised Chinese were to see black people. I eventually came to terms with being a mini celebrity, but I will definitely be taking a break from selfies for a while. Apart from that, Chinese people we met were very kind. I also admired their directness. I guess that is how they make things happen – by being straightforward and also very punctual. Another thing that blew me away was how hard they work – men and women, young and old. I remember taking the Beijing subway at about 9 pm, and discovering that that was the peak time for people to return from work – a total contrast with South Africa.

### ***Memories to cherish***

Travel changes us – every time – and the 2018 summer camp was no exception. The opportunity created by the UCJI and Hanban is one I will cherish forever. I was able to experience Chinese history, culture, the people and so much more. There are many more memories I could write about, such as our late-night excursions into Nanjing as well as Beijing – taking the train having no idea where we were going, just depending on a map and kind strangers who offered to help. Watching my peers eat scorpions and snakes in a street market. Experiencing the Chinese opera, which I must say was very comical. Visiting museums and zoos that spoke to the child in all of us. Bargaining at the market with the few words of Chinese we had learnt (I'll improve), and a lot of help from pleco and a calculator.

Learning about dynasties and emperors. Experiencing the extremely hot conditions. Walking distances I never thought I could cover in a day. Riding on rickshaws and motorbikes (including a nightly escapade in which four of us ended up on one motorcycle).

So so many memories I will cherish forever. Travelling with the group was also what made the camp awesome. As in any family, there were disagreements and challenges, but there was a lot more love and laughter. The singing and dancing always succeeded in changing our mood. Having people with you who were willing to explore things together also added to the fun.

I will now try to answer my initial question, namely 'how the Chinese do it'. Of course, this trip was just a taste of China, and there is so much more I have yet to experience. However, from the little I did experience, I came to realise that the Chinese are very hard-working people, and that this is what makes them who they are today.

I aspire to making a positive contribution to society, after completing my studies, and this trip provided me with a new understanding of what it means to work hard and move forward, no matter what. I am excited, and even more motivated to continue my studies of Mandarin and Chinese culture, because I believe I have a great deal more to learn from China that can help me grow as an individual, and contribute to my country and continent.

I just don't have the space here to describe all my experiences and my memories. The long walks, beautiful spaces, interesting foods, special stories, and variety of people are among the memories I cherish.

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