

The Great Wall

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Today I wish to share with you some of my experiences from my trip to China last December. First : the Great Wall.

The late Chairman Mao Tse Tung has said something like " Bất đáo trường thành phi hảo hán" or " Bất đáo trường thành phi hảo hán" (I am not sure which one is correct, or may be both of them are correct), so to be a hảo hán I set up a trip to China to see the Great Wall and fulfill those gem sayings.

It was a great day. We arrived early in the morning at the foot of the mountain. The temperature was a chilling minus 5 degrees and the ground was covered with snow and ice. Looking up the mountain with the Great Wall snaking along its top, your old Minhson feared that his worn out heart would desert him. But his pride was too

great. He couldn't let his children beat him. So he started climbing slowly, watching every step. To the East, the sun was 30 degrees above the horizon and rising quickly. Half of every step was still in the shade and covered with frost while on the other half the snow was melting and exposed its worn out stone. Once you have reached an outpost on top of the mountain, you looked ahead and found another one, further away and higher along the ridge. It's too late to turn



back without damaging your self-esteem, so you kept on climbing while praying the Great Wall would end soon.

The scenery was fantastic. You stood there, looking to the north down the valley, imagining the hordes of invaders approaching, the frantic preparations of the soldiers on the ramparts, the noise, the smell of war and then all vanished, only you and the wall remained. Where are they now, all those men who stood there two thousands years ago with their joys, their grieves, their angers, their fears....And then you realize the ephemerally of life. Love, hate, joy, grief, they all come and go like us and die with us. Why bother harboring them in our heart and burdening our live? And then you understand why Buddhism advocate the rejection of "Lục dục Thất tình"

Old Minhson was playing the philosopher on top of the mountains when suddenly he woke up to a stench drifting in the wind. He followed his nose. The stench grew stronger and stronger and then suddenly, on that very wall, around a corner, on that very scenic top of mountain, he discovered a new wonder of the world! Yes my friends, it was the Toilet, the most archaic and primitive toilet in the world! It was a small stone room with no window, no lighting, just an opening for the door. Old Minhson stood there immobile in awe for a

whole minute so his eyes could get used to the semi-darkness and he found in front of him on the stone floor two holes of around 25cm of diameter each and one meter apart. There was no water in the room, no toilet paper, just two ghost holes looking at him like two eye-sockets from the past and an unbearable stench. He tried to look into the holes but beyond 20cm from the surface, it was too dark to see anything . May be the holes go all the way down to the base of the wall , ending up in a kind of secret chamber full of gold (the other kind of gold). Anyway, Minhson was very happy. He can now fulfill the second saying of Chairman Mao and be sure he is a Hào Hân. He mustered all his dexterity and shot a jet down a hole, right in the centre.

On his way down the Great Wall, Old Minhson thought may be with his genius he has discovered the Secret Weapon of Tan Thuy Hoang, the first Weapon of its kind in the world, the Ultimate Weapon of Mass Destruction . Imagine a few hundreds soldiers relieving themselves into those holes every day and $e = mc^2$ you will have a killing stench drifting kilometres away, stunning all the barbarian invaders and knocking them down from their horses easily! Ah! Those smart Chinese! They invented everything. They invented the first computer, the Suanpan (the Chinese abacus), the noodle that went to the West as spaghetti, the gun powder, the fireworks, the fake Rolex and now the WMD!

And that marvellous toilet on top of the Great Wall made me remember some of my happiest experiences during my childhood.

A long, long time ago, when I was young and in primary at Jauréguiberry, during the long holidays I used to go and stay with my grand-father in the countryside. He had a farm, some plots of paddy fields and a few cows. The house was in straw, very small and with no toilet facility. Whenever I felt the urge, I just grabbed a hoe and ran to the back of the house, chose a good spot among the bananas trees, dug a hole and enjoyed one of the most satisfying moments of life!

Ah! How I missed those moments, sitting under the shade of a banana tree, behind a row of Cù Giông (or Cù Mi Tinh) bushes, listening to the coo-coo of a wild dove! Around me was a whole miniature universe in action: Ants busy scurrying up and down a tree ferrying provisions to their nest, toads hoping around, chasing insects. A small bird watching me curiously then swooped down quickly, catching a caterpillar on its way. And the sound was fantastic: the chirping of crickets, the long, incessant litany of cicadas, the rustling of bamboo leaves in the wind... Looking at the passing clouds in the blue sky, I dreamed and dreamed....Then suddenly I was pulled back to reality by the hurrying steps from the house and the yelling "Minhson, where are you? What take you so long...Are you dreaming again?". I reluctantly reached for the dried banana leaves hanging down near me like a long strip of toilet paper... After covering the hole with dirt, I walked back slowly to the house, the hoe on my shoulder and leaving a broken dream behind. Ah! the good old time! And guess what? We used to have the biggest bananas and the sweetest "cù giông" in the village!

Nowadays, whenever I sit in a toilet cubicle, I feel claustrophobia. The narrowness of the wall, the blinding shine of the white tiles, the smell of chlorine, the hissing of water entering the tank, all give me the nostalgia of the old days. And we were an ecological lot too. We didn't chop down trees to make toilet paper, we didn't use energy for lighting, we didn't waste water to flush the toilet, we didn't use chemical fertilizer, we were saving the planet! So, you see, the warming of the Earth is your making, not mine. Old Minhson from the tender age has "contributed" a lot to the environment...

One of these days, I will write a thesis exposing all the virtues of the dug-out toilet and its role in combating climate change. Who knows, may be I will be able to get a Nobel Prize and you all will be proud of me!

Back to the Great Wall: it is grandiose, it is spectacular and worth seeing. And from now on, whenever talking about the Great Wall, the great general Minhson from the Southern Barbarian Tribes (Yes my friends, that's how the Son of Heaven and his subjects used to call us : Barbarians from the South- Rợ Nam Man - and that's why they occupied us for a thousand years : to civilize us!) can say without boasting: Veni, Vidi...Pissi. Those last three words are said on behalf of the people of Tibet.

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