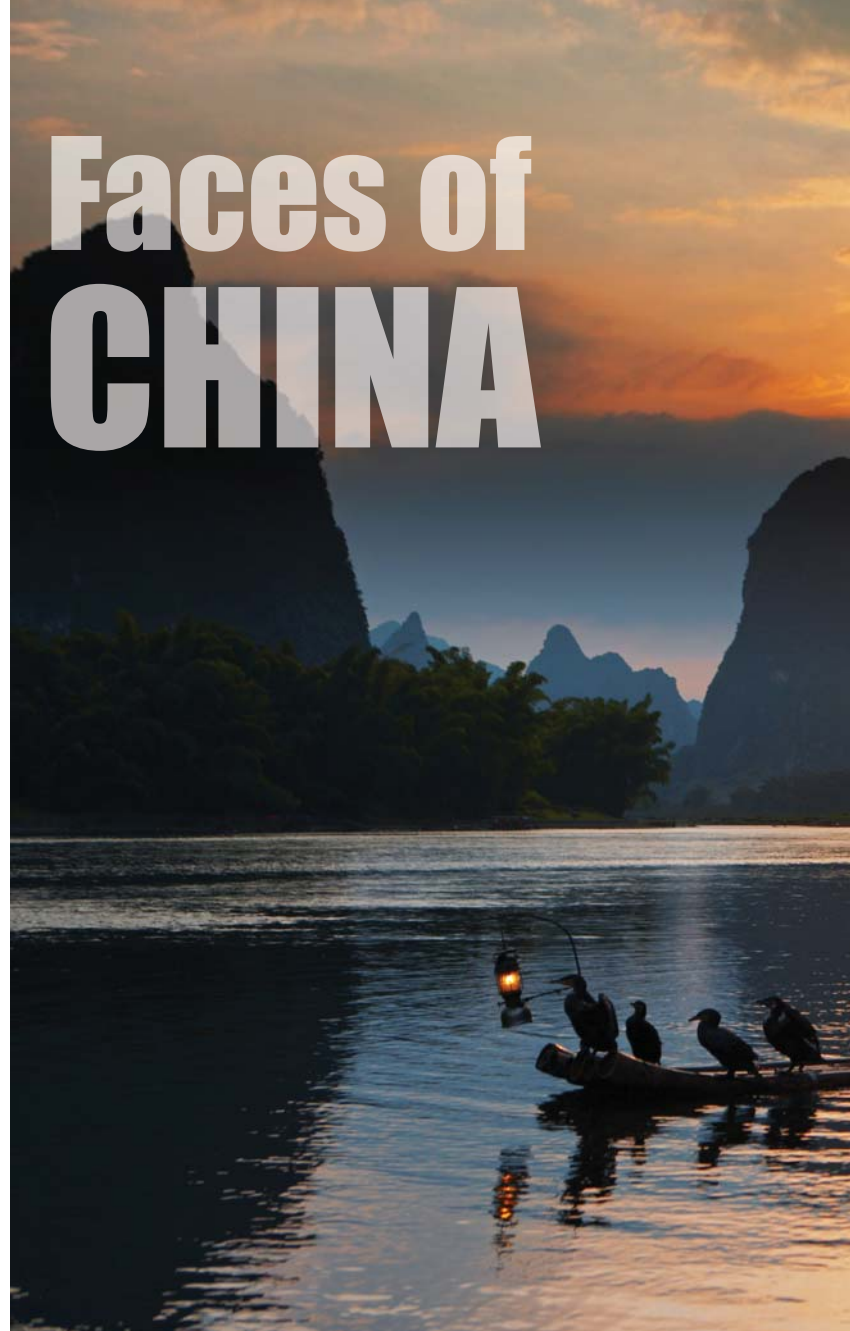


The Changing

Faces of CHINA

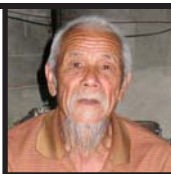
The 2008 Beijing Olympics was, in many ways, the modern-day pinnacle of Chinese aspirations – not only a time for the Chinese government to sit back and absorb the world’s admiration for the stunning spectacle that they put on, but also for the ordinary Chinese citizen to witness something that they would never have dreamed possible only a short time ago. So fast has this enormous country changed over the last twenty years that in many areas it is unrecognisable from the place that the middle-aged Chinese knew when they were growing up. There are, however, still parts of the country where traditional ways of life remain relatively untouched. We interviewed three very different Chinese people to see how life has changed and what they think the future holds for their families.



Cormorant and fisherman on Li River, Guilin

Mr Huang

Cormorant fisherman,
Yangshuo, southern China



Mr Huang, 74, lives with his wife and grandchildren and has been a cormorant fisherman for most of his life, following a tradition that has been practised in China for more than a thousand years. For those not familiar with this method of fishing, the cormorant’s throat is tied so that it can eat the smaller fish but returns larger ones to the fisherman’s boat.

Mr Huang learned to fish from his father and uncles from the age of ten. When he was only 12, his father passed away and he went to work on the rivers. By the time he was 22 he had a family of eight to support solely through fishing. Life was a struggle and he remembers days when none of his family ate.

In recent years, various factors have contributed to depleted fish stocks, rendering the traditional way of fishing almost impossible. ‘Luckily’, Mr Huang says, ‘cormorant fishing has become more of a spectacle than an industry in itself, attracting visitors from both China and overseas.’ From the mid-1980s, tourism started to take off in Yangshuo and he found a new job – posing for photos with his traditional grass poncho, wide-brim straw hat, a bamboo pole and his loyal birds. In this way, he could supplement his daily fishing business. By the 1990s, almost all of his income came from tourism rather than the fishing itself. Mr Huang believes that his present life is 10,000 times (a common exaggeration level in Chinese) better than 20 years ago, adding that he thanks the reform project started in 1978 by Mr Deng Xiaoping, then president of China. Although Mr Huang’s eight children have successful careers, he hopes that his grandchildren would study more, so as not to follow his way of life, the life of a traditional cormorant fisherman.

Mrs Pan

Farmer, Longji, southern China



Mrs Pan, 43, grew up in the Huangluo Yao village at the foot of the Dragon’s Backbone rice terraces of Longji, Guangxi, southern China. After she married, she grew rice and sweet potatoes and kept some pigs. The 1990s saw a surge in tourism and she joined the performers in the village to demonstrate their unique long hair combing to visitors, supplementing her wage by selling some local handicrafts. Twenty years ago, according to Mrs Pan, life was far more difficult and everyone depended on the weather for a good harvest. In the mountains, there is only one crop of rice each year and a bad year would cause terrible problems for the family. Their farm produce included rice, corn, sweet potato and raising pigs. When they needed cash, they would have to sell their livestock. Now, though they still work on the fields and keep pigs, their main income is from tourism.

Mrs Pan explains that tourism has changed their lives beyond what she ever could have imagined. Local tourism has forced massive improvements in the roads and transport networks, which has, in turn, improved communication and they are now able to learn far more about the outside world. Mrs Pan insisted that her daughter went to college to get a better education, something that would have been unimaginable in the past.



Oriental Pearl TV tower, Shanghai



Longji village and rice terraces

Jessica Chen

Travel agent, Shanghai



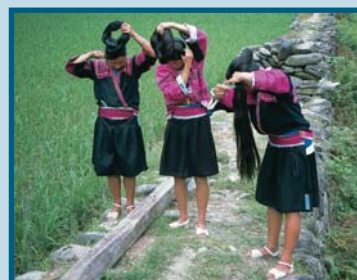
Jessica Chen, 34, lives in Shanghai and works for a travel agency. Like many Shanghai citizens, she has witnessed a dramatic change in life since her youth. She was in her teens when the first bridge was built to connect the two main areas of the city and still has vivid memories of spending hours queuing to catch the ferry across the river to visit her grandparents. They lived on a farm on the flatlands that is now Pudong, one of the most famous cityscapes in the world.

Jessica is married to an IT engineer but they don't have any children, so they are known as 'DINKs' (Dual Income, No Kids). They have a comfortable life and their main ambition is to travel the world now that the government has made overseas travel far more accessible. When asked where in the world she would live if she had the choice, the answer was categorical, 'Shanghai. Where else?' In the next 20 years, the city will be one of the most important in the world!

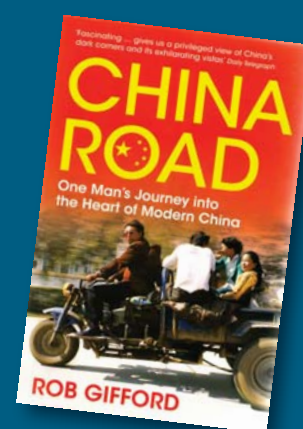
Getting to know the local people and actually interacting with them is often one of the highlights of a trip to China. The western perceptions of the Chinese are often disproved, revealing a warm and friendly welcome to the country. The Chinese people have had to adapt quickly to the pace of the change in their country, and expectations are now at an all time high.

FACT file

A 14-night trip to China featuring time with local people in the Hutongs of Beijing along with the Great Wall and the Terracotta Warriors, staying in three-star accommodation costs from **£2,450 per person**. A similar trip including five-star accommodation, private guiding and transfers costs from **£3,900 per person**. For more information, please call our China specialists on **01993 838 220**.



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For more on the changing face of China, Rob Gifford's book 'China Road' gives a wonderful insight into various people he meets whilst travelling Route 312, a 3,000 mile journey from Shanghai to the border of Kazakhstan.