

FEATURE

Invaluable Insight into China

On the Way—Ten Thousand Miles of Rivers and Streams

A See China through CCTV-4* Travel Series

By Jay Hsu and Ruby Tsao

In areas where China's CCTV-4 is available, one of its programs with the English name *On the Way* is invaluable in providing up-to-date insight into many less known places in China. It is a travel series with a theme. The most recent one is *Ten Thousand Miles of Rivers and Stream*, which traces the well-known rivers of China and interesting places along them. A newly filmed installment is presented every weekday.



The current series traversed many tributaries of the Yangtze River, such as the Wu River and Jialing River. This was followed by visits to points along Nu River and Lancang River in Qinghai and Yunnan; as well as Yarlung Zangbo River in Tibet. One comprehensive series covered almost all of the rivers and streams in Hainan Island, and gave a full picture of that island. Finally, Yalu and Songhua Rivers in Northeast China, Wei River in Gansu and Shaanxi as

well as Han River in Shaanxi and Hubei were surveyed.

A Typical Episode

In a program shown in December (number 167), a young reporter and his team

visited a village in Liaoning Province near Yalu River bordering North Korea. Colorful trees on pristine hills by the Yalu River make a nice backdrop for villagers. One family raises ducks by Yalu River. They have 3,000 ducks producing about 2,000 eggs a day. The ducks are raised in the clear waters of Yalu River producing large eggs that sell for good money; they get even better prices for their salted duck eggs. Tourists come by to buy from them on the way to scenic spots. The family started with 300 ducks and increased to 3,000 after 12 years. Income from duck eggs averages about 10,000 yuan a month.



The second family visited grow ginseng on the hills. First they raised the sprouts in the shade. After 5-7 years, they are transplanted in the forest to simulate the growing conditions of wild ginseng with higher medicinal value. The plants grow for another 10 years before they are harvested. There are 117 families in this village planting ginseng for a living producing about 3-4,000 kilos of ginseng a year. Due to possible effects of drought, flood and pests, only about 5% of the ginseng can reach the best quality. We can see why ginseng prices are high.

The border with N. Korea is patrolled by local sentry. They are dedicated to their duties in spite of austere living conditions. Off duty, they tend to their farms or fish in Yalu River with

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income supplement of several thousand yuan a month.

Magnificent Scenery and Mega-Projects

Since the program is basically an extensive travelogue, viewers are continuously treated to a feast of pristine landscapes and scenery covering mostly the less well-known sites in China. Pollution and congestion, so often reported in the news, cannot be seen in these locations.

Immediately, we got to appreciate the size of China. Then we were struck by how mountainous it is. In fact, westward beyond Sichuan, the mountains become ever taller and the landscape becomes even more spectacular. We saw a part of the grand canyon of the Yarlung Zangbo River (it is deeper than the Grand Canyon in the US), followed by the terrain of the area where the three major rivers, the Nu, the Lancang and the Yangtze flowed in parallel southward in Yunnan (China is planning to build a national park in this area). On the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau we also caught a glimpse of the majestic Kunlun and Tanggula Mountains. Finally, in Tibet we saw the world's tallest, the Himalayas.

The mountains made travel in this part of China difficult. But in recent years, extensive building of highways and railways is easing this handicap.

As many of the rivers in the west and southwest are flowing down from the tall mountains, China also has spectacular river views. Many of the rivers start from glaciers and there are stretches where the streams form rapids and cascades.

Since most of the rivers in the west start from great heights, they hold enormous

hydroelectric potential. China's hydroelectric potential is the largest in the world by far, and it is capturing this potential by the building of a large number of dams, including the world's largest and the third largest.

On the Han River, China just completed the Central Route of the gigantic South-North Water Transfer project. (See "China's South-North Water Transfer Project" in the January-March 2015 issue of the CAF.) We were privileged to witness this mega project in two episodes. This project diverts the water from the Han River, through a reservoir, dam and man-made waterways, all the way to Beijing and Tianjin.

Excellent View into the Lives of Rural Residents

Each episode of the program entails a visit to one or more locations along a river. In China, only 12% of its land is arable – this is lower than many major nations. But China managed to have bumper crops almost every year for the last 30+ years and is more than self-sufficient in food. The CCTV programs show us how this is possible.

Chinese farmers are extremely hard-working. Most of the rural farmers we saw are productive and prospering. This is due to several factors. First, improved transportation is allowing better connection to other areas and cities.

Second, most farmers now possess tractors as well as automobiles. Improved

farming methods and use of new seeds produce a more plentiful harvest. Furthermore, by popularizing the use of green houses, localities which previously were not able to produce certain products – such as water melons in Tibet – are now routinely reaping them. We were very surprised by the variety of produce now available on the markets in Lhasa and Xining.

Lastly, technology is helping rural people to enter the modern age. The rural people now can buy and sell things over the internet via Alibaba or Ten-cent. Farmers from the rural areas previously known to be poor now are receiving more than adequate income. Many families in the “remote” villages mentioned income in the six figures in Yuan. Such extra income comes from a multitude of sources— specialty crops, fruits, fishing, as well as tourism. Raising TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) herbs such as ginseng, or picking wild herbs from the mountain are common practices.

Honey is also an important ingredient in TCM. Raising bees is therefore also a popular undertaking. Alternately, farmers can go into mountains to find honey from nests of wild bees located in the trees or steep cliffs.

Farmers are enjoying the full support of the government on improved farming techniques. The government appears to give them guidance on what to plant and how, and provide reports on weather, precipitation and other important information.

Harmony between the Han and the Minorities

China has more than 50 minorities living within its boundaries. These include the main groups – Tibetans, Uygurs, Mongolians, Manchurians, Zhuangs, Miaos, etc. Also, since there are fourteen countries located along China’s border, the people moving across the border from these countries and settle in China constitute another group of minorities. We saw episodes which show minorities from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia, as well as from Nepal, Burma and Korea. In all cases, the minorities

seem to live in harmony with the Han Chinese. Inter marriages are common. Most of them, and especially their children, can speak Mandarin. Minorities are accorded special privileges. For example, while people from the Han majority have to observe the one-child policy, most minorities do not.

The government also appears to be involved in encouraging the locals, especially the minorities, to engage in tourism as an added source of income. Now many areas are opening up to attract tourists with hostels, fine local food and shows featuring traditional songs and dances performed by minorities.

Because numerous episodes were filmed along the Yarlung Zangbo River and its tributaries, we were accorded an extensive view into Tibet. What we saw was a Tibet with happy people and thriving merchants. Tibetan Buddhism is thriving and its adherents are free to worship. Most of its colorful temples were refurbished. With the Han and Tibetan people living happily side by side, Tibet seems well integrated into China.

The rural and minority areas all seem to have inherited the tradition of respect for education. A recurring theme is people go to great lengths to make sure their children go to school. Young people all have a goal to go to college, with the family taking on whatever sacrifice needed to make it possible. Girls seem to enjoy the same opportunities for education. Minorities embrace Han culture while retaining their own customs and traditions. Peace and harmony among different minorities and religions seem to be prevailing.

Reform of Rural Areas

Through the TV series we can indirectly observe the changes that are taking place in China. Currently, China is launching a comprehensive program of reform. This reform is to change the previous high-speed growth to one emphasizing the quality rather than speed. In the rural areas, reform is taking place in:

Environmental improvement – We saw restoration and preservation of many wetlands. This entails clearing of polluted streams and ponds, replenishing of fish stocks and protection of migratory birds.

Reforestation – There used to be large forests in Jilin and Heilongjiang. Logging had taken its toll. The provincial government had called a stop to any deforestation activities. Instead, a large-scaled reforestation program had started. Forests have reappeared in many locations.

Protection of rare species – In Yunnan and Tibet many wild animals roam. However, some species are nearing extinction – such as the



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golden hair money, and certain kinds of horned mountain goats. China has put these animals on its protection list. Through the efforts of government watchmen and dedicated local volunteers, progress is made in stopping poaching and providing care to injured animals. Many previous hunters and poachers are hired as protectors of forests and wildlife.



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Shedding Light on the Urbanization Program

As part of the reform, China is engaged in mega-scale urbanization. Thirty years ago, nearly 80% of its people lived in rural areas. By building numerous cities and migrating large number of rural people to them, China is planning to reduce the rural dwellers to about 40% of the total population by 2020. Judging from the CCTV series, the urbanization program seems to be doing well. Major cities are clearly growing, though in a well-controlled manner. One example is Xi'an with new areas of high-rise buildings. It also has a high tech manufacturing zone which produces, among other products, China's first commercial airliner.

Discovery in Xi'an – Xi'an was the site where the Terra-Cotta Warriors of the Qing Dynasty were discovered. Today, it is further enhanced by the uncovering of a Tang Dynasty palace with an area four times that of the Forbidden City in Beijing. In it several Tang Dynasty emperors had lived, including the only female monarch China ever had, Wu Zetian.



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Migration of people - One aspect of the reform is the moving of rural inhabitants to the cities. In some rural towns, we saw sections of empty houses as their inhabitants have moved to a city. We understand that the government subsidized such moves by buying the old houses and allowing the migrants to move into the new government built houses in the city.

Official Residency or Hukou- Migrant workers from the rural areas had been a main source of labor for major cities during the first 30 years of China's explosive growth. With the urbanization drive, new cities are opening up which are closer, with industries in the new cities paying a higher wage. In addition, the migrants do not face a tough hukou problem in new cities nearby. Thus in many episodes, young people from a rural area can look forward to gaining hukou in a short time. Their parents can also migrate to the new city to join them.

Great Food

Last but not least, the CCTV series showed that at every place visited by the CCTV, the local delicacies or snacks are always major attractions. Indeed, in every episode, the reporter is always shown eating something mouth-watering. The minorities are not taking a back seat in this respect. For example, recently there were three or four episodes devoted to Xi'an, and two of them showed fine food and snacks available in the large Muslim section of the city.

Conclusion

For those in the US who are interested in learning about the current state of China, the

program *On the Way* on CCTV-4 is invaluable. All episodes are recently filmed and provide fresh insight into many remote areas of China. It gives a truthful and comprehensive account of what exactly is happening in China which cannot be obtained through commonly available videos or ordinary tours. We heartily recommend the program to the readers.

*CCTV-4 is available from Comcast or Direct TV through their Chinese language packages. It is also available from KyLin TV, which offers TV via Internet Protocol (IPTV). Readers can also access the program on the internet through the website "CCTV4". The program is in Chinese, with sub-titles in both Chinese and English.

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