

My First Impression of China--Washingtonians' First Trips to the Middle Kingdom

Preface

Several factors went into my putting together this special collection of stories.

The publication of “My First Trip to China” by Hong Kong journalist Kin-Ming Liu in 2012 made me think: Why not a collection of first trip to China stories by Washingtonians? From writing the book “Connecting Washington and China—The Story of the Washington State China Relations Council,” I know how strong the tradition is in the Evergreen State in building relations with the People’s Republic and how many pioneers there are in this endeavor, each with a unique story.

With that thought in mind in the spring of 2013, I then realized that 2014 would mark the 35th anniversary of the normalization of the diplomatic relations between the United States and China. What better way to celebrate for Washingtonians and their Chinese counterparts who care about this relationship? It is for this milestone that I chose to include 35 stories in this collection.

As a Washingtonian who is also a former citizen of China, this book is also a remedy in disguise for a serious case of curiosity about how Americans saw my birth country for the first time.

The participants in this project are some of Washington’s government, business, academic and community leaders, including those who established the Washington-Sichuan friendship-state relationship and the Seattle-Chongqing sister-city relationship. Their first trips to China took place from 1973 to 2008, covering the time the two countries cautiously opened liaison offices in each other’s capitals to the time of the Beijing Olympics. They tell valuable stories not only in terms of the history of Washington state-China relations, but also in the overall understanding of U.S.-China relations, especially for future generations, American or Chinese.

I am honored by all the participants in this project who either let me interview them or submitted their stories. I appreciate very much Joe Borich, past and longest serving president of the Washington State China Relations Council, for being my advisor on this project and Bruce Ramsey, former editorial writer at the Seattle Times, my editorial advisor.

You will find in these pages evocative, embracing, even endearing stories: from a governor who saw his China trip as the most important accomplishment of his administration; from a reporter who was probably the first American journalist to hear Deng Xiaoping mention communistic capitalism in an interview; from an attorney who talked into the chandelier in his hotel room to get message across to his Chinese host; from a business executive who couldn’t get China out of his blood. Be ready to be inspired by the stories as well as the story tellers, who represent the best of the Washington half of the Washington state-China relations.

Wendy Liu, June 2014, Seattle, WA