

**IP THESIS**

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**城牆的那些事兒**

**STORIES OF THE CITY WALL**

Growing up around the ancient city wall has allowed me to amass a personal library of wonderful stories to reflect upon. My grandfather, an avid gardener, always complained about the city wall blocking the sunlight, which discouraged his beloved flowers among the ten flower pots from growing to their full potential. As a child, I enjoyed standing on a small wooden stool, trying ever so hard to look outside through the windows. The giant wall did block most of the view, so I would just gaze at the cars and people walking through the gate. The sunset was always my favorite moment. As the descending sun was obscured by the wall bit by bit, it illuminated the wall with a sad yet beautiful coat of golden light.

As a Chinese student I strive to be an ambassador of my country's culture and traditions. That is why I am always trying to create artworks that can represent Chinese culture in most of my projects. After exploring my hometown of Nanjing during the summer of 2009, I decided to create a book that could portray the significance of the city wall of Nanjing to its local culture and its people's lives through pictures and writing based on my experiences. My goal is to draw people's attention to the city wall of Nanjing and I hope that after they have seen my project, they will appreciate the cultural and historical masterpiece of the wall much more, and learn that it must be protected from destruction by rapid city development and foreign culture invasion.

When I firstly began to do research on my project online, it came to my attention that although there are lots of materials and books about the city wall, none of them really show the true

beauty and value of it. Most of the time, books focus on its historical background or architectural intelligence. Or in some cases, I found photo books by photographers who only admire the outside beauty of the wall. Moreover, I also want the readers to listen some music pieces while they are reading my book. The best way to present this wall to everyone is by leading them into the world of myself and the people who live around the wall, so they can share the feelings of the local people and understand the unique relationship between them and the city wall.

Nanjing is a historical city which was the capital of six ancient Chinese dynasties. The city wall of Nanjing was built about 500 years ago, during the Ming Dynasty, by the first Emperor Zhu Yuan Zhang. Everyone knows about the Great Wall, but very few have heard about this magnificent city wall in my hometown, which was built in the same period. Although about one-third of its original parts have been destroyed, it is still the longest city wall in the world. I grew up around the city wall, so memories of it are a very important part of my childhood. Unfortunately, this valuable example of our cultural heritage is threatened by rapid city development and foreign culture invasion. Moreover, since the younger generations are more interested in other entertainments like going to movies and bars. Or they choose to sit at home everyday playing video games or chatting online. It is such a pity to witness how this city wall is being forgotten.

That is why I want to show everyone the magnificance of this wall through this book. The content is going to be based on the memories and stories of people I encountered at the wall. The stories in the book are very touching, but I also want my readers to create their own feelings about the wall through the pictures. So I decided that the pictures will take a bigger proportion compare to the text part. On the other hand, the plan of including music pieces with the book is ambitious. When I contacted my friend who has his own music studio company, he was a little hesitated at first. Fortunately, despite the fact that I have no knowledge in music, we were able to get some ideas from the pictures I took. We agreed we have to develop a number of songs that can fit in different scenes. For example, there are going to be songs about my memories, my hometown and

so on. Although I don't know how to write songs, I still contributed a lot by just humming some tunes on the phone. So my friend could then write them down in notes.

I have been working on this project since summer, when I took over 800 pictures of the city wall. When I came back to Michigan in September, I started to brainstorm suitable contents for the book. With all these pictures in hand, I started to wonder about where to begin with. Which pictures were the best, most suitable ones? The book is going to have text and pictures, so I need to find a good relationship between them. Fortunately I came up with a good way of putting different pictures into categories. First, I put them into five groups: culture, city development, sight seeing, people, and history, and labeled each piece with a number. Then I began to put those numbers on the pictures and assumed that those with the most numbers on them would be the most interesting ones, because each has the potential to represent various topics. This grouping method turned out well, and I think it is a very efficient way to choose better and more meaningful pictures from the pile I have in hand.

After picking the best pictures, I created a few mockup pages. One thing that most people agreed on was the lack of depth in the pictures. It may be true that each picture can give out lots of information, but that also leads to a lack of focus. I had the same concern when I got deeper into this project. Although there are going to be stories related to the pictures, I still think if the pictures can speak for themselves they will be much more effective. For example, there is a picture of houses built with the bricks from the city wall, but I didn't have a chance to get closer shots of it. It will be better if I can go into the houses, and take pictures there, so I can get more detailed information or even stories from the people who lived there. It certainly will give me a better understanding of the history of the city wall.

Fortunately, I was able to go back again to take better pictures to fix this problem. With a list of places that need a revisit. I saved lots of time locating new places to take pictures, and I knew

what was needed once I arrived at the scene. For example, I went back to the house which was made of the bricks of the city wall and met an old couple who lived there. They told me stories about the bricks and all the changes since they moved in 50 years ago. I was lucky to have the chance to document similar touching stories with other people as well. I believe the reinforced pictures and stories will surely improve the quality of my final production in a great way.

The trips back home also gave me some brilliant ideas on how to improve what I have already had in hand. It is obvious I am choosing a huge topic to work on. Although I have narrowed it down, there are still so much that can be included. During my stay in Nanjing, I was able to get some interviews with people who live around the city wall. I was thrilled to find out when I was taking pictures around the city wall, most people were willing to tell me stories about the wall or share their experiences with me. These stories really left a deep impression. When I was recording them, it came to my attention that it would be much better for me just to focus on telling the stories of mine and other people's in this book rather than dividing the book into certain chapters and address each topic separately. I met this couple who were taking their wedding pictures at the wall. They shared their stories with me without hesitation. The best part is I did not only get the story, but also their personal feelings to the city wall. At that moment, I realized that other people's thoughts and stories can include various topics like city development and history. So I begin to make this book more personal, using myself as a narrator, and with the visual assistance of the pictures, I can let people see the city wall of Nanjing through my eyes.

The importance of the City Wall of Nanjing is not just its historical value, but also its influence to the city and Chinese culture. After finishing this project, I realized that the stories of the city wall of Nanjing will never end, it is because the wall is a part of everyone's life. My work does not end here. It will continue after I graduate, not only to present its beauty through more pictures, but more importantly, through the stories of the people who cherish the Wall.

### **Bibliography**

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