

# Chinese Horticulturists - Extracts from the diary of two English teachers in Fuzhou, Fujian province



Houseboat with vegetable plot, on a side channel of Minjiang river, Zhezhougang, University City, Fuzhou



Horticulturalists' plots, near Wulongjiang Ave, edge of University City, Fuzhou. In the background are the Qishan mountains

In our many walks around and near the campus of Hwa Nan Women's College during our stay in Fuzhou, Fujian province, we encountered, time after time, neat rows of growing vegetables,



Vegetable plot near sidewalk, near Fujian University, NW Fuzhou.



Vegetable plot on river bank, near dormitory blocks of Fujian University, NW Fuzhou, Fujian province

lush and green against the warm sky. Apart from large areas of obvious horticulturalists' plots, which virtually surrounded our part of 'University City', many small growing areas were along the roadside, on the grass verges and even in small corners alongside some of the College buildings and on riverbanks. This made us curious. How could someone grow vegetables in such public places without their being pinched? And who grew them? And were they ever vandalised, as, being unfenced off, they most certainly would be in the West? So, after some time, we decided to poke our noses in. Along the roadside, next to some of the rows, was a small house or rather a hut and we co-opted Nancy, one of our long-



Author with Nancy approaching horticulturalists' hut. Near University City, Fuzhou. Note Satellite TV dish rear right on roof.

suffering students to come with us to translate.

The first thing we noticed was the satellite dish leaning precariously on the top of the makeshift roof. We walked up and introduced ourselves and they invited us in for a drink of water. The family Zheng comprised mother, father, 4 children and two grandchildren. It was startling to realise that they all live in such a tiny house (basically just two rooms and a kitchen area under the eaves), obviously in great harmony together, and then working alongside each other on the large plot. The satellite TV was a

source of great pride and they told us they watch CCTV which gives, in addition to mainly Chinese programmes, at least one English channel as well as Mongolian TV, with altogether 50+ channels.

They told us that they had rented the land: 4 - 5000sq.m, from a landlord<sup>1</sup> for nearly 10 years but that there was some talk of the nearby road being widened. That would mean their livelihood would disappear and they would have to look for somewhere else to live. They grow mainly flowers and plants to decorate the streets of Fuzhou and are paid by the local council. They use every sq. inch of



Nancy checking author's note while horticulturalists finish their meal

'their' land in cultivation, something they have to do to survive, and they said the soil is pretty good [*Editor's Note: Not surprising as the land is part of the Minjiang flood plain*]. They do, however, use a chemical fertiliser, which must increase their productivity, but traditionally human faeces have been used

<sup>1</sup> We did not ask who their landlord was. However, it is likely to be the Government, as in principle only the Government owns land in China



and although our family here swore they didn't use that system, nevertheless that practice seems to be still common<sup>2</sup>.

We were always curious as to how there was never a snail or parasite in sight and yet the plots didn't appear to be sprayed. We presumed that it was the old style of digital application, as in the old days!! We asked what the plastic covers<sup>3</sup> over long rows of plants were for, and the family said the young trees and shrubs had to be protected from frosts at that time of year. They spend all day and every day in their gardens protecting in winter and watering in summer. The wide river Minjiang provides the water. Although they didn't grow crops on the small public grass verges, they said that people working as security men or cleaners in the university buildings grew their own vegetables and they were surprised when we asked if the produce on such plots was ever stolen. Different cultures and different lifestyles!!

After we had partaken of the proffered cup of tea, we bade the cheerful family goodbye.

*Thoughts from Abroad, Feb 2010*

Teri France [Secretary, Hibiscus Coast branch]



Horticulturalists near University City, Mabaocun village, Fuzhou:  
L-R: Father of the two sons, son and his wife and child, other son



Protecting vegetable plot in village garden, Geqicun village, NW Fuzhou.

Note: The empty upper storey of house. These are v. common. Will they be completed before parents move in?



Protective straw-hat covers on plants, on Minjiang River plain, near Geqicun village, NW Fuzhou.

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<sup>2</sup> One of our Chinese colleagues at Hwa Nan Women's College told us that her aged parents who live in a rural area still use human waste as fertilizer

<sup>3</sup> On other plots we saw 'straw hats', or sheafs, used as plant covers (see photo, above)