

# IMPRESSIONS OF A CULTURAL EXCHANGE: WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND SISTER STATE ZHEJIANG



*Man in Workroom*

*"My dream is to have a successful career and to contribute to the papermaking industry."*

*Wang Dingsong. 56 Papermaker*

*Fuyang Zhejiang Province September 2007*

*Mr Wang works for the Fuyang Ancient Papermaking factory. I was lucky to get him to stop working for the 30seconds or so to take his picture. He takes his job very seriously. I asked him some questions while he continued his work, one was what did he want to become when he was a boy. The interpreter casually replied to me "a papermaker of course like his father and his grandfather."*

*Brad Rimmer*

*Lady at Desk*

*"I would like to become a teacher. I will be able to teach students as well as correct their faults. I keep correcting faults as an examiner. The two jobs have similarities in this sense."*

*Li Fengqin. 32 A product quality examiner.*

*Fuyang Zhejiang Province September 2007*

*Fengqin works in quality control for the Fuyang Ancient Papermaking factory. I came across her sitting at her desk in the printing room at the factory. The place was very noisy with the traditional printing presses in action. I had permission to photograph her but not to photograph the printing presses which are some of the last ones still in use in China. Apparently this was to keep the tradition safe from being copied by outsiders.*

*Brad Rimmer*

**In November 2007, Western Australia celebrated the 20th anniversary of its sister state relationship with China's Zhejiang Province, hosting a delegation of government and industry officials and staging a range of cultural activities, including exhibitions and performances. Zhejiang lies on the east coast of China, south of Shanghai and its port is a major recipient of WA's iron ore, wool, barley and canola exports.**

The Premier, Alan Carpenter, launched the 20th anniversary cultural exchange activities, noting the partnership has proved beneficial to both Western Australia and Zhejiang.

"This 20 year sister-state relationship had played a vital role in helping strengthen WA's links with China," the Premier said. "We plan to broaden this relationship to include education and research, the marine sector, health and medicine, environmental management as well as maintain our traditional ties in the resources sector."

As part of the cultural exchange, WA photographer, Brad Rimmer was chosen to travel to China and take a series of photographs in Zhejiang, while Chinese photographer Wu Pinhe travelled to WA to do the same thing here with the intent of staging an exhibition of the resulting images. Film crews accompanied both photographers to document their experiences.

'Yuan Fen, a visual narrative of people and place' was the resulting exhibition, staged from 16 to 30 November 2007 at Governor Stirling Tower, followed by a showing at the State Library from 4 to 31 December. For

Brad Rimmer the Zhejiang shoot was an opportunity to continue a series of portraits he has been working on in China over the past four years.

"We are all very aware of the cityscapes of Beijing and Shanghai; I'm interested in the ordinary situations and the people who make up the majority of the average Chinese, going about their lives in this modern day industrial revolution," said Brad. "I usually ask a series of questions that accompany the photos, simple things like 'what is your dream?'" The photos then become more personal, and in a country of over 1.2 billion give us a small insight into what would normally be just an anonymous individual without any clues to their aspirations."

The project presented Brad with some challenges, particularly with the short time frame and the issue of what could and could not be photographed.

"The project was shot over two weeks and because of the cultural restrictions it was a little like a corporate job not necessarily an art project. I understood that this was the restrictive nature of the project

and worked within that. The main benefit for me was being there and the opportunity to continue working on the larger project, adding to my body of work. Having the film crew observing me was an interesting experience, sometimes difficult but overall a positive situation. The exchange definitely made me consider my work and its objectives. I would love to see the exchange develop in to a longer-term residency, collaborating with Chinese artists and writers. I felt that we only just started to scratch the surface."

The documentary of Brad Rimmer's experiences in Zhejiang and Wu Pinhe's experiences in Western Australia is due to be completed in April. Two versions will be made available for public screening, one edited in Australia for western viewers and the other in Zhejiang to cater for Chinese tastes in narrative.