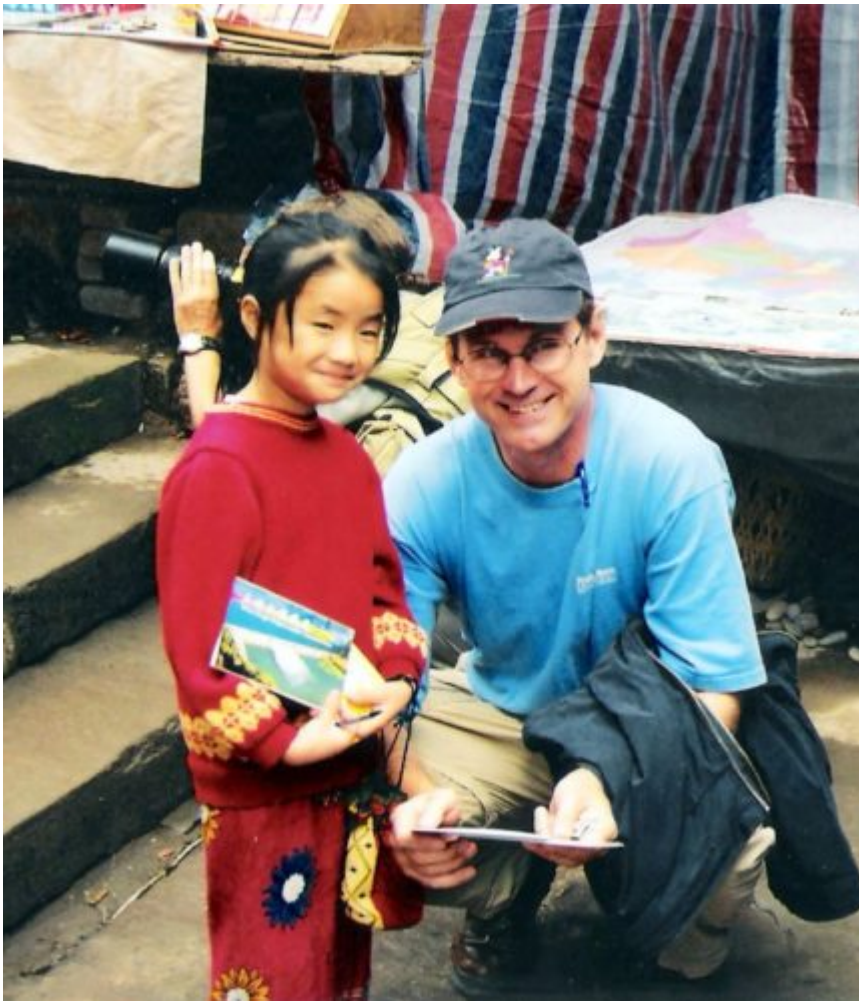


By Dan Friesen

We've taken many groups up China's Yangtze River, third-longest in the world. One thing China has no shortage of is people! At every stop along the river, we got off and took in the local sights. But the people are what make a trip to China (and almost any place) so intriguing.

The Chinese have a historically reinforced reputation as canny merchants. Ask anyone living in Southeast Asia and they will likely confirm that the Chinese are a force to be reckoned with in the marketplace. Witness what happened when the post-Mao economic reforms transformed China in the 80s. China found its way back to its cultural/economic roots and became the most productive manufacturing nation on the planet.



All this to introduce a little Chinese cutie pie. I met her while wandering through one of the Yangtze markets and she captured my heart. She must have been about 5 years old, but she had garnered a command of English from hustling tourists and carried on a captivating, rapid-fire dialogue (mostly monologue) with me. I suspect this little lady is now running a thriving business by now, hopefully no longer dependent upon foreign tourism.

I received an email from our travel partner in China over the weekend. Things continue to improve, he reports, while emphasizing strict controls on movement and the need to wear masks at all times in public buildings. Like many, we are watching China's experience

closely; so far, our partner is not allowed to practice his trade, but he did kindly offer to mail me some masks. □