



POSTCARDS from CHINA

■ Jason Wing

An artist of Chinese and Aboriginal heritage, Jason Wing meditates on the rise of consumerism and the effects on the traditional way of life in a community in northern China

I arrived in a 2000-year-old village where the local people have never seen foreigners or white people before. Locals would stop, point, stare, snigger, judge and watch my every movement. Parents grabbed their children's hands and treated me like an exotic curiosity. It is ironic that the very first time I experienced what it feels like to be a Black Aboriginal was in a remote village in Heshun

county in Shanxi province of northern China.

Aaron Seeto, the director of Gallery 4A in Sydney nominated myself and Indonesian-Australian artist Jumaadi to attend a three-week art residency in the most unique and revolutionary commune, designed to resist consumerism and progress in order to maintain traditional Chinese customs and culture.

Qu Yuan and Shen Shaomin are the two people behind the residency program. They both discovered the beauty of Xucun village whilst undertaking a previous residency. They were so

impacted by its beauty that it inspired them both to preserve the village for future generations. It instantly became their personal mission to protect Xucun from being destroyed by bulldozers and replaced with poorly made apartments that were forced on the people.

This is one of many similarities with Aboriginal people; it seems as though modern day China could refer to colonial Australia as a case study for the destruction of culture in the name of propaganda, capitalism and consumerism. Many Chinese people have been relocated without consultation and placed in gentrified accommodation, which isolates community interaction and breaks down traditional customs. Being of both Chinese and Aboriginal heritage, I feel that my bi-cultural experience was one reason why I was selected for the residency.

I embarked on the residency with the aim of learning about my heritage, as well as to raise awareness amongst local villagers and government about the destructive nature of progress on priceless traditional customs. The artist's residency is just one element of the project; it offers an alternative model which, hopefully, both Chinese and overseas governments will support financially to ensure that traditional Chinese culture survives for at least another 2000 years. There is also a rebuilding program that restores village houses to their original condition using ancient materials and methods. Another goal of the Xucun Art Commune is to promote tourism, in effect stimulating the local village economy while at the same time raising awareness of the village's unique historical value. Some would argue that tourism is often destructive, but in Xucun it is a welcome alternative to bulldozers and apartment blocks.

I was excited to work amongst 10 Chinese artists and 10 Western artists from all around the world; my studio in Sydney is very isolated and I relished engaging with 20 diverse artists and like-minded people. It was also a wonderful opportunity to create new work immersed in a new and foreign environment, which inspired new themes. It was my first time in China so I was very excited and stimulated by everything I set my eyes on. I did feel a sense of coming home even though my family is from Hong Kong. I still felt like I was connecting to my roots.

The artists' studios were old classrooms and on the outside of my studio there was a sign which read 'population control'. At one stage in time these rooms were used to educate locals about China's one child policy and other Communist ideals. I found it amusing that these same classrooms were now

being used to educate the villagers about a new form of mind control branded as 'middle class'. It is apparent to me that lower class Chinese people are being launched into an instant middle class, sentencing them to a life of excessive consumerism. China has been buying the world's minerals despite its own abundant resources, and produces everything on shore – essentially the entire country is capable of being self-sufficient and self-generating. It seems ironic that our role as international visiting artists was to educate the Chinese people about the decimation of their own traditional way of life. I see my home country as a shining example of how government policy and progress can devastate cultures in an instant.

I was born in Cabramatta in 1977, the Year of the Snake. I was raised by many family members, including my Chinese and Aboriginal grandparents. My father's Chinese family is from Hong Kong and my mother's Aboriginal family originates from the Taree region, where the Biripi people live. My parents met at Cabramatta High School, in western Sydney, and at the time it was one of the first modern urban migration suburbs, so it was a very exciting place to be raised. I was constantly surrounded by Asian imagery and had the opportunity to practice my Cantonese in restaurants. When my parents separated I travelled between two worlds – the city and the bush – and this had a profound influence on my attitude to life and my artwork.

I combine both traditional Chinese paper cutting and Aboriginal stencil techniques in my work. I also look for similarities in both cultures in terms of spirituality, customs, teachings and detailed understandings of the human body and nature.

My works are visual diaries, so I created new work based on my travels and interactions with both the people and surrounding environment. The mountains around Xucun were incredible and engulfed the entire village. This was the obvious starting point for my body of work. The Taihang Mountains directly inspired my first work. I noticed that there were twigs placed in the cracks of the mountain. This was to promote health in the lower spine region. *Mountain Born* is a picture of me with sticks in my stomach and prayer flags in the shape of a mountain. To me, these twigs were a perfect example of the interconnectivity between humans, nature and tradition.

Renew, Rebirth and Rebuild is a work about destroying the ancient culture for modern consumerism, what is ironically

