

Zhaoxing: The VIP dinner

Zhaoxing is another beautifully preserved Dong town and like Chengyang is preparing its self as a tourist destination. With bilingual signs throughout the town and a number of hotels and guesthouses this picturesque little town is hoping to become a major tourist destination. The timing of my visit could not have been better. It turned out that the governor of the county was showing around a group of government officials from all over China. They were in Zhaoxing to see how it has been developed for tourism, now that a new road from Kali, larger city to the North, has recently been finished. There were a number of men and women elaborately dressed up in festival costumes and I was following them around taking some pictures and trying to figure out what was going on when I struck up a conversation with a man who turned out to be the governor of the county. He spoke English and had studied for a while at San Jose St. He invited me to join him and the rest of the delegation for the Dong style dinner that was being put on for them and the following cultural show. I've course welcomed my good fortune and accepted the invitation to a free meal (I have been a grad student long enough to no the value of a fee meal). As we were sitting down for dinner I ran into the two guys



One of the Dong performers in Zhaoxing.

who I had met in Chengyang and they were invited to join as well. The meal, as every meal I have had with locals in China, but even to a greater extent, was way more food than could possibly be eaten, and way more alcohol than should possibly be drunk. Although this alcohol called, me-joe, tasted much better than the typical home brewed baijiu I had been used to drinking. Mid-way through the meal, men and women clad in traditional costumes went around pouring shots of the alcohol down everyone's throat. Just coming off my bad episode of Baijiu in Gaoding I was not really in a mode to drink more but I had little choice in the matter on this occasion.



The governor, light blue shirt in the middle, at the VIP dinner.

After the dinner we followed the crowd over to one of the town's drum towers for a cultural performance. There were a lot of cameras and TV cameras around throughout the meal and the performance. I'm guessing I made at least the local paper and maybe a propaganda brochure. But the low light of the evening occurred when we were asked to get up in front everyone including the Chinese TV cameras and sing an English song. Our trio consisted of me, an Australian, and a Dane. Coming up with a song we knew the words to was difficult enough. Never mind the fact, well known to those rare poor souls that have heard me sing, that I can't carry a tune at all. I would soon learn that unfortunately my companions weren't much better. Happy Birthday was in the running, at least we knew all the words, but as well as being my sister's birthday it was also the Dali Lama's birthday, and in the interest of staying in the country and avoiding deportation we decided against it. We eventually decided on the Beatle's Yellow Submarine. So there we were thrust in front of 500 or so people, Chinese TV cameras, and a number of Chinese government officials, belting out a rendition of Yellow Submarine that may have made John and Paul wish they had never written the tune. Maybe fortunately, we only got through the first verse. But this wasn't enough, demanding more punishment or just in the interest of further humiliating the



Alcohol being forced down my throat.

foreigners we were asked to another. To which the Danish guy wanted to sing a Danish song with a repeating chorus that turned out to be rather vulgar he was betting on the fact there were no Chinese Danish speakers in the audience and hoping it would eventually make it to number one in Denmark on youtube. One more very poor rendition of the disco classic "I will Survive" in which we didn't even make it to the chorus and we were mercifully permitted to return to our seats and enjoy the professional Dong singers.



Crowd at the cultural performance. I believe the girl in the middle with the red stripes is critiquing our sing. Zhaoxing.



Dong performers in Zhaoxing.



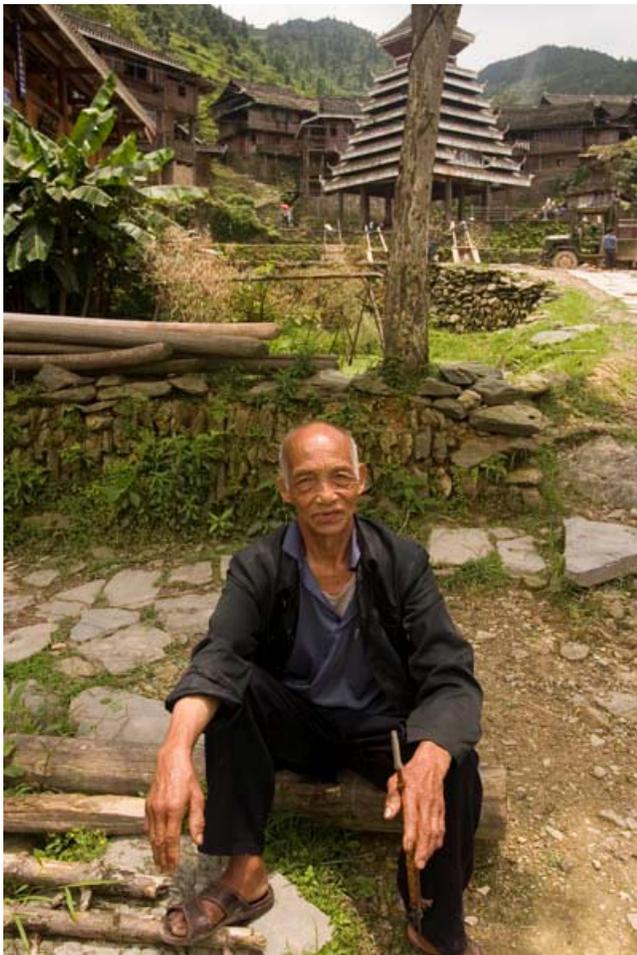
Dong woman at the VIP meal in Zhaoxing.



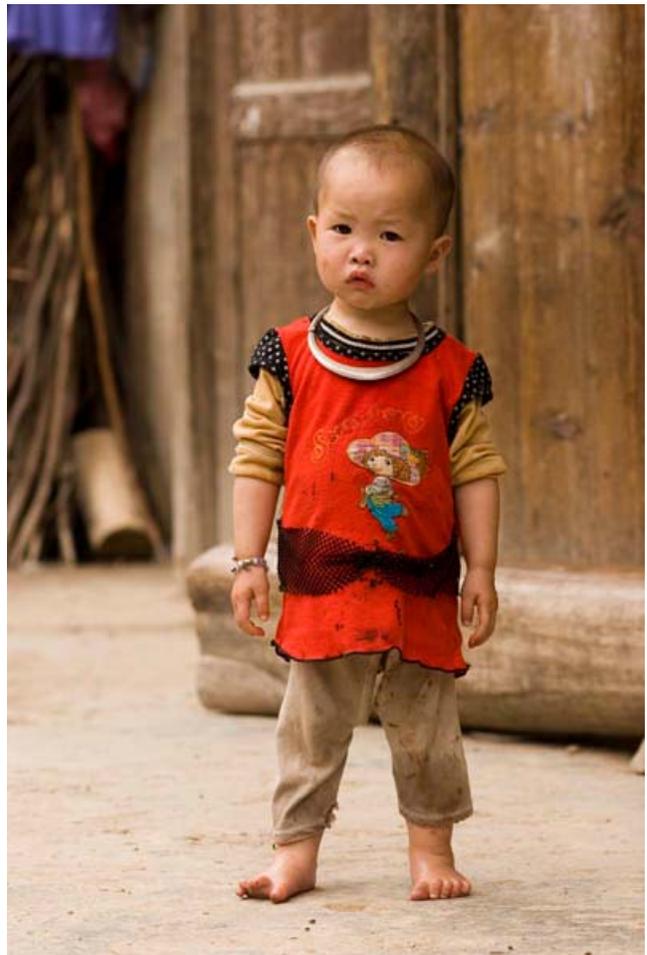
Rice fields near Zhaoxing.



**Dong village near
Zhaoxing.**



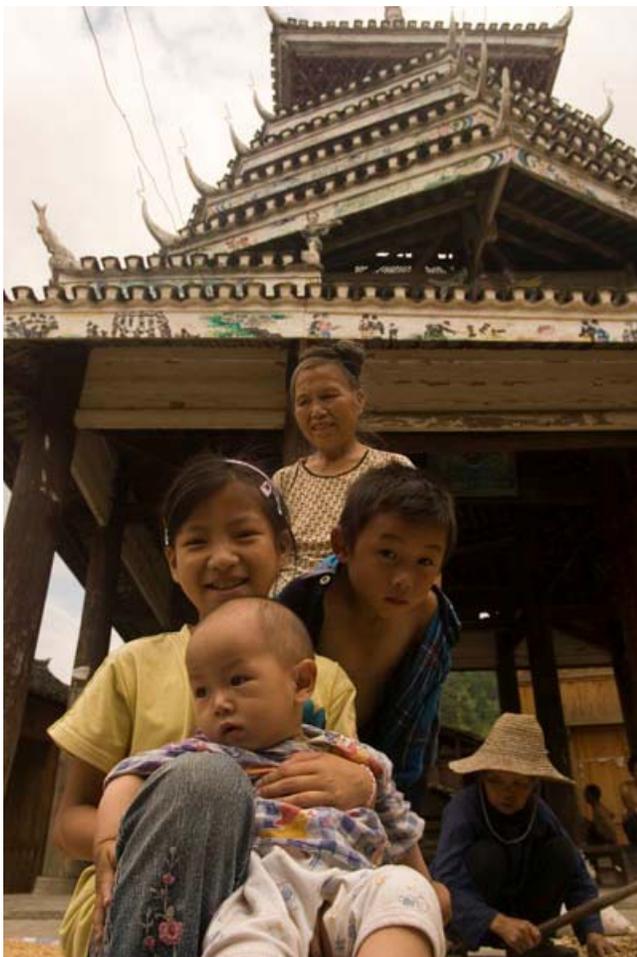
**Man in front of the Drum tower at Taun
An near Zhaoxing.**



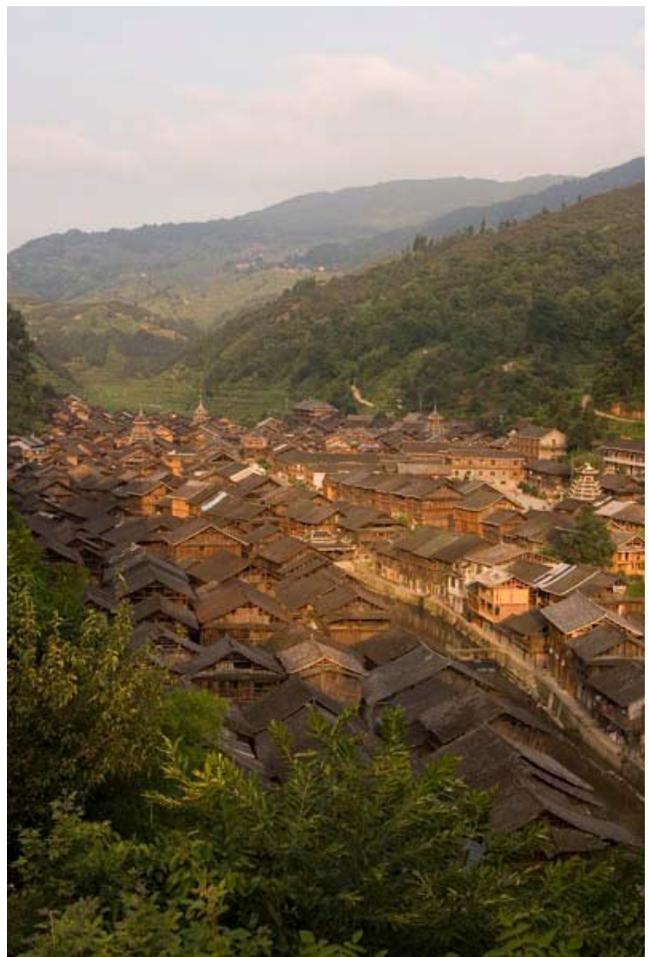
Child in a village near Zhaoxing.



Dong woman in village near Zhaoxing.



Child in a village near Zhaoxing.



View of Zhaoxing.



**Bridge and drum tower
Zhaoxing.**