



Encroaching Progress

THE SPEED OF GROWTH IN CHINA—particularly over the past 20 years—is staggering. In 2010 China’s GDP surpassed that of Japan and it became the world’s second largest economy after the United States. Today China remains on track to be the world’s largest economy by 2020.

For many, progress means growth and vice versa. But within progress and growth there is always, and there always will be, a real risk of losing culture, heritage, and history in the mad rush forward.

I have been traveling to China for work annually for the past seven years, and even the most unobservant of souls could not miss the signs of growth. Acres of skyscrapers, factories, and apartment buildings seem suddenly to appear from one year to the next. From my hotel room window in any major Chinese city, I regularly count no less than 20 construction cranes. One morning, while watching the sunlight wash over the urban landscape from high up on the

22nd floor, I counted 42 such cranes. In contrast, at the same time on the busy street far below, a diminutive, hunched government worker cleaned the asphalt highway with a traditional straw broom while cars zoomed past.

In Tianjin, pictured here, I couldn’t help but wonder how long it would be before this nook of the past would be lost forever, swallowed by progress. Perhaps, as I write this, it is already gone.

When American sociologist Robert Nisbet (1913–1996) defined his five “crucial premises” of the *Idea of Progress*, the first premise was “value of the past.” I hope the values of the past in China—both good and bad—are not lost, forgotten, or crushed in the name of so-called growth, progress, and prosperity.

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YOU’RE INVITED! We invite you to submit your photos along with a brief (approximately 200 words) description of why these images are important in your understanding of a person, place, idea, or incident from your experiences in international education. The photos could be of a simple moment on your home campus involving international students, a major event in an exotic location, or anything in between. The editors of *International Educator* will run selections on this page throughout the year. Please contact us for submission details at elainal@nafsa.org.