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NYC Teacher Embarks on Odyssey to Define Her Homeland and Heritage  
***As “Year of the Tiger” approaches, one NYC teacher explores what it means to “BE Chinese”***

NEW YORK CITY (January 5, 2010) An immigrant from Taiwan teaching at America’s first public school with a dual culture and language/English and Mandarin curriculum is presumably credentialed on things Chinese. But Elsa Chen, third grade teacher at P.S. 184M, realized the culture she shared with 85% of her students remained largely undiscovered by both teacher and student. Using a Fund for Teachers fellowship, Chen spent six weeks last summer traversing Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan’s community centers, places of worship, and centers of transportation to define *Chinese*.

“Fifty-six different ethnic groups comprise China’s 1.3 billion population,” explained Chen. “Most of my students are from the Guandong and Fujian provinces, but know little about the rest of China, its people groups and their cultures. I wanted them to understand what it means to **be** Chinese and to know that a “Chinese” person does not have to look like them or me.”

By conducting research in multiple regions through socialization and observation, Chen developed a curiosity for all things related to China and its various people groups which she’s beginning to share with students this semester. “None of (my students) knew there were such things as ethnic groups or the idea that we are Han Chinese,” said Chen. “The energy in my voice and the tidbits I have shared thus far are piquing my students’ interests. My teaching projects a new passion and energy and I’m also excited for my students to share with me what they know or have experienced.”

Back at P.S.184M, Chen designed a new year-long study of ethnicity and culture based on her summer odyssey. She created units around six ethnic groups –Tibetan, Hui, Naxi, Bai, Dong and Miao – focusing on their gender roles, food, family structure, language, geography, and religion in world communities.

"Each province in China provided a surprising new challenge and a new opportunity for learning, but my love for my job goes beyond expounding content knowledge," said Chen. "I am driven each day to give my students all the opportunities for success in our competitive world and I strive to foster pride in and understanding of being Chinese."

**Fund for Teachers** is a national, donor-supported organization celebrating its tenth year of awarding fellowships for self-designed professional growth to teachers who recognize the value of inquiry, the power of knowledge and their ability to make a difference. For more information about Fund for Teachers, visit [www.fundforteachers.org](http://www.fundforteachers.org).

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Learning the Miao language from village girls in Xijiang, Guizhou.



Torches purchased for the Bai Torch Festival.



Before Tibetan prayer flags.



Learning through dining with a Tibetan second grader.