



- Chris:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Chris and with me today is Neil.
- Neil:** Hi there.
- Chris:** Now Neil, what is your most **treasured** possession?
- Neil:** Well, that's interesting – my most treasured possession would have to be... my guitar.
- Chris:** I would probably say one of my most treasured possessions is a painting by my grandfather.
- Neil:** Oh, art in the family!
- Chris:** So, today we're discussing possessions. But before we get started, it's the quiz question. Let's see if you can answer it correctly.
- Neil:** OK, I'm ready for a challenge.
- Chris:** The question is: in terms of distance, what is the world record length for a photography exhibition?
- a) 90 metres
  - b) 1 kilometre
  - c) 600 kilometres
- Neil:** Well, I have no idea, so I'm going to go for the completely ridiculous: c) 600km.
- Chris:** OK, we'll find out the answer at the end of the programme. Now, I asked a question about photography because in today's show we're talking about a series of photographs from China.
- Neil:** From China? So what are these photos about?
- Chris:** Well, a photographer called Huang Qingjun has been travelling around China for over a decade, taking photos of families standing outside their houses.
- Neil:** What's special about that?
- Chris:** Well, he asks the families to place all their **belongings** in front of the house too.

**Neil:** All their belongings? So even things like tables and chairs?

**Chris:** Yes, as much as they can move! Now, I've got some clips from a report by BBC correspondent Beth McLeod. She describes one of the photos – can you hear what objects she sees?

**BBC correspondent Beth McLeod:**

*On a dusty, grey, patch of land, a pair of pink slippers, some cooking utensils, a bicycle and some blankets are neatly arranged in rows. Standing among their belongings an elderly couple face the camera, unsmiling... A DVD player, telephone and television are balanced on a block of concrete in the **forefront** of the photo, and some string and rocks hold a satellite dish at an angle on the ground.*

**Chris:** What objects did she describe seeing in the photo?

**Neil:** A pair of slippers!

**Chris:** That's correct.

**Neil:** Some cooking utensils – so things like spoons and knives. A bicycle, some blankets, a DVD player, a telephone.

**Chris:** Very good. There was one more thing too – a satellite dish.

**Neil:** So, why were all these things placed outside their house for the photographer to take a photo?

**Chris:** The photographer wanted to capture the lives and material goods of rural Chinese families. The photos reveal some of the social changes happening across China.

**Neil:** Because of these people's belongings?

**Chris:** Yes, we can see the many different possessions of these families – some of their things are very **old-fashioned**, but some are much more modern. Weiliang Nie of the BBC's Chinese Service describes how the **consumer goods** bought by people in these rural areas have changed.

**BBC Chinese Service senior producer, Weiliang Nie:**

*In the past, it is unimaginable people like these poor farmers or peasants could have access to a television or a telephone... They still have these sewing machines which you pedal with your feet. These are the things that the Chinese used to have as valuable stuff 30 or 40 years ago.*

**Chris:** So, having a television or telephone was once a luxury, but now they are seen by many as necessities.

**Neil:** Was a sewing machine a common item for people to own years ago?

**Chris:** In the 1950s, a sewing machine was one of the 'four big things' that Chinese families would **crave**. The three other things were: a bicycle, a watch and a radio.

- Neil:** By the 1980s, the four big things that people wanted were: a television, a washing machine, a rice cooker and a fridge.
- Chris:** This series of photos provides a **snapshot** of part of this social change.
- Neil:** Is the photographer critical of these changes, do you think?
- Chris:** Well, there is a sense that he's capturing a way of life that is slowly being lost.
- Neil:** Yeah, I see what you mean. Putting all their belongings outside their house makes it look as if they are moving away.
- Chris:** In this final clip, Beth McLeod describes one family who are doing just that – moving away:

**BBC correspondent Beth McLeod:**

*In one photo, a family pose next to a house that has the Chinese character for 'tear down' written on it. It's one of many older dwellings demolished to make way for tower blocks in a rapidly changing China.*

- Chris:** Some of these rural areas are becoming more built-up and urbanised.
- Neil:** It's quite sad really that this family are losing their home.
- Chris:** But the photographer himself believes these things are a cause for optimism. Building roads to these remote areas means people can move around more freely.
- Neil:** And by providing electricity, they can get news and ideas through the TV or internet. Is the photographer planning on continuing this project?
- Chris:** Yes, he wants to photograph more of China's urban families.
- Neil:** I imagine the amount of stuff people own in urban areas is much greater.
- Chris:** If you compare the photo of a wealthy film director with the photo of a poor fishing family who live on a boat – they are **poles apart**.
- Neil:** Almost all the belongings the fishing family own are related to cooking, whereas the film director owns a car and a large flat-screen TV.
- Chris:** It makes you wonder if we really need all our possessions.
- Neil:** That is very true... but having said that, there's no way I could live without my guitar!
- Chris:** OK, let's return to the quiz question: what is the world record length for a photography exhibition?
- a) 90 metres
  - b) 1 kilometre
  - c) 600 kilometres

**Neil:** And I went for c) 600 kilometres.

**Chris:** You were wrong I'm afraid – it was b) 1 kilometre. A photography exhibition called 'Jump4London' included over 80,000 images of people jumping in the air – that's a lot of photos!

**Neil:** Yeah, 80,000 – my word!

**Chris:** OK, that's all we have time for today. Do join us again for more 6 Minute English from [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Bye for now!

**Neil:** Goodbye!

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>treasured</b>	valuable, precious
<b>belongings</b>	things that a person owns
<b>forefront</b>	a position in front
<b>old-fashioned</b>	a style that is out of date
<b>consumer goods</b>	items that can be bought
<b>crave</b>	desire, want
<b>snapshot</b>	a glimpse
<b>poles apart</b>	at opposite extremes

### Read this story online:

<http://bbc.in/Orpwvz>

### Related story:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19648095>