

020215 Eurozone

Twice is the Charm

I believe that I have mentioned in the past that there are probably about two dozen students from China studying at DTU, including one named Wei who is in my program. When I first arrived at DTU, I tried to speak Chinese with the Chinese students, but the common reply was that Chinese was too difficult for me to speak. But, I'm speaking to you in Chinese right now! But, it wouldn't matter and English was the language that we would always use.

However, I think that going to China a second time has proven to everyone that I truly like China. I met Wei on the second day of classes and he told me in Chinese that from now on, we will always speak in Chinese. My friend Rui told me that my Chinese has improved a lot since I returned from China. I don't think it has. I just think that now people believe that I can speak. It was a lot of fun to be able to speak Chinese again in China. I miss it now that I have returned to Denmark where I can not speak the native language very well. I am embarrassed at my poor Danish skills, so I am truly enjoying being able to lessen my feelings of inadequacy by speaking something other than English with people and to have them understand.

As a newly initiated member of the "Chinese club", I was invited to go into Copenhagen on Saturday (Feb9) for a celebration of Chinese New Year. There are apparently a good number of Danish-Chinese and they held a festival in one of the shopping plazas downtown. The festival featured Chinese art, music and dance performed by both Danes and Chinese. The festival also included a parade led by dragons and ending with lots of Danish children dressed up for Carnival. After the parade, our group split up so that everyone could buy different foods for a dinner later in the evening. I went with friends from China and Thailand to a part of Copenhagen that is home to lots of Thai, Chinese and other Asian grocery stores. We later reconvened in one of the kollegiums where we would spend four hours preparing the food. Our feast featured jaozi (dumplings) and other Chinese dishes as well as Thai dishes and was delicious. Hao chi!

Holidays

You may remember that last fall, Tuborg released its Christmas Beer with much fan fare on a Friday that is practically a national holiday. Not to ignore the other major Christian holiday, Tuborg released its special Easter Beer on Friday (Feb 15). I have yet to try it, but some have said that it has amazing reviving qualities.

Seeing the light

I had a second appointment to see a Danish eye specialist last week. I asked him what exactly the gunk that he had me putting into my eye was doing. Much to my surprise, he told me that one of its main functions was to stop my eye from healing. He believes that my cornea had been attacked by a virus, resulting in all of the problems that I had. The idea of the drops was to stop the healing process so that my eye would concentrate on killing the virus. I have never heard of such a virus before, but the treatment is working and I look forward to ending the use of the drops so that my vision returns!

The dark

My friends Micah, Santiago and I met for dinner last Monday for the first time since we all departed for different continents before Christmas. Little did we all realize that we would be meeting again but two days later to say goodbye to Santiago. I assume that everyone has seen the pictures or heard about the current economic and political crises in Argentina. As Santiago says, Argentina is a resource rich country which should not be facing an economic crisis. However, poor governing and bad decision making stretching back to the 60's have caused the economy to collapse.

When Santiago worked in Argentina for Caterpillar, he had the choice of being paid in US dollars or in Argentinean Pesos. The peso was pinned to the dollar and so workers would be paid the same amount in either currency. Santiago, like many others opted for US dollars to be deposited into his bank account where they remained in dollars. As part of the recent attempt to bring order to the country, the government has allowed the peso to float freely. But, they also reassured the people that bank accounts in US dollars would remain in US dollars so their money was safe. Safe until the government decided last month that all accounts would now be in pesos which are currently trading at about the rate of 2 pesos for 1 US dollar. Suddenly people saw their savings cut in half with further inflation feared. People have been trying to get their money out to buy dollars, but there are limits regarding how much money can be taken out and how many dollars can be bought. Santiago has been able to use the ATMs here in Copenhagen, but he wondered how much longer that would last.

Santiago felt that he could better keep watch over his family and savings by being in Buenos Aires. Santiago needs the money because the Masters in Wind Turbine program does not officially start until the fall semester and so he could not get funding for his studies this year. However, he has been told that he is at the top of the list for a scholarship in the fall. The professors in the department were very understanding of the problem and supported Santiago's choice to take off this semester so that he could go back home to see what could be done. So on Monday Santiago told us that he was considering leaving and by Thursday morning he was gone.

With the world being so small; spanned by airliners, the internet and international universities, I am not sure why it still surprises me when something that happens half way

around the world has a direct affect upon our lives. I only hope that the crisis lessens and that Santiago is able to return again next semester.

Eurozone

As you probably know, the European Union changed its currency to the Euro on January 1st. However, Denmark along with Britain and Sweden have decided to hold onto their old crowns and pounds for now. It is actually rather disappointing that Denmark did not adopt the Euro. Although I like the crowns, the ability to travel all over Europe on a single currency would have been very convenient. But, I cant blame people for wanting to hold on to their own currency for a while longer due to both national pride and not wanting to change.

What will the launch of the Eurozone mean to Europe? Will the peoples of the member countries feel more united now that they share the same coins? Each of these countries has a good, but currently dormant economy and an army. What if they could fully act as one as not only an economic power, but a political and military power as well? Hints of the later were made when it was proposed in Brussels that the peacekeeping forces sent to Afghanistan be part of an EU force. But, the member countries were not yet ready to make that step.

As the EU continues to gather strength, will the US move over to share room at the superpower table with the EU? At some point, will the US have a choice? It seems to me that the policy of the current administration as well as the last one was that are allies are either with us or against us in what goals the US wants to accomplish with little room for compromise. This manifested itself in the current war against terror. Our European allies support the US action in Afghanistan, but are becoming more and more vocal in their requests that they take an active part in the campaign against terror and not just fall in behind the US. The EU does not want this to be just a US led initiative. Furthermore, I suspect that the support that the US has been receiving will quickly wither if the US were to project its power against Iraq as some in the US government have suggested.

At what point does the US become less of a nation justly avenging itself and more of a nation acting despite or against world opinion? I fear that the future can already be seen in the policy of the US towards international treaties that the rest of the world has ratified. The US will have its missile defense shield. We will sit back and claim that our industry will voluntarily clean up greenhouse emissions while the rest of the world bears the true economic cost of abiding by the Kyoto Agreement. We will keep our land mines, we will decide when and if the Geneva Convention applies to prisoners of war, but we will not allow our soldiers to be tried in international courts. It is as if the US government treats world politics as a game. If they don't like what the rest of the world is doing, they just take their ball and go home. But what if the rest of the world continues to play without us? At what point does the US itself become the rogue state that keeps defying the ideas and principals that the rest of the world see as just and moral?

So, Europe now has this new currency....

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)

Copyright © 2002 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.