

000324 Do you have peeps?

Stores

Across the street from my school is a store that is literally a little hole in the wall. There is basically a door that you go through and then there is a space of 4 feet by 4 feet to stand. Opposite the door is a glass counter laden with goods both on top and on the shelves below. Behind the counter is a space that is 4 feet by 10 feet, lined by shelves. Two women work behind the counter and I believe that they live there as well.

At the shop, you can buy coke and sprite as well as some domestic sodas. Pepsi is also here, but it is not as available as coke. Every store will also sell bottle water. There are also chocolate bars. Kit-Kat, Cadbury, Snickers and Dove bars are all available, although Kit-kats are by far the most easily found. The store across the street only has kit-kats. There are also some domestic chocolate bars, but these taste like you are eating wax. The store also stocks crackers and cookies. Cookies as we know them in the US are more difficult to find, but there are tons of variations that are like biscuits. There are also some that have different fillings such as fruit.

The store also stocks toys, beer and other liquor, cigarettes and other things that I do not recognize, all in plastic wrapping. The store also has a telephone that you can use to make local calls. On the steps to the store, there are bags of milk for sale. Milk does not come in cartons, but rather bags or bags that are shaped like bottles. I have tried a few of these bags of milk and most turn out to be sweet milk. I do not know if the milk is pasteurized so I always boil it first. However, it is all for not since I don't like the taste of sweet milk. Speaking of bags, now that the weather is getting warmer, some stores are now selling bags of beer. They have kegs of beer out front that they use to fill plastic bags with beer. I have heard that they are very inexpensive (around \$.25 for a bag).

The store across the street is pretty typical of most of the little stores that line the street. Some will have things that others do not, but most carry the same goods. However, there are also a few larger supermarkets. These are not like Schnucks or Shaws, but much smaller and also in the store fronts. I love to wander the aisles of these stores to look at all of the things that they have to offer. Most of the packages list their contents in characters, so I can only look and imagine what is inside. Other packages have pinyin or English so I have a better idea. Usually when I shop for something specific like corn starch or salt, I ask one of the dozen or so people working there to point out where it is. This method has worked very well. There is a supermarket within a five minute walk of my school gates that I frequent for my bread, jelly and other items. Each of these supermarkets has things that the others do not. I have found one other store that has peanut butter and oatmeal. One can also find Pringles and other western foods alongside their domestic counterparts. Crest and Colgate are also here in force and they have just as many varieties of the same toothpaste as we do in the US. I try to limit how much of these western foods and goods I consume, since I am here in China to experience what China has. However, the lure of peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole wheat steamed bread is often too much to resist!

The western companies are slowly infiltrating the country in force as are western media. In the past the Chinese government could limit what movies were shown here and what parts. However, with VCD's being so popular, movies that have just come out in the US are on the streets here within days. Piracy is letting people see what they want. It will be interesting to see what happens as these two cultures blend over time. I am hoping that the Chinese culture accepts the good and rejects the bad, thus maintaining its uniqueness. But, as I mentioned before, Titanic and Backstreet Boys are huge here, so some bad has gotten in :).

Lessons

My lesson on the environment with my Junior 3 kids did not go over very well. The idea, which I got from an ESL book was to teach them words like environment, industrialist and environmentalist. Next I would have them use these ideas in a debate about the Three Gorges Dam as they worked in teams to discuss the impact of the dam from each perspective. I thought that they were at a level that they could do so, but I was mistaken. They had never seen the word environment before (in English) let alone did they understand what I wanted. So after 20 minutes I realized the futility of continuing. I could hear my mother and my sister who are both teachers snickering as I stood before the 60 students with my lesson plan in tatters, no back up plan and 20 minutes left in the period. Fortunately, I remembered that this same ESL source had listed some backup ideas in case you had time left in your class. After floundering for around five minutes I seized upon the idea of trivia. I began to ask them questions about the US and at the same time, tried to explain that trivia is a game in the US. They knew a lot about the US history and geography. They knew a lot about world geography. Definitely a lot more than their US counterparts. I think that I will follow up on the trivia theme with them next week.

However, the lesson was not a complete loss. After class, one of the students caught me in the hall to ask me more questions about the environment and about how the Chinese see the environment. He wanted to become more of an environmentalist and wanted to know how.

For my Junior 1 kids, I have been continuing the grocery store lesson and have started the bank. I teach them the value of our coins and next week I will incorporate money into my lesson about the market. The market lesson will teach them the English names of fruit and other things that you buy on the street.

Playing with the kids

Jason and I have begun to play with the kids out in the schoolyard during their break for dinner. The other day, Jason was playing soccer with maybe 30 kids as I played badminton with a J1 who was out for blood. Our game had a huge crowd of kids to watch the goofy foreigner play. So, it was embarrassing when I went after a lob and wound up stepping in front of a moving van. Fortunately, the van was going only 5 mph and so they stopped, but the kids thought that it was funny. Jason fared even worse. He went up to head the ball and wound up falling backwards onto a little kid who was standing just behind him. The kid was

fine and now has the notoriety of being know as the student who was squished by the foreign teacher.

Taiwan

I have had so many people ask me about Taiwan in the past few days due to the recent election in Taiwan. Even the state news (in English at 7PM) has devoted a lot of time to the issue. People are really concerned that war is inevitable although most do not want it. We shall see what occurs with the new president of Taiwan.

Of course, we still do not have our green cards. I imagine that it is little things that are so much trouble that gives so many US companies such a headache when they try to do business in China.

That is it for the weekend. I can not believe that I have been here for almost 7 weeks now. This past week has gone by so quickly.

Have a great weekend and I will write again soon.

Jeff

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