

000329 And you are?

People

The majority of the people here are Han Chinese which is the major ethnic group here in China. However, there are also minority groups in China such as the Mongolians. After being here for a while, I can start to pick out people from Inner Mongolia by their different facial features from the Han. The people here in Yantai dress very smartly. Black shoes with massive soles and black pants that you would find in London or New York are everywhere here as well. The most popular colors for clothing are currently black or dark blue. However, the choice of color may be due to the winter, so we shall see if more brighter colors emerge during the spring. Most people, including myself wash their clothes by hand, so you can often see clothing hanging out the windows of the apartments or on lines in the street. Some people here have spin dryers and some even have washing machines. I think that partially because of the hand washing and line drying a lot of people will wear the same clothes for more than one day. Nice clothing such as what is worn here is probably also too expensive to have dozens of outfits in people's wardrobes. I have found this practice to be to my advantage since I only brought a few pants and shirts with me. People here just do not take notice as they would in the US, which is actually nice and I am enjoying the relaxed atmosphere.

One thing that I miss here in Yantai are all of the coffee shops of St. Louis. Not that I am dying for a cup of real coffee (ok, maybe I am), but what I am missing is a place to sit down to talk with friends. My Chinese tutor has often lamented that she has no place to hang out with her friends. There are the discos, but they are so loud that conversation can be impossible. I believe that there is a tea house here that fits the bill, but I have heard that it is expensive and I have yet to try it. Therefore, when I want to sit and talk with someone, or when I get tutored, we meet at DiDi hamburger. The restaurant has a second floor that is reasonably quiet between the rush of meals with the exception of a VCD player which is constantly running.

Teaching the Teachers

Every week I spend several hours talking with different teachers. Some are very eager to practice and to improve their English so Jason and I are constantly receiving invitations to speak with them in our free time. We also have two hours a week set aside when we meet with all of the English teachers. There are about thirty English teachers, so Jason and I divide the class in half. For the past two weeks, I have had the teachers read an article from US New and World Report entitled, "Get that TV out of your children's bedroom." It is about children in the US and their media consumption. The article reveals that children watch on average 3 hours of TV a day. Between the TV and the Internet, children are becoming more isolated and are therefore lacking some basic social skills.

The article has prompted some interesting conversations amongst the teachers, which was what I had hoped. Children in China are just as eager as their counterparts in the US to spend

hours in front of the TV. However, since they spend so much time in the classroom, their TV consumption is largely limited to weekends and holidays at home. However, I know that most of my students are huge fans of a cartoon called, Inspector Conan. It is a Japanese cartoon about a young boy who consistently outsmarts adults and uses high-tech gadgets to solve crimes. I have watched the cartoon with my students during their dinner break and I am sure that there is more going on in the cartoon as well.

Almost all families in China have a TV, but few have more than one. Fewer still have a computer or internet access. Everyone wants a computer, but few can currently afford to buy one. It is for this reason that there are so many internet cafes in Yantai. Teenagers here are very into chatting online. With the exception of myself and any other foreigners accessing our email in the cafes, all of the computers are being used to chat. Children at my school are taught computers in class on what I think are 486 machines (they are slow). However, for those few who do have internet access at home, their surfing is monitored. There was a WT volunteer who used his computer at his apartment to look at sites on Tibet for his travels. A few days later, he got a call from the Public Security Bureau (PSB) who wanted him to come down to the station to explain why he was looking at those sites. I can no longer access the Boston Globe from the internet cafes. I had been reading to Globe to keep up on the Taiwan news. Now the computer just chugs and chugs, but the site can not be accessed.

The teachers at my school loved the article because they are always eager to learn about the US education system and about the students themselves. I wish that I knew more about teaching methods or ideas because some teachers are eager to add US methods to their own. My Chinese-American friends have often said that a blending of the Chinese and US system of teaching would be an ideal education system. Other teachers will not even read the article or will not ask questions, so it is a mixed bag of responses to my lessons. At least the article kept their attention. I am thinking about talking about the differences in courtship this week. The teachers, I hear are big gossipers, so they should be very into this lesson. They love to look at my photos from home and they always ask which woman in the pictures is my girlfriend. We shall see how the lesson goes, but it should be interesting!

Culinary Treats

There is a street market which is about a 5 minute walk from my school. I have become addicted to walking through the market and sampling the delights. There is roast chicken next to silk worms (I have not tried these yet, but I have been promised that I will) next to cow hearts. The mix is always an adventure and I am always finding something new. It is here that I buy all of my fruit and vegetables. I love the bouzi (steamed bread stuffed with meat or vegetables) and the other breads in the market. One vendor makes an english muffin like treat filled with jam. All of the breads and bouzi sells for 5 Mao, or 6 cents. I have also become a huge fan of buying pineapples. My pineapple woman insists on cutting it up for me if I do not want to save it for later. There is nothing like having tons of fresh pineapple available.

Teaching

This week I will start a lesson about the post office. This will lead into my kids writing pen-pal letter with my mother's school in Canton, MA. I have so many students, however that I can not do this lesson with all of them. The number of letters that I could send would overwhelm the Canton school system. I think that I will save the for just my boarding school junior one students. I am looking forward to this lesson and I hope that it goes well!

And you are...

With so many students, I can not possibly remember all of their names even though I named most of them! However, they remember mine. Everyday I have students say, "Hello Jeff!" I know that the ones that know my name are my students, but I just wish that I could know their names. I have eight non-boarding school classes with 80 - 100 students each. I also have nine boarding school classes with 60 students each, giving me about 1360 names to remember.

Legal at last

Today Jason and I received our green cards. We are no longer living under the threat of deportation. The beaches will just have to wait until the summer.

Take care,

Jeff

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