

001007 National Day

Sorry that this is a bit long, but this is two weeks worth of stories and it has been a busy two weeks. I also have some good news to share. I was accepted to the Penn State Acoustics program for my Ph.D. starting next August. Now I will just need to see about how much funding I can get from them to actually attend.

Language

I am very glad to have a tutor who is teaching me Chinese. Helen is so much better than my Chinese textbooks from Wash U that I brought with me to China, because she is teaching me how the Chinese people actually speak. I have pretty much given up trying to learn grammar from the books. When I have tried to run newly learned sentence structures past Helen, she always just tells me that technically I am correct. However, if I were to use that sentence structure, people would know right away that I was a foreigner. (I assume that she meant if I met someone on a dark, foggy night seeing as most people guess right away that I am not from around here even before I try to speak.) The lessons have been invaluable to me since being able to speak broken Chinese has made living here so much easier. People on the street are some times surprised when I say something in Chinese to them and at other times they launch into quick Chinese that I can not follow. Cabbies are especially eager to carry on conversations. But, it is fun to barter with people in their language even if my vocabulary is limited.

Rain

Last Thursday (9/28) was supposed to be a Sports Day at my school, but it had to be canceled due to rain. It was the first full day of rain that I have ever seen here in Yantai. It was disappointing for the kids who faced a day of classes instead of a day of fun, but the rain is badly needed. The province is currently in a draught and it was predicted that Yantai has only about 90 days worth of water left. Water in some parts of the city is being rationed by the city shutting off the water supply during the day. My water is intermittent due to the shut-offs and due to construction crews laying new water pipes throughout the city. The new pipes turn the water a lovely orange color as the rust in the new pipes is slowly worn away by the water being used by the populous. Most of my clothes now have an orange spot or two and the water has a nice metallic smell to it. Fortunately, Jason and I bought a water cooler last semester for which bottles of water are inexpensive so I don't have to boil and drink the orange water.

National Day

Last Sunday (10/1) was National Day, celebrating the 51st anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The day is celebrated by a seven day holiday for most people. It was predicted that the populous would again swamp popular tourist spots as they had during the May holiday. I opted to stay in Yantai because I wanted to avoid the crowds, because I needed space from the daily hustle and bustle of the school and because my travels during the summer had

depleted my savings. Upon hearing that I would be in town for the week, my best class Junior 2, Class 1 (my favorite and best class) decided that they would take care of me for the week. I receive several invitations for dinner or to play and I accepted all of them.

Last Sunday after church and lessons, I was met at the school gate by two of my students, Cindy and Monica. We went to Monica's house for lunch and then to Cindy's house later in the day for dinner. Monica's father is a worker, which is a catch all title used for people who work in factories. Her mother is an accountant who can speak some English. We had lunch in their home on the 5th floor of one of the concrete buildings that carpet the city. Monica's father's employer gave the home to the family. Her mother cooked a delicious meal and it was fun to speak with them. They asked tons of questions that started with "in your country.." and they wanted to know about the education system. They were pretty good questions for 13 year olds.

Cindy's family lived on the first floor of a similar building. Her father is also a worker and her mother is also an accountant. However, their jobs are not as good as Monica's parents so their house was on the first floor and had only two rooms used as bedrooms/living rooms, a kitchen and a bath. Since the home was on the first floor, they had their own gate and a small garden. However, the space used for the garden meant that the home lacked the usual bowed windows that add to the space in the kitchen. We did not eat at their home, but instead went to a nearby restaurant so that we could all fit.

On Wednesday I opened my apartment door to find five boys from the class. They all streamed in before we set out for a video arcade. There are tons of these in Yantai with more opening all of the time. The one we went to was on the 4th floor of a shopping arcade. The video game include the usual fare of fighting games, car racing games and shooting games. There were also games where you were show two pictures and asked to find the differences. One game that is popular all over are the dancing games. These games involve a large platform on which two people can stand. On the platform are four panels in a diamond pattern, which are to be stepped on when they light up. The game has a monitor that displays a cartoon figure dancing and the steps that the people playing are to take. It is just like the game, Simon, but you dance instead of hitting the panels with your hands. You choose the song that you want to dance to and the game starts. As the music plays the dance steps are shown and the players dance either on the panels or on the middle of the diamond. The game keeps track of how accurately you dance and the better you are, the longer you get to play.

We hung out at the arcade for a few hours before heading to Nanshan Park, near the school. The park has a zoo, a pond with boats and a mini-amusement park. All of the rides looked sketchy and appeared even more so once I found out that you had to haggle over the price of the ride. We went on a few rides including a mini-rollercoaster. I wound up riding in a car with Joey who was the instigator of the day. Joey is a precocious, short, 13 year old. I held on to the car and Joey held on to me and swore in English (I told you he was precocious) as we made the hairpin turns. After a few rides, I could tell that they were out of ideas of things to do and I did not want them to keep spending their money. So, once again, UNO saved the day. They were excited when I pulled it out and they quickly learned what each card meant during a practice round. We sat down on a wall and as the crowd grew around us, we played a few rounds of UNO until it was time to go.

The next day, I took the bus out to Penglai which is a sea-side town about 1 1/2 hours from Yantai. There I was met by one of my students who lives there. We spent the day wandering the beaches, riding speedboats in the ocean and checking out the tourist sights. Her family took me to lunch at a restaurant in town, but it wound up just being my student, her friend and two cousins as the parents had to work in their liquor store. Lunch was fun and at one point I was asked to take a look out the window at one of the cousin's motorcycles. I could see the Yamaha insignia and I said that it was a Yamaha which made me very popular with the cousins who thought I knew my motorcycles. I spent the rest of the day riding on the back of the motorcycle whenever we went to a new place. I had been to Penglai once before, but at that time I had not visited a neat museum to a hero from the Ming Dynasty. The museum was actually his home and was beautiful with lush lawns crossed by immaculate pathways, elaborately painted ceilings and beautiful gardens with trees over 400 years old. The museum also displayed recreated carriages from the Ming dynasty including a rocket launcher. The rockets were spears with fireworks to propel them. The rockets were each put into a slot in the cart and lit to launch at the enemy. There were also cannons and shells on display.

National Day in Beijing and Religion

Last week there was some press over the Associate Press wire regarding the canonization of 120 Catholics who died under Chinese religious persecution. The Vatican chose October 1st as the day of the canonization due to it being the feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, patron saint of missionaries. The Chinese government proclaimed its "utmost indignation" at the Pope for bestowing sainthood on the missionaries and they were upset that it was done on National Day. I have read the reports from the AP news source and from the Chinese press and I can not say which of the accusations regarding the character of those chosen for the canonization are true or false. What I do know is that on CCTV English News they had a several minute story showing Bishop Fu Tieshan of the China Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) along with several dozen nuns holding a press conference in Tianamen square on Sunday morning before mass. The CPCA is the official Catholic church in China as ties with the Vatican have been forbidden since 1951. Any church that does not go through an official overseeing body like the CPCA can and have been shut down. However, lots of Catholics still have ties with the Vatican through underground churches. In fact, Voice of America (VOA) did a story on the thriving, underground Catholic church in Northwest China a few weeks ago.

Here in Yantai, I attend an official Catholic Church. But, here in Yantai there are also underground churches, but I do not know much about them. However, at my church there were two priests who are brothers originally from Qingdao. They were forbidden to return to Qingdao due to their ties to the Vatican. Recently, one of the brothers disappeared to go to another city to help the underground church there. An older priest who used to say the mass has also left the church. I was told that the CPCA had asked him to become the bishop for this area. However, he refused because there is already a bishop for this area who was chosen by the Vatican. So the old priest was sent by the CPCA to Jinan to a seminary there to "rest".

There was also a story on CCTV regarding the Falun Gong protests on National Day in

Tiananmen Square which you may have read about. All that was said on CCTV was that there were demonstrations by the Falun Gong which tourists found “to be annoying”. End of story in the Chinese press, but not over the AP wire which reported the sometimes bloodied protesters being rushed into waiting vans.

I have lived in China for almost eight months now. I remember commenting when I first got here that the cultural differences removed, it feels no different than living in the US. I still stand by that assessment. Capitalism is rampant, goods are available and the people seem free. However, things like last Sunday are often reminders that there is an overseeing presence lurking in the background. I do believe that socialism has its place here during this time in that a tight control of the state is the only way that China can become a developed nation without all of the disasters that are so evident in the former Soviet Union. And at some time in the distant future, I believe that due to the openness, democracy will come to China. However, the clamp downs on religion and free speech are reminders that China still has a long and difficult path to follow until the people here are truly free.

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