



AITECE Ltd (Australia)

Association for International Teaching Educational
and Curriculum Exchange

NEWSLETTER Issue 12, May 2007

News from the Teacher Programme Coordinator

The AITECE Teacher Programme from "Down Under" is fortunately continuing to recruit and assist teachers for teaching in China with AITECE. We're pleased to have 15 teachers presently at Chinese Institutes, many of them renewing their contract each year. In August '06, Maureen Eddyned, Austin Punch and Mark Craddock (NZ) began their contracts at SISU Chongqing, Shanghai, and Chanchun respectively. We hear very positive reports of their experiences. Mark went down to Zhaoqing in the Spring Festival break to help John Wotherspoon with his English Corner programmes.



Mark Craddock and students at Zhaoqing

Then in February '07, 5 new teachers, Anne Ting, Heather and Dennis Attrill, Sandra Power and John Oxland left Australia to make their contribution to the education of the young students in China.



Back row L-R: John Oxland, Sandra Power
Front row: Heather Attrill, Anne Ting, Dennis Attrill

Their preparation included interviews and Orientation sessions, as well as advice and help from both returned and current teachers. The next intake for new teachers is August, '07.

Many of the returned teachers manage to come to our Debrief Sessions for returned teachers. This is usually a great chance for all to share memories of their time in China. Brian Jeffers (our new Editor) was welcomed home in September '06, after five years at ACC Fuzhou.

Liz and Peter Hogan's welcome was held recently in March. For both these occasions Michael Dredge made his home available at Marsfield...an ideal venue.



Brian Jeffers' debriefing at Marsfield

Our quarterly AITECE Committee meetings at Balmain provide us with the opportunity to keep our efforts for AITECE alive. Contributions by way of sponsorship and annual subscriptions enable us to cover any essential running costs re promotion and activities. Sincere thanks to all who have sent donations.

Our next meeting, also AGM, is Sunday May 27, at 2 Thames Street, Balmain. Further meetings are in August and November. All are welcome.

I encourage all AITECE teachers and friends to be active in promoting the work of AITECE. China is very much in the news

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these days. Many foreigners are visiting, touring, setting up massive joint ventures, making lots of money. However the presence of dedicated AITECE teachers who give their time and expertise voluntarily to the Chinese people without much thought to monetary gain is something to be commended and even proud of. Since AITECE began in 1988 more than 250 teachers worldwide have made this contribution. Let's try to keep it going!

Finally a big "Welcome" to Brian, the new Editor of our Newsletter. I'm sure Brian would appreciate any articles or photos about your experiences "in or since" China.

Please keep in touch, and my gratitude to the Committee, and all of you.

Margaret Walsh

Chongqing - A City of Mountains and Lights or City of Fog and Furnace?

Just over two years ago (December 2004) we were offered a teaching position with AITECE in Chongqing, China. Having never heard of Chongqing we immediately consulted with Google to find out it was known as the City of Fog and Furnace. At that time we had been living in Coffs Harbour (known as the City of sunshine, sand, ocean and all things beautiful) for 25 years so the idea of trading this for fog and furnace was a bit daunting but nevertheless we took the plunge and agreed to teach there for one year. When we told our friends the reaction was "Where?" or, those who knew the city, scared us with tales of pollution and heat.

Our first impression of Chongqing seemed to confirm the "fog" theory as when we were coming through the clouds to land we were surprised to feel the wheels touch the tarmac – we thought we were still coming through the clouds!! However, the temperature was refreshingly cool – not at all furnace-like and very different to the reception we received which was very warm, friendly and welcoming.

Our next few weeks were a blur of meeting new people, lesson preparation, teaching and settling in procedures (opening bank accounts, health checks, visa requirements). It was quite a few weeks later that we woke to blue skies and sunshine and set off with our camera to explore the mountain behind our campus. We thought we had left behind the Australian bush to find it was right at our doorstep. This mountain became our regular haunt and we learned that Chongqing is truly a city of beautiful mountains. A walk along Nambin Lu after sunset also confirmed what the students were telling us – Chongqing is a City of Lights.



Front row left: The Hogans at Marsfield

The more we explored the more we came to love Chongqing – its energy, its people and its food. We travelled to many other places in China but were always happy to return to the friendly people of Chongqing. Our son visited us three times whilst we were there and he agrees that it's the best place in China. (This could have something to do with the fact that Chongqing is reputed to have the most beautiful girls!)

Our one year contract became two years and we are now back in beautiful Coffs Harbour. We have many stories to tell but it would take up too

much space, so if you would like to see some more photos we have uploaded them to www.youtube.com – in the search box type: elizhogan and you can view them. If you are thinking of teaching in China we can highly recommend the experience. We were helped and supported along the way by wonderful AITECE people, so thanks to all our friends at AITECE especially Margaret in Sydney, Hugh, William and Rita in Hong Kong, and all our other AITECE friends around the world.

Peter & Liz Hogan
20th April 2007

150 million Chinese in planes, trains and automobiles

April 25, 2007 - 2:53PM

A record 150 million people are expected to take to the road, rail and air during the week-long May Day holiday period.

A record 150 million people are expected to take to the road, rail and air during the week-long May Day holiday period, state media on Wednesday quoted officials as saying.

Despite rising complaints that China's three "golden week" vacations each year generate little but crowds, litter and pollution and that their pump-priming effect is waning, the government has no plans to ditch the holidays, the China Daily said.

"With per capita gross domestic product estimated to keep growing, there is huge potential for tourism development during the Golden Week holidays," it quoted the deputy head of the National Tourism Administration, Zhang Ziqin, as saying.

Some officials have previously urged the holidays be scrapped.

This would be a mistake, said Wang Kecheng of the National Bureau of Statistics.

"The system has contributed a lot to boosting domestic consumption and demand, which makes its existence necessary," he was quoted as saying.

This May, more people are expected to travel overseas over May Day and use their cars, the newspaper added, without elaborating.

Six years ago China started week-long holidays centred on National Day in October, Labour Day in May and the traditional Chinese New Year in January or February as a way of boosting domestic spending.

But Chinese people, who have taken with gusto to the idea of vacationing since economic reforms started putting more money in people's pockets, have become frustrated with the government-enforced Golden Weeks.

Tourists have dubbed Golden Week vacations "Golden Porridge", a play on words referring to the hot and sticky swarm of people flooding tourist spots and public transport.

Reuters

EDITORIAL

To those who have taught English in China, there comes an abiding enrichment, a savour of friendship and experience that lingers—outcomes that go far beyond expectation, ones that no *tourist* could hope for, let alone attain. Thus it has been for Roderick O'Brien, the Editor of the AITECE Newsletter since 2002, who has stepped aside from the editor's chair and now, in Adelaide, embarks on a fresh stage of his life. It is fitting for an incoming editor, therefore, to acknowledge Roderick's contribution to the cause that is still so dear to his heart, and to express on behalf of AITECE warm appreciation for the issues of the Newsletter he has overseen. For his part, he maintains a lively interest in the aims and affairs of a body that actively promotes the Teaching of English in China.

Contributors to this issue are present and former AITECE teachers, who gladly responded to the editor's invitation.

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A typical Chinese Wedding

The invitation came quite out of the blue, as is often the case for foreigners in China, and at very short notice into the bargain. One Friday, as I was in the school bus on my way home from our college, I casually asked a Chinese colleague about the coming weekend. She expected to be busy, she said, as she would be helping her sister who was to be bridesmaid at a family wedding. So we got talking about different customs in Australia and China.

The next day, I had the invitation by phone. The appointed day (a Sunday) dawned and, dressed in an appropriate wedding garment, I was whisked away by car to I knew not where. The apartment was on the fourth floor and, with nearly twenty people inside, it was pretty cramped. After being introduced and greeted warmly, I was ushered into a bedroom where the bride had just finished dressing. There, the groom displayed for my admiration an array of bridal photos which had been taken, I was told, some months before, and most elaborately mounted and boxed.

By this time it was midday so off we trooped to the Double Happiness Restaurant for lunch – a conventional Chinese meal – where my wants were thoughtfully attended to, even to the point of having tasty morsels selected for me by Elizabeth, my ‘mentor’ for the day. It was just as well because the dishes kept on coming in such variety that I would have been hard put to choose appropriately on my

own. In adjoining rooms, mahjong kept many of the guests occupied (and some money doubtless changed hands). Suddenly, everyone rose and back to the house we went for the ceremony. I was glad I’d had the foresight to bring with me a batch of my Australian photos as these turned out to be a handy means of communication during the hour of waiting.

The bride’s grandmother was first solemnly installed in the place of honour. Then, in turn, her parents and other married couples paid their respects as a hired wedding ‘celebrant’ began the chants of blessing, all the while coaching the participants in what they had to say.

Finally, the bride and groom came before the grandmother, the bridesmaid standing discreetly behind them. After more chantings, the guests in their turn came to offer congratulations and presents, usually money in red envelopes. These were promptly passed by the bride to her bridesmaid who kept a large bag at the ready. My vantage-point was a corner of the room where I sat with Elizabeth, who quietly explained what was going on.

And to end it all, we had the crackers to ward off unfriendly spirits! It was now time (4pm) for all to repair to the restaurant again for the Wedding Banquet. Knowing from a previous experience how long such banquets could last, and with the prospect of an early class the next morning, I had to make a quick decision and, with regret, apologise for my early departure. But before leaving I must be photographed with the bridal couple. To round off the generous treatment that I’d been given all day, I was driven home, full of memories of the simplicity and love of this close-knit family who, on a most sacred day of their lives, had taken me as one of their own.

Brian Jeffers

A Love Story by Bernadette from Fuzhou

I'd like to relate to you my love affair with The Humble Bicycle.

It all started when I sat on this old bike and I realized I could keep it moving. I knew then that I could ride a bike if only I would not let my fears get in the way. It took me a while though before I finally was able to keep my feet firmly on the pedals and get the bike to take me where I wanted to go.

When I fell off the bike and hit my head on the pavement I didn't want to try again. No amount of coaxing and persuasion could get me to pedal. I just sat there without moving. I had my left foot on the pedal but I would not let my other foot leave the ground. How then can I keep the bike moving at all?

I was even given a brief scientific lesson on force and motion. I listened intently and nodded my head in agreement but when I was in the bike seat everything was forgotten. It was back to zero. You see I had these pictures in my head of not being able to balance and the worst of it was the idea of getting bruises and cuts. I was too scared of getting hurt. My friends even jokingly suggested that they would ask our bike man to make trainer wheels for me – you know these wheels they put on the bike for kids who are learning how to ride. It sounds ridiculous at my age but I actually toyed with the idea; perhaps that would be the only way for me to learn. When Brian, one of the Aussie guys, left his bike keys and even had the seat lowered for me to practise over the summer vacation I promised myself I would do it.

During the first semester I visited Pepot in Nanchang. I had a few days off during the first week of November when the students were having their mid-term exams. It was my first time to travel on the train alone. So for several days we bonded and I even got to meet the other Filipinos who were also teachers. She had this old pink bike and it was conveniently low for me. One afternoon she urged me to give it a try. She pushed the bike and held on to the end of it while I pedalled. It didn't work out. I was so self-conscious that after a while I told her to stop.

The afternoon before I left Nanchang, I asked Pepot if I could use her bike. I went down and brought the bike outside the gate. There was a pavement leading to her apartment building. It was about 100 metres long. Since it was about 2 in the afternoon, there were not many people outside. It was also threatening to rain. I whispered a little prayer and gave it a go. It wasn't working at first. After a while I became more confident. I was able to keep the bike moving for 10 metres, then 20, then 30 and before I knew it was actually riding the bike the entire 100 metres. A Chinese woman was sweeping in the intersection of the pavement. She gave me a thumbs up and I knew I was doing well. I was enjoying the new experience when the rain came down. I headed back and all the way I had a smile pasted on my face. It was exhilarating. When Pepot asked me how it went I pretended at first to show a look of frustration. Then I burst out "I can ride a bike!" It was truly wonderful.

Bernadette (second from right back row) and Stan Cusack (centre back row) with other foreign teachers at the Fujian Hwa Nan Women's College



YEAR OF THE PIG

In the legend of the Lord Buddha summoning the animals to him before he departed from the Earth – which is the basis for the Chinese zodiac – the pig comes in last, behind 11 other swifter animals (the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster and dog).

Thus, as the Year of the Dog closes and we welcome the Year of the Pig (or Boar), we complete one cycle of the zodiac that began on February 19, 1996 with the Year of the Rat.

The Chinese generally do not have such a negative view of the pig. Aside from being a great source of food, the pig is seen, in terms of astrology, as the epitome of honesty, steadfastness and generosity.

This is the year of the Fire Pig, running from February 18, 2007 to February 6, 2008, and is also known as the Year of the Golden Pig, or jin zhu, regarded as a most auspicious time. It occurs only once every 60 years in a full cycle of the zodiac, which involves not just the 12 animals but also the five elements – earth, metal, water, wood and fire.

How the Fire Pig came to be regarded as the Golden Pig has roots in history and phonetics. Writing in Tulay, the fortnightly digest published by the Tsinoy organization Kaisa, Wesley Chua relates:

“In 621 AD, Tang Emperor Wu De attempted to make sense of or standardize the confusing monetary exchange. First, he abolished the monetary system used during the Sui Dynasty and adopted the Western Han system to standardize monetary values. The Chinese began using zhu (ingots) as the means of exchange, and this standardization gave rise to the long, prosperous and peaceful reign of the Tang Dynasty.”

Because of this, 627 AD, the first year of the reign of Zheng Guan in the Tang Dynasty, became known as the jin zhu (gold ingot) year. It so happened that that was a Fire Pig year, and the character for pig (zhu) is a homonym for ingot (also zhu). Folk tradition thus turned the jin zhu (gold ingot) year into the jin zhu (golden pig) year, and because it was a most auspicious year in the Tang Dynasty, tradition equated the Fire Pig year with the Golden Pig year.

In Chinese tradition, the New Year or Spring Festival is a time for families to come together for this most important of festivals. Like Thanksgiving in the United States and Holy Week here, all roads lead to home and hearth. This family gathering naturally means a culinary feast, with meat – pork and chicken especially – figuring prominently on the menu. And no, it is not true that you should not eat pork in the Year of the Pig, or chicken in the Year of the Rooster, or beef in the Year of the Ox.



China Jottings 183: Christmas Edition, 2006



Winter has arrived. After two months without rain – hardly a drought, but still dry – a cold rain dropped the temperature, while continuing overcast skies, blotting out the warmth of the sun, have kept the temperature down. Thus within a week, summer clothing has given way to winter clothing. The former have gone back into the wardrobe to begin six months of hibernation, whilst the latter have emerged after six months of summer torpor.

The season of Advent is upon us, signalling the approach of Christmas. Already decorations have appeared in the major shops, while Christmas music is being played; Santa Claus is once again riding his sleigh, with reindeers aprancing and snow abounding. For the retail world of course, especially here in China, Christmas is more of a commercial festival than a religious one. It is not a holiday. Indeed I have two classes scheduled for Christmas Day, but I have transferred them to another time. Our play, *Robyn Hood*, which has been the subject of the past two Jottings, will be performed at English Corner on the Saturday 23rd. It will be performed a second time at the college after Christmas. I expect to know the exact date some time on the day before!

In class I have started to teach some Christmas carols to the students. I get each class to vote on which one they want, then I print it out. In previous years I have simply printed out a limited number which I use in class, then collect to be used in the next class, but this year I intend to give students copies that they can keep. To teach them the music, I simply sing the tunes and get them to repeat. They must therefore follow my voice. Can this be the reason they sing out of tune? Nah, can't be! I do this for a number of reasons. One is to tell them about Christmas, which means one has to move beyond "Jingle Bells", which is by far the most common tune played hereabouts. A second reason is to add some variety to class, with more student participation. A third reason is to improve their pronunciation, since one must take greater care in this respect when singing.

Greg from Fuzhou

For an Application Form

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