

Chris Brown's story – November 2008

Chris war Freiwilliger bei unserer Partnerorganisation *Shanghai Xu Bo Art and Culture Exchange* und hat in der Si Chuan Province Englisch unterrichtet.

I have been teaching for three weeks now at Middle School #2 in Mianyang, Si Chuan. It has been an eye-opening and thoroughly enjoyable experience.



The headmaster picked me up at the airport in Chengdu and then drove me to Mianyang. This was fairly late at night, but he and several others, including the headmaster at Cheng Mian Lu Primary School, stayed up late to welcome me over dinner. The next day a trip was arranged to go to Bei Chuan, a small town very near the epicenter of the earthquake. This was a completely unexpected gesture for which I am very grateful. Mianyang is very safe after the earthquake. I don't feel in any danger whatsoever. The only signs of it are some damaged buildings, which have been safely blocked off. My first morning, I gave a brief speech to the entire student body during the flag-raising ceremony. It went pretty well, I think. The headmaster had just started at the school a week earlier, so we were both giving our first speeches to the school that day. The teaching consists of a few lessons (2-4) per day with each lasting 40-45 minutes. I am absolutely spoiled by my classroom. I have a computer, projector and screen, so I can prepare my lessons in Powerpoint. This makes it easy to incorporate pictures and even video into the classes. I am mostly teaching Grade 1 students, which correspond to Grade 6 or 7 students at home. I loosely cover the grammar and vocabulary from their book, but I am encouraged to teach whatever I feel like. I have also taught more advanced lessons with the Grade 2 and 3 students,

whose English is very good. We have had dialogues about food, sports, and the differences between student life in China and the US. They have some very good questions. All of the students are curious and fun to teach. They all say hello or try a little conversation in English between classes. There is also a lot of support from the other teachers at the school. They keep me on schedule, offer tips and feedback, teach me a little Chinese, and provide great company in the evenings after school. I certainly never feel lonely. I live with Mr. Zhao and his family. He is one of the teachers at the middle school. I cannot say enough kind things about him, his wife and his son. They have all been very warm, gracious and accommodating. They help me get around and make sure I am never hungry. Speaking of which, the food here in Si Chuan province is very good with lots of chili peppers. The local favorite is hot pot, which is a bit like fondue except the cheese is boiling chili oil. Various meats, tofu and veggies are cooked in the oil at the table. The oil comes in three grades: spicy, very spicy, and paint remover strength. The hotter, the better for me.



The beer is pretty good, too, and that's important when you need something to put out the flames coming from your mouth. I have one more week to go, and I am not anxious to leave. The school teachers really want me to have a good time, and I have. It has been a wonderful place to teach, especially since this was my first time teaching. It has gone much better and more quickly than I had ever expected. The experience has been unforgettable.