

ACADEMIC NEWS

July August 2007

Chinese students are returning to their studies after the summer vacation. In the past they would often arrive by bus carrying a small bag of luggage for the semester; now many arrive with their parents and cases in the family car. With many more students at university now than a few years ago (in 2000 there were 5.56 million college students in China, now there are over 16 million!) the roads around campuses can become crazy for a few days. We were pleased to recently read that, according to Yuan Guiren (vice-minister of Education), the Ministry of Education is now aiming to improve the quality of higher education under the current Five Year Plan (2006-2010) following this rapid expansion. Generally our teachers have been fairly protected from this rapid increase in student numbers as we don't usually have to work at weekends or in the evenings and our classroom hours do not normally exceed 16 per week. However, we continue to be challenged with the higher number of students in the classroom and the total number of students assigned to each teacher. This is often because every Chinese student wants to have access to a native English speaking teacher.

Summer School Reports

We were greatly encouraged with the success of the summer schools that took place in central China during July and August. More than 40 short-term teachers in the four teams were involved in either teaching oral English or giving teaching methodology training to around 300 Chinese students and middle school teachers.



Hanzhong: Vanguard University in California provided 12 team members for the summer school in Hanzhong, giving oral English classes to a wide range of Chinese school students. Two members of the team briefly returned to the USA at the end of the summer school before returning to Hanzhong to begin teaching for the new academic year.

Xi'an: Frieda Y recruited all nine members of the team and also led the summer school with assistance from Dave B and Jeff B. Unlike the other three summer schools, class sizes were small this year with only a total of around 30 Chinese students in all three classes. In previous years we have usually taught around 80 students.

Ganquan: Frieda Y also recruited all 12 members of this team however long-term Academic members Helen T, David P and Allison B actually led the summer school in Ganquan. The team gave formal oral English classes to around 120 Chinese middle school teachers, however they also spent most afternoons talking with local middle school students based on the same school campus.

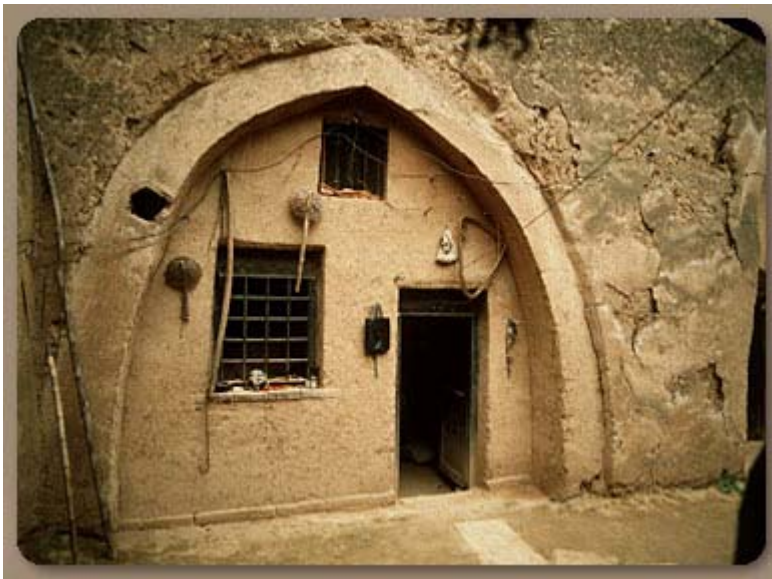
Shiquan: Barry and Jan M led seven short-term teachers on a teaching methodology training summer school south of the Qin Ling mountains. Lectures to around 120 middle school teachers were followed by various language activities in small groups applying the content of each presentation.

In each location the short-term teachers had the opportunity to visit the homes of Chinese students or teachers and sometimes share a traditional Chinese meal with their hosts. Allison B actually enjoyed one meal with a Chinese teacher sitting in her 'cave dwelling' home on the loess landscape of central Shaanxi province! See end of newsletter for more details on cave dwellings.



(Photograph of Allison having far too much fun on a summer school!)

For your information...Mid-Autumn Festival falls on 25 September 2007, celebrated with lots of sweet round moon-cakes. Confucius was born on 7 October many moons ago!



The front of a typical cave dwelling in Shaanxi province. According to one website, cave dwellings are still home for at least 40 million Chinese peasants