

Greetings to you all! I thought it best to provide you all with another update as to what is going on in China! There is so much I can say! But, in the interest of not writing a book, future updates will have titles, so you can see if you want to read about that particular aspect of China.

Things here are going very well. I am just amazed at the quality of students that are present here. I find that I do not have to spend much time on basic skills, as the students already know them. Hence, I am able to do more advanced projects and analysis - and the students do fine! Classroom management is also easy, as these students are respectful and kind. This makes teaching such a joy ; I love coming to work each day!

I am finding that China is much different from the United States. At local restaurants, the only utensils used are chopsticks. These are almost always made out of bamboo, and only now am I actually getting proficient at using them, though I still drop food between the serving plate and my plate. Actually, plates are almost never used. Just about everything is eaten in a bowl. Rice is standard with every meal. All the foods that are ordered are then mixed with the rice and eaten altogether. But, I'm not talking about cereal bowls. The bowls are actually quite small, similar to what you would find at a camp, but smaller. And, Chinese do not use napkins. Restaurants give out pocket packs of kleenex. These are used as napkins. On top of that, it is not considered rude to throw food on the floor. Since many meat dishes (chicken, for example) are served with the bones still inside (they just take a chicken leg and chop it to pieces, bones and all ; same with meat) I just take out the bones and toss them on the floor. Same if there is something in the meal I don't like, hot peppers, for example. Take them out and drop them on the floor. Since it is hard to eat rice with chopsticks, it is also proper to take one's bowl, put it right up to your mouth, and just shovel it in.

One thing that I'm noticing is that getting things done in Kunming is not convenient. Since the Chinese believe that like things go together, I have to travel to the proper "district" to buy things. If I want to buy pants, I have to ride my bike over to the "pant section" of town, where dress pants are sold. There, for an entire block, there will be store after store, right next to each other, selling the exact same thing. If I want to buy computer paper, I have to ride to the computer section of town, where there is store after store that sells computer stuff. Again, they all sell the same thing. How anyone here makes money is beyond me. You would think that six stores, all in a row, selling fruit would not be beneficial to any of the vendors, yet that's what I see. Visa claims to be "everywhere you want to be." I guess people don't want to be in Kunming, China, because I can't get my visa card to work at any ATM in the city. In all honesty, it maybe works once out of every twenty times I try to use it.

China itself is actually quite poor. Many people do not have refrigerators, and go to the market every day to shop for food and vegetables. But, China has done a good job of creating jobs. There are people who just watch parked cars, people who wander the streets cleaning up trash, and almost every residential apartment complex has a gate keeper, whose job it is to make sure the gate is locked at night and that only residents get in. There are bike parking lots with attendants who watch the bikes. Actually, it's pretty amazing. People just throw trash on the street, but every morning the streets are always clean again.

So do I like it here? Yes! I am really enjoying everything about China. There is so much that I am learning about China and myself. Recently the chief recruiting officer from NICS came and stayed with me for a week (now that I know I can host, you are all welcome to come visit). Showing off Kunming to him really helped me to see how much I have learned, and how much I really like living here. Recently I went out to the countryside, to a minority village, where I did some project work with the people there. I went with two staff members from the school, and we helped lead a program at the special place in that village. It was amazing! The people were so nice, and so willing to talk as well as communicate. I was also able to see terraced fields and really experience the non-city life.

I have found it easy to incorporate my faith into my teaching. That has been good, and I can share the good news in subtle ways. Since I teach drama, I am also responsible for the Xmas play! Since I have a non-like-minded person in that class, this will be an excellent opportunity to share the news and help him to see just how great our father is! This, of course, will not be forced.

Well, there's so much more I could write, but I think I need to stop here! If you have specific questions, please let me know! I am thinking of you all, and talking to dad on a regular basis on your behalf. For those of you who are helping to support me here, I just received word from NICS of your donation. So, now that I know who you are, thank-you letters are on their way!

If you want to call, or write, my information is as follows:

Steven Dickens
c/o Kunming International Academy
Yan Jia Di Xiao Qu
Kunming, Yunnan, 650034
People's Republic of China

phone: country code = 86
from US = dial international prefix, then 86-871-819-6643

One with the word,

-Steven