

Chinese at Work contents

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note: many Chinese take English names due to the difficulty foreigners have pronouncing Chinese language names properly

note: for a rough idea of currency exchange, 100 Chinese yuan is about US\$15.

PART ONE: BEIJING

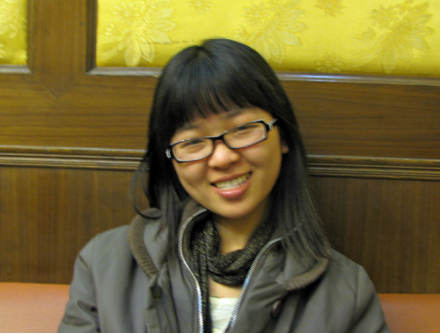


the forbidden city, Beijing



the Great Wall of China, Beijing section

1. Zhong Huizhen (Sunny) University Student



What's your major?

It's a long story! I was always interested in English. My first teacher in junior high school was very nice and very patient. She taught me a lot. That got me interested. In high school too, I learned well, so my teacher maybe saw my potential, and encouraged

me to attend this university, Beijing International University. I also learned other subjects, but English has always been my favorite.

In China do students usually start in junior high school?

That was the case in my day. Nowadays some kids start learning from kindergarten even. But officially from fourth grade now.

Did you take special English courses in high school?

No, just regular ones. I decided to come to this university to study English when I was a senior. I had a few choices; this was my first choice. I had to study very hard, six subjects: History, Geography, Art, Politics, English, Math and Chinese. The three basic are English, Math and Chinese. Everyone must learn these. Most of our teachers, in high school and at university, are Chinese. There are only a few foreigners. Foreign teachers tend to teach literature and culture, like Shakespeare, because old English is tough to understand.

Any other reason for your interest in English?

I was interested in the culture behind the language: American and European culture and history, for example. Now I'm most interested in American culture. It's like control over the world... I can't help but be interested. And I'm interested in the movies.

So you're interested in American politics?

No, not really. Just the culture, and the characteristics and way of thinking. Americans are more independent and outgoing. This affects

me a lot in my daily life. I seldom depend on my parents, and have been working part-time jobs since my sophomore year. I want to be independent, and gain knowledge, and then I can judge things by myself, not by my parents.

How did you learn those aspects of American culture?

By movies! When I'm free I download some US movie, or I go out to the theater. In China it's not good, but there are a lot of pirated US movies, maybe just 5 or 7 yuan. It's very cheap.

What's your favorite movie?

Like most girls, I love love stories. Have you watched *Walk in the Clouds*, or *Lakehouse*? Those are recent. Or *Prison Break*? It's very popular. I like *Desperate Housewives* and *Gospel Girls*. But *Gospel Girls'* culture is very different, not practical for Chinese. I can accept and learn how it is in America.

Interesting. But keep in mind that Hollywood doesn't always accurately portray American culture.

Yes, I've thought about that. But still, it's a taste, even if things are exaggerated or misrepresented at times.

Do you cut class often?

(laughter) Sometimes.

Do you belong to any clubs?

I used to be a member of the cycling club and the movie club. Bicycle club was interesting; it's a good memory. I would go out with my bicycle with other club members. They'd organize trips around here. The most impressive one was, once we went around Beijing to all the universities, in one day. It was really tiring. One by one. A few members had pro racing bikes, but most have old fashioned ones.

About how many universities did you visit that day?

About ten. And those campuses were much larger than ours. They had bicycle clubs, so we met their members. Our club had like 20 members who went together. We started early in the morning and came back around 11pm. Then we had dinner together, drank beer,

8. Wang Wei Marble Carver



How did you learn this job?

I learned from friends, not from family. Actually my friend's sister taught me, and my sister, when I was 18. So you could say it's a family business now, because myself, my sister, and my brother all do marble carving.

How long did it take you to learn?

Three years. I finished learning eight years ago.

About how long does it take to make one piece?

(The translator makes a mistake and says): Three or four hours.

(The interviewee, who speaks some English, catches the mistake and says):

No no no! It takes 30 hours to make one.

Really?

Yes yes! For these larger ones it takes that long. The smaller ones vary, perhaps ten or 20 or more hours.

Do you look at scenery and make it, or carve just from memory?

Just from memory. I live here, right near the Great Wall.

About how much do you make in a month?

It depends on the season. It's very different. Winter is slow. In winter, maybe most of the time I'm producing more and in the summer selling more. I may make more than 2000 yuan in a month. In winter I may not sell any for several days.

You just sold one today, for a good price.

Yes thank you! I'm happy you bought one.

How long do you come here to sell in a day?

I arrive around 8am and stay until tourists leave, usually around 5pm.

When do you have time to make more?

After I go back home I carve until around 11pm. My sister does this too. It keeps us busy, but we enjoy it.

Any good and bad points about this job?

A good point is, it's very easy. The bad point is I'm stuck sitting here for the whole day.

Isn't it interesting chatting up people? Or does it get boring?

Well, I rarely have the chance to speak to a person other than a greeting and some negotiating. But sure, I enjoy talking. I know a little English, which I learned on the job, by talking with tourists.

What's your dream for the future?

My big dream is to open up a large store in Beijing, Wang Fujin region, but at the moment I lack the money.

Would you move from here and live there as well?

Maybe. I don't know. I'm considering all my options now. If we could afford it, perhaps. But this is our hometown.

Do you have to pay to sell at this spot?

I pay a certain amount to the souvenir store right next to my stall.

How much do you have to pay?

It's a group rate.

So they pay and you don't know how much?

Right.

Okay. Does it strain your eyes or hurt your fingers to be carving a long time?

Yes, it did at first, but as I've been working over the years the pain is less.