

# The Lowdown on China's Higher Education



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Edited by

Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff

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**SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff

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This book is dedicated to two noteworthy Chinese teachers of English who have striven to push the envelope and develop creative and innovative teaching methodologies to provide their students with a quality education in spite of the inherent limitations of the Chinese educational system.

Zheng Hong, Xinyang Agricultural College, Henan  
Xia, Jimei, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, Guangdong



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Note .....	ix
Preface .....	x
Editors' Biographies .....	xi
Authors' Biographies.....	xii

## **Part I: Realities on the Ground**

Chapter One.....	2
China's English Mystery—The Views of a China 'Foreign Expert' Martin Wolff	
Chapter Two .....	10
EFL/ESL Teaching in China: Questions—Questions—Questions Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff	
Chapter Three .....	40
Chinese University Diploma: Can its International Image be Improved? Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff	
Chapter Four .....	70
Mute English—The Latin of China Yiqing Liao and Martin Wolff	

## **Part II: A Proven 2<sup>nd</sup> Language Acquisition Program**

Chapter Five .....	96
What is Holistic English? Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff	
Chapter Six .....	109
Typical Barriers to Teaching English as a Second Language in China Martin Wolff	

Chapter Seven.....	127
Experiences in Secondary and Tertiary Education in China	
Rand Herz	
Chapter Eight.....	138
HE Matriculation to the Ivy League?	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Nine.....	147
Corporate Training and Holistic English are Not Compatible	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Ten .....	153
A Market Driven Model: PetroChina Embraces Holistic English Program	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Eleven .....	190
Holistic Teaching Methodology for English and Business Courses	
Li Xiaoxia, Huang Haijun and Martin Wolff	
Chapter Twelve .....	307
Medley	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Thirteen .....	329
Analytical Comparison of Benefits Received from Holistic English	
Methodology	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Fourteen .....	338
Teaching Post-Grad Students	
Martin Wolff	
Chapter Fifteen .....	347
English in China—The Unfunny Joke	
Martin Wolff	



## EDITORIAL NOTE

CET 4 and CET 6 National English examinations have become the symbol of English proficiency in reading and writing. Employers have required them as prerequisite to employment consideration. They have become the gatekeepers to employment.

All comments of students quoted in this book were written by post-graduate students who have passed CET 4 and some have passed CET 6; and the comments were created on computers equipped with Microsoft WORD. The students' comments are unedited to reflect their true lack of English competency and to debunk the claim that CET 4 and CET 6 reflect an appreciable English writing proficiency, particularly with the availability of the "spell function" of WORD.

## PREFACE

This book is a compilation of articles arising from the editors' nine years of personal experiences, study, research and analysis of EFL teaching in China between 2002 and 2011. It is an attempt to identify deficiencies and suggest improvements in EFL teaching in China. The authors began with the assumption that identifying the existing problems, analyzing them and suggesting corrective action would be beneficial to bringing about much needed curriculum reform.

The editors were assisted by the opinions of 240 post-graduate non-English majors, 60 junior English majors and 52 junior business majors at Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Xiasha Higher Education Park, Hangzhou, China. 2,600 post-graduate students assisted with chapter 6.

We are joined by the Dean of the School of Foreign Languages and his assistant, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, for Chapter 10.

### **Part I: Realities on the Ground**

Chapters 1 – 6 deal with the realities of foreigners teaching in China. These chapters cover a broad range of issues that will confront every foreign teacher in China

### **Part II: A Proven 2<sup>nd</sup> Language Acquisition Program**

Chapters 7 – 15 deal with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> year experiences of continuing implementation of the Holistic English Program in China. These chapters relate BOTH successes and failures.

## EDITOR'S BIOGRAPHIES

### **Niu Qiang, Ph.D. Changchun University**

Niu Qiang, Ph.D. was born and raised in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, China. She obtained her bachelor of arts degree (1991) in English from Jilin University; her master of arts degree (1996) in English linguistics from Jilin University, and her Ph.D. (1999) in English linguistics from Shanghai International Studies University. She is currently an associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages, Changchun University in Jilin, China where she teaches psycholinguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and the testing of English as a second language.

The book originates from The Project-sponsored by SRF for ROCS, SEM and 吉林省教育厅科研规划项目，吉教科文合字（2009）98 号

### **Martin Woff, J.D. China Foreign Expert**

Martin Wolff, J.D. was born in Rochester, New York, USA. He obtained his doctor of jurisprudence degree (1976) from Loyola University in Los Angeles, CA. He has taught international business law, contract law, intercultural business communications, international marketing, and Holistic English. He has been a foreign expert in China as of 2002 and is currently teaching and training others on Holistic English.

## AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

### **Li Xiaoxia, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University**

Li Xiaoxia was born in Fu'an, Fujian Province, China. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree (2000) in English and tourism from Xi'an Foreign Language University, her master of literature degree (2006) in linguistics and applied linguistics in foreign languages from Zhejiang University. She is currently a lecturer and administrator at School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, China. She teaches English to non-English major undergraduates.

### **Huang Haijun, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University**

Huang Haijun is Professor of English and Executive Dean of School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Hangzhou, China. He teaches Translation Studies and is the author of a number of articles on translation.

### **Liao Yiqing, Ph.D. Zhongshan University**

Liao Yiqing, Ph.D. is an associate professor and student supervisor in the M.A. program in linguistics at Sun Yat-sen University. From February through August 2009, she was a visiting scholar at Cambridge University's Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics. She has been a university EFL teacher for the past 15 years and has published more than 20 papers in academic journals, a monograph (Language Studies from Critical Perspectives), several textbooks and some translated works (including Macmillan Encyclopedia). Her research interests include functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and gender studies.

**PART I:**  
**REALITIES ON THE GROUND**

CHAPTER ONE

CHINA'S ENGLISH MYSTERY—  
THE VIEWS OF A CHINA 'FOREIGN EXPERT'<sup>1</sup>

MARTIN WOLFF

**Introduction**

The mysteries of exotic China arise not only from its voluntary isolation from the modern world during some of the most formative and progressive decades, but from an inability or unwillingness of the west to understand Chinese logic and thinking. The west views China with western eyes and judges China according to western standards. The west asks some seriously ignorant questions about China, such as:

What is the culture of China?

What do the people of China think?

What do the people of China eat?

To fully comprehend the absurdity of these questions, simply invert them, as Chinese college students regularly do in their English classes that are taught by foreigners:

How is the culture of America?

How do the people of America think?

How do the people of America eat?

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<sup>1</sup>Original Publication: *English Today*, December 2010, Cambridge University Press, pg. 53.

Each populace assumes that the other is a mono-culture. This thinking also carries over into the area of lingua franca. The west assumes that all Chinese people speak Mandarin or Cantonese and have a common written language. China actually teaches that one must learn 'Standard British English' or 'Standard American English' or 'Standard International English.' In addition to Mandarin and Cantonese, China has fifty-five minority languages and an uncounted number of localized dialects such as Shanghainese, Wuhanese, and many others. There are at least three written Chinese languages, not just one, for example, traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese and pinyin.

British English has numerous varieties, including English English, Black British English, Geordie, Scouse, Scottish English, Hiberno-English, Welsh English, etc., and it is well accepted that the U.S. also has a large number of regional varieties of the English language.

However, for many Chinese teachers, there is only one English – the imagined 'Standard English' that exists only in the minds of Chinese scholars who stand before their Chinese students and instruct them, in Mandarin, to 'master standard English.' The reason for instruction in Mandarin is because the Chinese scholars' English is too poor to teach in the target language.

## **English fever**

The teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China has become a nationwide endeavor pursued at all academic levels, from the kindergarten to the University. In the past ten years there has been an explosion in the development of public school English programs and private English language schools throughout China. EFL/ESL has become very big business in China (China Daily, HK Edition, October 9, 2002). Reports show that ESL has become a 10 billion yuan business in China. Of the 37 billion yuan annual book sales, ESL takes up as much as 25% of the market share. And a few ESL teachers in Shanghai command an hourly rate of 1,000 yuan (US\$120). Even on average, a student pays 10–20 yuan (US\$20–2.40) for one hour of ESL training.

At any given moment there are twice as many Chinese learning English as there are citizens of the U.S.A. English instruction begins in kindergarten and continues into postgraduate study, for both English majors and non-English majors. As of 1999, China had more than 800,000 public schools,

primary through college ([www.umich.edu](http://www.umich.edu)), churning out over 2.5 million college graduates each year (Xinhua News Agency, 3/27/02) with the numbers still on the rise. A different report claims that China currently has <sup>2</sup>35 million schools and an enrollment of 320 million students. (China Daily.com, 10/30/02).

In 2001 the class of entering college freshman swelled to 2.6 million, 800,000 more than in 2000 (China Daily, 11/28/01), with a total college enrollment of 11.75 million in 2002, 8.02 million more than in 1990 (China Daily, 10/30/02). As of 1999 there were more than 1.3 million teachers serving more than 71 million students, of which 1,000,000 are Chinese teachers of English and 250,000 are foreign teachers of English ([www.umich.edu](http://www.umich.edu)). In 2009 China expects 10 million new college students to attend its +2,236<sup>3</sup> public colleges and more than 1,300 private colleges.<sup>4</sup>

## Goals and objectives

Universities and colleges throughout China are obsessed with their pass rates on the National English proficiency examinations CET 4, CET 6 and CET 8. Although 'English Fever' is running rampant throughout China and is claimed to be 'market driven', the rush to institute English learning nationwide, with more than 1,000,000 Chinese teachers of English who are themselves, for the most part, unable to produce comprehensible oral or written English or teach in the target language, has miserably failed to meet market needs. The goal of universities and colleges throughout China is to have students pass national English competency examinations such as TEM 4, CET 4 and CET 6. Setting aside, for the moment, the fact that these national English competency examinations bear little or no relationship to comprehensible output, the pass rates have become the exclusive focus of administrative attention and false pride.

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<sup>2</sup>'China expects drop in number seeking college degree.' Online at <[http://en.ce.cn/National/Education/200905/31/t20090531\\_19211543.shtml](http://en.ce.cn/National/Education/200905/31/t20090531_19211543.shtml)> (Accessed July 1, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>List of universities in the People's Republic of China. Online at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_universities\\_in\\_the\\_People's\\_Republic\\_of\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_the_People's_Republic_of_China)> (Accessed July 5, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>'Non-government colleges seek help.

<[http://service.china.org.cn/link/wcm/Show\\_Text?info\\_id=100414&p\\_qry=university%20and%20enrollment](http://service.china.org.cn/link/wcm/Show_Text?info_id=100414&p_qry=university%20and%20enrollment)>. (Accessed July 1, 2009).



This is in part due to demands of Chinese employers who are misinformed that passing CET 6 is the evidence of an accomplished English speaker.<sup>5</sup> Wang Shugua, President of Harbin Institute of Technology, is quoted as saying 'I recognize CET as a good tool to promote English studies but I am against the practice of regarding a CET certificate as the prerequisite for graduation, which is totally misleading.' He tried to eliminate the requirement for a CET certificate in order to graduate from HIT, but gave up without success. 'I had to reconsider the usefulness of CET certificates in job hunting for our graduates.'

Almost all employers want their recruits to have a CET certificate, so I had to push my students to pass the CET for their good, although it is against my will.'<sup>6</sup> The goal is to pass CET, which is equivalent to passing the third primary grade at a public American primary school.

## Failures

The word failure might sound extreme. It would probably be more politically correct to speak about deficiencies or inadequacies in China's English curriculum, pedagogy and methodology but the bottom line is that China's English program is a monumental failure by western standards. The simple truth is that Chinese university graduates who have passed CET 6 can read and comprehend basic English at the American third grade public primary school level but they lack listening skills, writing skills and speaking skills.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese universities have invested heavily in sound labs to teach English listening.<sup>8</sup> Postgraduate students who have spent many hours in these sound labs know nothing about proper listening skills. They speak with each other in Chinese and off topic while someone else has the floor. Their cell phones ring and they answer them. They send text messages or worse,

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<sup>5</sup>Yuankai, T. 'Education feared to raise robots.' Beijing Review. Online at <[http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/txt/2007-08/31/content\\_74644.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/txt/2007-08/31/content_74644.htm). (Accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>'Education feared to raise robots.' Beijing Review. Online at <[http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/txt/2007-08/31/content\\_74644.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/txt/2007-08/31/content_74644.htm). (Accessed July 10, 2008).

<sup>7</sup>Wolff, M. 2010. *Of the students, by the students and for the students*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, ch. 12.

<sup>8</sup>Wolff, M. 2010. *Of the students, by the students and for the students*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ch. 3.

play games on their cell phones. Some sleep with their eyes wide open while others lay their head down on the desk and sleep. There is little or no eye contact between listener and speaker. The students have not been taught – or have not learnt – some of the basic principles of listening, such as giving your full attention to what is being said, focusing your mind, listening for main ideas, asking questions, giving feedback, etc. Such principles cannot be learned sitting in a cubicle wearing a set of headphones while listening to canned dialogue.

So what do the students learn in the sound lab? They memorize set phrases that are subsequently unusable because the student has learned only one context in which the set phrase was used. There is little likelihood that the student will ever be confronted with the exact same dialogue in real life and the student has no idea how to use the set phrase in any other context. The investment in sound labs has not furthered the Chinese students' functional English capability.

Oral English is usually taught in standard classrooms with theater style seating where students memorize English set phrases taught by Chinese teachers using Mandarin; or they are taught songs and games by foreign teachers with no formal linguistic or second language acquisition education or training, hence the nickname 'White Monkeys.' Spoken English is not usually tested in the CET examinations so it is not taken seriously.

When it comes to written English, most Chinese university graduates do not have any idea how to write a letter, résumé, report or memoranda. Their writing is messy, filled with cross-outs, inserts, white out and erasures. The overall appearance is simply unacceptable while evoking memories of kindergarten finger-painting. One Shanghai Chinese Professor of English writing allows her students to write their English writing class final exam in Chinese because it is easier to grade.

## **Reading English**

Chinese university students read at the rate of one page per hour. This is because they read English like they read Chinese, one character at a time. Each character is a complete story in itself. Chinese students demand a complete story from each English word, but it does not work that way. The complete story is found within a complete sentence or even an entire

paragraph. This ultra-slow reading rate severely restricts choices in class reading assignments.

### **Faulty foundation**

As the proverb says 'A house built on sand cannot stand', and one may say there are Four Great Lies about the learning of English in China.<sup>9</sup> These are:

- (1) You must master English
- (2) Chinglish is no good
- (3) You can only make your English better speaking with a native English speaker
- (4) Everyone in China must learn English

As a consequence, students are tight lipped, afraid to lose face<sup>10</sup> by speaking English because they have not mastered it due to a lack of foreign teachers and the unacceptability of Chinglish. They have learned 'Mute English', a dead language.<sup>11</sup> This results in the college graduates having wasted sixteen years learning a communicative language that they can't use. They graduate functionally illiterate.

### **The lack of English-speaking environments**

No college or university in China provides their English majors with an English speaking environment. Most colleges and universities require all non-English majors to study English. The absence of an English speaking environment makes the study of English even more difficult for the unmotivated non-English majors.<sup>12</sup> Most, if not all, Chinese colleges and universities have a weekly English Corner that they pass off as an English

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<sup>9</sup>Wolff M. 2010. *Of the students, by the students and for the students*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ch. 1

<sup>10</sup> Wu, X. 2009. 'The dynamics of Chinese face mechanisms and classroom behaviour: a case study.' *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 22(2) 87–105.

<sup>11</sup> Wolff, M. 2010. *Of the students, by the students and for the students*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ch. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Qiang/Wolff, M. 2009. *China EFL: Curriculum Reform*, Nova Science Publishers. Ch. 17.

speaking environment. However, this is merely an appointment to voluntarily speak English once a week.<sup>13</sup> The University of Science and Technology has developed an EPC (English Practice Center) to provide a friendly environment to practice English.<sup>14</sup> Student participation is required which simply means that the informal outdoor voluntary English Corner has been moved inside and made mandatory. This is simply an English Corner by appointment and does not contribute to an English speaking environment.

Deans, Associate Deans and staff of Foreign Languages Departments routinely speak Mandarin both inside and outside the classroom. Some admit that their English is too poor to use. Others make the excuse that in China it is difficult to speak English, an apparent admission that the students are not worth the effort or that laziness is ok. One famous Dean of a famous Foreign Languages Department at a famous university in southern China in 2009 stated, 'Leaders dare not speak or teach in English because there are so many young scholars waiting to criticize their poor English and take their jobs.' A Party Secretary to a Foreign Languages Department of a college in Central China in 2006 stated, 'We want our students to be able to read western scientific journals while remaining good socialists so we do not want them exposed to much western culture, they may become capitalists.' It should be noted that this Party Secretary had an education in Animal Science and spoke no English. Therefore, all Department business had to be conducted in Mandarin to accommodate the Party Secretary.

Chinese college and university graduates have studied English for up to sixteen years and know the rules of English better than most native speakers. However, my judgment is that many have learned only 'Mute English', as so many students are functionally illiterate, unable to use the communicative language they have studied for so long.

## Conclusion

Perhaps English Fever is just an excuse or justification for something to fill the void in a generally lackluster subjects curriculum. Maybe it is just a

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<sup>13</sup> Wolff, M. 2009. *China EFL: Curriculum Reform*, Nova Science Publishers, Ch. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, M. 2010. 'HE matriculates to the Ivy League?' Online at <[http://chinaholisticenglish.org/ download-articles](http://chinaholisticenglish.org/download-articles)>. (Accessed May 25, 2010)

vehicle to create more than 1,000,000 direct teaching jobs and more than 10,000,000 indirect publishing and other support jobs. Possibly it is just perceived as a much needed jolt to the Chinese economy. And maybe it is just something to keep young people busy as they are warehoused awaiting an expanded job market that can accommodate them. And maybe, just maybe, China really does want access to western academic journals; but this is dubious with National English examinations that foster a third grade American primary school level English capability; hardly sufficient to read and comprehend western scientific journals.

Whatever the Chinese logic behind English Fever, it is beyond this author's comprehension. Clearly English in China today is not for the purpose of communication.

The answer may be found within the basic Chinese psyche.

One of the fundamental tenets of Marxism and Alinsky is: He who controls the language controls the argument.

Albert Einstein's definition of insanity: 'Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.'

## CHAPTER TWO

# EFL/ESL TEACHING IN CHINA: QUESTIONS—QUESTIONS—QUESTIONS<sup>1</sup>

NIU QIANG AND MARTIN WOLFF

### Abstract

The teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China has become a nationwide endeavor pursued at all academic levels, from kindergarten to University. In the past ten years there has been an explosion in the development of public school English programs and private English language schools throughout China, and EFL/ESL has become very big business (*China Daily Hong Kong Edition*, October 9, 2002). Reports show that ESL has become a ten-billion yuan business in China. Of the thirty-seven billion yuan annual book sales, ESL takes up as much as 25% of the market share. And a few ESL teachers in Shanghai command an hourly rate of 1,000 yuan (USD \$120). Even on average, a student pays 10–20 yuan (USD \$1.2–2.4) for one hour of ESL training.

### Introduction

“Can We Talk?” This question precedes the often politically incorrect, controversial or sensitive monologues of America’s famous stand-up comic, Joan Rivers. It is often followed by: “Really people, let’s get serious.” So -

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in: Linda W. Cooke, *Frontiers in Higher Education*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2007

## **Can We Talk?**

There are many unanswered questions concerning China's nationwide EFL/ESL teaching fever which are probably politically incorrect, controversial and sensitive:

- (1) **Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English?**
- (2) **How can EFL/ESL teaching in China be called a success?**
- (3) **Is EFL/ESL teaching in China a case of the blind leading the blind?**
- (4) **Can anyone really be expected to acquire English in this hostile environment?**
- (5) **What is the Chinese English student's favorite wine?**
- (6) **Is it inevitable that although we teach them English, they will learn Chinglish?**
- (7) **What's in a name?**
- (8) **What is worse: Students who cheat the system or a system that cheats the students?**

This chapter raises numerous fundamental issues which appear to have been overlooked by China in its exuberance to embrace EFL/ESL teaching as it rushes to join the new world order, and partake of its share of the global economic pie. This chapter also establishes a solid and fundamental legitimization for asking controversial and sensitive questions, but leaves their final resolution to the language teachers, graduate students and linguists who have an inherent duty to seek the answers.

**Really people, let's get serious.**

### **1. Why Should 1.3 billion Chinese Learn English?**

In 1862, under the Great Qing Dynasty, the first English Language School was officially opened by the Chinese Government to train ten men for the newly created diplomatic corps. (Deyi 1992). In the past ten years, there has been an alarming increase in the emphasis on English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China.

Presently, China annually recruits 100,000 "Foreign Experts" (FE) to teach English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) ([www.Chinatefl.com](http://www.Chinatefl.com)), with an accompanying 10 billion Yuan price tag (*China Daily Hong Kong Edition*, October 9, 2002). According to one Internet

recruiting web site there are 150,000 foreign ESL teachers working in China ([www.AbroadChina.org](http://www.AbroadChina.org)). The People's Daily reports that in 2001 the industry made a 700 million Yuan (USD \$8,700,000) profit in Beijing alone (*People's Daily*, January 23, 2002). Public middle schools, high schools and universities throughout China have developed and implemented English-language programs. Private EFL/ESL schools (kindergartens, primary, middle, high and college) have proliferated to such an extent that according to statistics from the Education, Science, Culture and Health Committee of the NPC, about 54,000 private schools had been set up in China by the end of 2000, with 6.93 million registered students (*People's Daily*, May 23, 2001).

At first blush, it may appear admirable that China has so wholeheartedly made such a concerted effort to adopt English, the international language of commerce, as its second language. On October 24, 2002, Zang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education reportedly said: "With China's accession to the World Trade Organization and the approaching Olympics in 2008 more than ever is it a priority for young Chinese to learn and improve their language skills" (*China Daily*, October 25, 2002). The same article states "Beijing is striving to reach its goal of teaching citizens to speak English to improve its image as an international metropolis."

Beijing wants its thirteen million residents to speak English to enhance its image as a cosmopolitan metropolis. In addition, China's Ministry of Education wants all young people to learn English due to its World Trade Union (WTO) membership and the hosting of the 2008 Olympics. Certain municipal governments in China require all of their civil servants to learn some English (*China Daily*, October 5, 2002).

These goals or objectives all beg the question; WHY?

Market studies, market analysis and affirmative recommendations from experts in the fields of business, maths and linguistics should support each of the forgoing propositions, but do not appear to have been conducted. What is the mathematical probability that each of Beijing's fifteen million or so residents will need to be able to speak English for an intended or even accidental encounter with a single English speaking foreigner during the 2008 Olympics? Presumably, not very high.



Does a market study support the proposition that Beijing's image will be enhanced in the eyes of foreigners if all the residents of Beijing can speak English? Further, would such image enhancement translate into increased economic benefit for Beijing? If so, how much will accrue and does it offset the social, cultural and political costs that must be paid along the way by the people of Beijing? These questions do not appear to have been addressed by any formal study.

How many bilingual (Chinese-English) jobs will actually be created in China due to China's WTO membership and hosting the 2008 Olympics? Does the number of new jobs requiring English support the need for all of China's young people to learn English? Answers to these questions are not readily available. And about the bilingual jobs created by the 2008 Olympics: How long will they last, a few months? Why should someone spend three or four years studying English in College for a job in 2008 that will only last a few months? Post-Olympics, what becomes of these Chinese English speakers? What is the mathematical probability that all municipal government civil servants, in any particular Chinese municipality, will need to use English in their daily work? Presumably, it is Very slim.

Is there any empirical study or evidence to support the current EFL/ESL revolution in China, a revolution which may, in fact, have significant adverse social, cultural and political effects? (Qiang & Wolff 2003a). It does not appear that the Chinese Central Government has issued any formal Resolution or Position Paper authorizing, condoning or supporting the current ESL revolution in China. Rather, it has been allowed and even encouraged to just evolve. Other than standardized testing for College entrance, the Central Government seems to have no set educational policy or curriculum for EFL/ESL. There is no single Ministry of Education document stating the Government policy on EFL/ESL in China (He Qixin 2001). This rush to educate has spawned an industry run amuck, without appreciable government control or regulation. (Qiang & Wolff 2003b)

Why the concerted effort to require 1.3 billion Mandarin speakers, 25% of the world's population, to learn English as a foreign/second language? Since Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations, does the world at large have a greater appreciation for the importance of Mandarin than China itself? Is the current EFL/ESL revolution in China a misguided, self-inflicted English colonization, brought about tacitly, if not officially, by adopting EFL/ESL teaching as a national program? Will the

West conquer China from within, without a single shot ever being fired? Will English enculturation supplant traditional Chinese culture and values? Will Beijing duck and dim sum be replaced with McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken? Why does China so meekly submit to the English-based new world order emanating out of Washington, D.C., when 25% of the world's population looks to Beijing for its leadership? Does China not yet realize the reality that the emerging China has the immediate clout to demand that those desiring to do business in China or with China should learn Mandarin, rather than expect 1.3 billion Chinese to learn English?

Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English when “95% of Chinese college graduates will not use oral English in their whole lifetime nor will they read any English materials?” (*China Daily*, November 3, 2003). Could or should China learn something from the EU prioritizing the preservation and continued use of native languages? (Qiang & Wolff 2003a) Is the risk posed by EFL/ESL to China's social, cultural and even political structures and systems outweighed by the potential economic benefits such that China's “Chineseness” is for sale? EFL/ESL at any cost? Should the love of money replace traditional Chinese wisdom as the most valuable asset of the new Chingland? Since national identity is tied directly to the preservation of the native language, should economic gain be at the expense of what makes China different from all other nations? National identity is tied directly to the preservation of the native language.

Subsequent to our first raising this issue in April 2003 “China and Chinese, or Chingland and Chinglish?” English Today, Cambridge University Press; more Chinese scholars have joined in asking the question, “Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English?” (Kechang 3/04; Cho 3/04).

## **2. How can EFL/ESL Teaching in China be Called a Success**

### **The Kindergarten Experience**

Foreign experts employed in middle schools and colleges are routinely asked to give Saturday or Sunday English classes to kindergarten teachers and students. Having examined these phenomena in three provinces, the various experiences can be reduced to a similar pattern.

The foreign expert is picked-up at their home by a kindergarten car and driven to the school. Upon arrival at the school the foreign expert is introduced to the headmistress who does not speak a single word of English. (One immediately wonders how such an administrator can properly supervise or evaluate the effectiveness of her English teachers.) Then, a few kindergarten teachers are paraded before the foreign expert. Aside from the perfunctory “Hello, how are you?” the teachers are unable to engage in the most rudimentary conversation with the foreign expert. Next the foreign expert is paraded through the campus, visiting selected classrooms where the foreign experts greet the children and nothing more. It is now lunchtime and the foreign expert is treated to a feast. During lunch the foreign expert inquires when the teaching will begin and is informed that it is already finished. Then the foreign expert inquires as to the identity of the person with the movie camera who had filmed the entire event and is informed that was the representative of the local television station. After lunch the foreign expert is driven back to their apartment to relax and bask in the satisfaction of knowing that they have made a significant contribution to the EFL/ESL teaching in China. NOT! The foreign expert is thoroughly disgusted that they have been used as a marketing tool, a sort of endorsement for the school to establish that they have a relationship with a real live foreign expert. This relationship encourages new enrollments and higher profits but has little or nothing to do with teaching EFL/ESL.

### **The Middle School Experience**

Foreign experts employed in colleges are routinely asked to give English classes to middle school teachers and students. One such experience in 2003 is representative of this experience. A foreign expert was asked to present a series of six courses to middle school teachers for two hours and a student class for another two hours. After the first two lessons to the thirty teachers, the vice-principle cancelled the teachers’ class without any advance notice to the foreign expert. When the foreign expert showed up for the third teachers’ class, a student class was substituted without explanation. Since the foreign expert had prepared a teachers’ lesson, this made things a little difficult for the foreign expert. When this was explained to the Vice-principal, he responded that the foreign expert should “just read from the approved textbook like the Chinese teachers do.” Upon inquiry, the foreign expert was informed that the Vice-principal did not want his teachers being further informed about Western teaching methodology.

The Vice-principal also unilaterally changed the student class format to four classes of 200 students for one hour each. The foreign expert also learned about this change when he showed up for the third lesson. When the foreign expert inquired as to how he was to teach such classes without having made appropriate preparation, the Vice-principal advised that his “students have prepared questions to ask so just talk with the students.”

In one representative class, 38 students out of the 200 asked all of the questions. The students had not prepared any questions in advance of the class (so much for the vice-principle’s claims of student preparation). The students simply opened their textbooks and randomly selected questions to read to the foreign expert. With the exception of one question, they were all answerable with a “yes” or “no” (so much for “talking” with the students). The only question that required a different answer was, “What color is it?” This “color” question was asked seven times in the one representative class, six times after it was explained that the question was an incomplete sentence lacking a proper subject or object (so much for listening comprehension).

Other questions were repeatedly asked in the representative class:

Question: Do you like China? (Asked 22 times) Answer: yes  
Question: Do you like Chinese food? (Asked 21 times) Answer: yes  
Question: Do you like Chinese people? (Asked 19 times) Answer: yes  
Question: Do you play the guitar? (Asked 4 times) Answer: no  
Question: Do you play the piano? (Asked 7 times) Answer: no  
Question: Do you play basketball? (Asked 11 times) Answer: no  
Question: Do you play football? (Asked 9 times) Answer: no  
Question: Do you like us? (Asked 17 times) Answer: (audible) Yes  
(inaudible) I am starting not to.

Is there a listening comprehension problem? NO! It was the first time that any of these students had ever met a foreigner and each of the brave ones wanted to say something, anything, to the foreign white monkey the school had brought around for an afternoon’s entertainment. The real problem appears to be a less than competent school administrator, an issue discussed below.

A foreign expert was introducing himself to individual students in a middle school class and the dialogue went like this:

FE: Hello. My name is Bob. What is your name?

Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.

Student: My Chinese name is xxx. My English name is Bill.

FE: How are you Bill?

Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.

Student: I am fine. How are you?

FE: I am fine thank you. Nice to meet you Bill.

Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.

Student: Nice to meet you too.

After this exchange occurred with six or seven students, always with the prompting of the Chinese English teacher, the foreign expert changed the dialogue ending. The following occurred:

Student: I am fine. How are you?

FE: I am really very tired and I wish I were not here teaching this class.

Student: Stares at FE with frightened “deer in headlights” look.

Chinese English teacher is silent.

Student turns and looks at Chinese English teacher

Chinese English teacher shrugs shoulders

Student turns to foreign expert and shrugs shoulders

Are the middle schools merely training parrots? May it never be!

A foreign expert wrote a tongue twister on a middle school blackboard: “How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” The foreign expert asked a middle school student to stand and read what had been written on the blackboard. The student stood only after several classmates said something to him in Chinese. Instead of reading, the student remained silent and appeared to have difficulty seeing the blackboard from the back of the classroom. The foreign expert asked the student to come forward. The student did not move until some classmates said something to him in Chinese.

When the student arrived at the front of the room and stood facing the blackboard, the following dialogue occurred:

FE: Please read what I have written on the board.

Student: Please read what I have written on the board.

FE: Yes. I want you to read what I have written on the board. .

Student: Yes. I want you to read what I have written on the board.

FE: Can you read?

Student: Can you read?

FE: OK. Please take your seat.

Student: OK. Please take your seat.

FE: Go and sit down.

Student: Go and sit down.

FE: I want you to go and sit down in your seat now. (Pointing to the student's seat at the back of the room.)

Student: I want you o go and sit down in your seat now. (Pointing to the student's seat at the back of the room.)

YES, we are merely training parrots!

Middle school teachers use the “talk and chalk” teaching methodology and the students repeat after the teacher who reads what they have written on the board. Vocabulary is taught in the same manner, with emphasis on memorization, but completely lacking in definitional meaning or contextual usability.

### **The College Experience**

The incompetence of many graduates from high schools or even colleges and universities to communicate effectively in spoken and written English is related to the teaching methods in China. Students are usually spoon-fed, listening and taking notes with teachers standing at the front and doing most of the talking.

(He Mei, *China Daily*, September 28, 2000)

Most of us begin studying English at 12 or even younger. By the time we graduate from the university, we have studied English for over 10 years. However, the result is awful. Many students can say nothing but some simple phrases. Even for some English majors, writing an article in English also means nothing other than making countless mistakes.

(Deng Di, *China Daily*, June 9, 2000)

A business English major at Xinyang Agricultural College, Henan Province, inquired: “What use is a degree from this college when I can only get a job as a laborer?” In the summer of 2002, two weeks before graduation, a business English major commenced his graduation party speech with the following sentence: “My English is so poor I will make my talk in Chinese.” In the summer of 2002, two weeks before graduation, one-third of a business English class could not spell “business.”

“I read nothing but English during my free time,” said Xiao Zhong, a postgraduate from the Economic Department of Beijing Normal University, “but my listening comprehension and oral English remained far behind satisfaction.”