
CHINA ESL

An Industry Run Amuck?

By: Niu Qiang and Martin Wolff

I. ABSTRACT

ESL IS BIG BUSINESS

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, Diary of A Chinese Diplomat, 1992 Panda Books) Now, China annually recruits 100,000 "Foreign Experts" (FE) to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) (source:www.Chinatefl.com) with an accompanying 10 billion Yuan price tag. (ChinaDaily, 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). The People's Daily (1/23/02, "English Language Training Profitable Industry in China") reports that in 2001 the industry made a 700 million yuan (US\$8,700,000) profit in Beijing alone.

NO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

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 ESL. There is no single Ministry of Education document stating the Government policy on ESL in China. (8/01, He Qixin, Foreign Language and Teaching Research, "English Language Education in China") There does not appear to be any Central Government regulation of this "big business," except for some limited guidelines for inviting Foreign Experts (FE), (the only publication is an Official Government publication in 1994, republished in 1998 and 2002) which has and will continue to allow for many deficiencies and abuses.

The authors have personal experience teaching English as a Foreign Language and ESL in top tier university, 2nd tier university, 3rd tier college,

private business institute and joint venture university. These varied teaching experiences have exposed the authors to many “foreign experts” and “foreign teachers” as well as their varied complaints about teaching English in China. The questions arose: Are these complaints valid; how wide spread are they; and what are the causes?

This article will examine the various existing ESL school management models; the varied curriculum models; the ESL teacher recruitment process; the common problems encountered by the recruited native ESL teacher with analysis of how the existing system fosters these; the mentality of the various Chinese student groups and how this effects ESL teaching methodology and results; and suggestions for improving the existing system.

II. MANAGEMENT MODELS

INTRODUCTION

ESL is taught throughout China in both public and private kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools, high schools, universities, colleges, private business institutes and training centers. There is no uniform management or administration model for the various schools or programs and neither school Administrators nor FAO Directors are required to have any minimal education, training or experience in education administration, business management, human resource management, or cross-cultural relations. FAO directors in public universities and colleges are required to have a Bachelors degree in English.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public schools have everything from informal English programs (primary, middle and high schools) to English departments within foreign language departments (universities and colleges). The public primary, middle and high schools generally do not have any Foreign Affairs Offices while both public and private universities and colleges usually have a formal Foreign Affairs Office. The FAO is charged with everything from recruitment of Foreign Experts to arranging their visa, foreigner residence permit, foreign expert certificate, arranging housing and providing for the safety and care of the foreign expert while they are in China. The FAO are sometimes staffed with novices who provide less than adequate services but more often than not, at least public universities and colleges have very professional staff who do a quality job.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITH PRIVATE CONTRACTORS

Many public primary, middle and high schools utilize agencies to recruit and care for the needs of the foreign experts.

Some universities and colleges partner with private educational corporations to provide an English Department. The private corporation recruits the foreign experts and provides for all of their needs. The private corporation develops and implements the curriculum.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

There are many private schools that are primarily owned and managed by Chinese who lack adequate education, training or experience in Education Administration, Business Management, Human Resources Management or Foreign Affairs Office Administration. By far this type of management model is the primary source of FE complaints.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS WITH WESTERN MANAGEMENT

These schools are few and far between. The school has western managers and directors of curriculum. Usually these are international schools with operations in many different Countries.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS WITH WESTERN DIRECTOR

Dual management or complimentary Chinese and Western management sharing. The Chinese management is responsible for recruiting students, all financial matters, physical plant management and maintenance. The western director is responsible for teacher recruiting/termination, class scheduling, teacher assignment, curriculum design and implementation and also acts as the go between with the Foreign Affairs Office staff that is on the Chinese side of management. This type of school is usually in partnership with a Public University and provides classes to the non-University private sector as well as servicing the University's needs.

This type of school relies upon the university to provide the degree, physical plant and the bulk of the students who basically pay all overhead expenses. All of the private sector students are pure profit for the school. Therefore, all university students are treated to a special educational bonus, i.e. they can fail every course for three straight years and still earn their diploma. A teacher's failing grade is administratively converted to a passing grade so as to not offend the university.

The western director is often just a figure head because the Chinese marketing staff sells classes at a particular time slot (western manager does

not need to schedule classes, only make the written schedule), sometimes for a particular FE (western manager does not need to assign FE), and if the students do not like their FE the FE is terminated (western manager has no choice but to terminate the FE), and since the FAO director is Chinese, the western manager merely directs the FEs needs and concerns to the Chinese side. The western manager does have a say in curriculum but that usually must be a consensus decision with the Chinese management that is in charge of ordering textbooks (budget issues may dictate the chosen text and the Chinese side is responsible for all financial matters). The students even go around the western manager, directly to the Chinese manager, with their complaints. Often times the western manager is also told who to hire.

TRAINING CENTERS

These are normally private corporations providing tailor made educational programs to business clients utilizing the client's facilities. Classes are usually held in the weekday evenings and on weekends when the employees have free time. They have also been known to assign teachers to public kindergartens, primary schools and middle schools on a weekend, which generates numerous FE complaints.

AGENCIES

These private businesses do not manage or administer any school. They are limited to the recruitment of teachers for client schools and charge a fee either to the school or the successfully recruited FE. A few agencies also act as the "Foreign Affairs Office" for their client school and thus provide some or all of the services required by the FE. Most agencies do not act as the "Foreign Affairs Office" for their school clients and do not provide any services beyond the initial contact between employer/school and teacher/recruit. This creates an opportunity for confusion and misunderstanding by the recruit who does not fully understand the nature and functions of the agency.

Some agencies are mere Internet web sites where employers or Agencies pay a fee to post their employment opportunity for potential recruits to view and potential employees can post their resumes for potential employers to review. The web cites may also provide advice but no actual services beyond the introduction opportunity.

In either case, Agencies are a major source of dissatisfaction and complaint by ESL teachers in China.

III. CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

There is no national ESL curriculum emanating from the Central Government of China. Each public and private educational institution is free to develop and implement its own ESL curriculum so long as public degree granting institutions meet the total required instructional hours (private schools are not allowed to grant degrees). The ESL teaching curriculum in public institutions is broken down into separate classes teaching vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension and oral conversation. In private institutions ESL is taught as a homogeneous subject. As a result, public school students with six or more years of ESL classes are well schooled in grammatical rules but unable to produce an intelligible basic English conversation (He Qixin, 8/01, "English Language Education in China"); while private school students are capable of producing advanced English conversation within three to six months and are able to advocate and debate in English after only one year of ESL training. While the latter group may not be well versed in grammatical rules, they are effective ESL communicators.

BAND 4 AND BAND 6 TESTS

Band 4 and Band 6 are standardized ESL tests for Middle School, Senior School and University students in Public institutions. Chinese ESL teachers designed the tests. These tests purport to measure student accomplishments in vocabulary, listening comprehension and reading comprehension, a somewhat dubious claim with even more suspect results, which have come under increasing criticism of late. (There are even professional exam takers who will sit as a proxy for someone who is not capable of taking the test. This type of cheating requires the knowledge and assistance of the test monitor and further dilutes the validity of the process.)

In any event, these tests do not test oral communication or production ability. Tragically, these tests actually discourage oral English teaching throughout the various levels of public academia in China.

ORAL ENGLISH

The goal of the Oral English or English Conversation class is to have the students utilize and practice what they have learned in the vocabulary, phonetics, comprehensive reading and comprehensive listening classes. A more apt class title would be "Speech Lab." The FE is the Lab supervisor who facilitates the Lab activity, i.e. speaking. This is not a lecture class that

imparts substantive content for future reference, although interesting issues can serve this incidental function.

In China, Oral English classes in public schools have 60 to 150 students sitting in a lecture hall all facing the teaching platform in the front of the room. (Teaching and Learning Forum 2001, Zhichang Xu, "Problems and Strategies of teaching English in large classes in the People's Republic of China") There are two, forty-five minute class periods per week. Students sit in lecture hall type seating facing the front of the room. With 60 students in a class, this provides each student with less than 1.5 minutes a week to practice oral English production with the FE.

In private schools there are usually no more than 10 to 12 students sitting in a small room with the desks in a "U" configuration for easier and friendlier conversation. There are ten, forty-five minute class periods per week. This provides approximately one-half hour per student, per week, for actual oral English practice with a FE.

The Speech Lab should be designed and equipped to facilitate speech production. Round tables, with which the Chinese are very familiar, or "U" shaped tables that provide teacher access in the middle, are the best seating arrangement.

A close, friendly, non-threatening atmosphere should be established to induce a friendly coffee shop approach to the small group conversation. As in a coffee shop, the topics should be current events that are relevant and interesting to the speakers. The best source for such topics is the local English newspaper, just as in the western Countries.

English conversation textbooks written by native English speakers are usually old and boring, using stories outdated by at least twenty years. The language is also old and outdated, culturally out of step with current language usage. English dictionaries are updated annually but these English textbooks are not. This is primarily due to budget constraints.

Textbooks written by Chinese English speakers often use inappropriate vernacular. They are usually authored by Chinese English speakers who have had little or no exposure to English culture and must rely upon their understanding of dictionary definitions for word choice. This dictionary definition English is too formalistic, rigid or brittle, and can produce tears of uproarious ridiculing laughter in a native English speaker who hears it. When was the last time you heard a native English speaker use any of the following expressions in daily conversation? 1. I am so sorry, pal. 2. Beg pardon. I didn't quite catch your meaning. 3. I must atone for calling you so

late. (Interactive Speaking, 2001) Current production, at least in America, would be closer to: 1. Sorry. 2. What? 3. Sorry for the late call. The following are some random examples of sentences from Interactive 2001 that simply do not reflect the way L1 English speakers talk:

It's time to say our farewells. P55

Could they make me known the exact time the plane takes off? P69

Have I got the go ahead to put out the fire? P119

I wonder if you'd excuse me for a moment. P152

... I'm afraid. P183

I'm afraid P 24, 167, 182

Will it be convenient if I call upon you at seven this evening? P220

To be openhearted, your denial that you had witnessed the accident dumbfounded me. P 249

He chooses to look into the matter till the truth is out. P264

More often than not the FEs are left to their own devices to obtain materials for the oral English class. When materials run short or the well runs dry they resort to showing DVD movies or playing games like "hangman" in class to "kill time."

The FE must also keep in mind that topics for discussion must be of interest to a majority of the class members. A female to male ratio of 6 to 1 is restricting on the quantity of sports related articles that may interest the class.

AD HOC

When a recruiting school encourages a FE to bring cultural materials from home, it is a pretty good indication that the teacher is expected to provide their own teaching materials and that the school has little or no English teaching resources. There are probably not any English books, magazines, movies, or other written materials suitable for English discussion, not even the prevalent out of date, twenty-year-old texts used by so many modern Universities throughout China. Those FE who require a structured or "set menu" curriculum may view this as a detriment. However, the truly creative FE view this as the greatest and most challenging opportunity to develop their own teaching program using up-to-date articles of local interest and relevancy that will interest, excite and encourage their students to participate in the discussion.

Some schools provide English resources and materials but the teacher is free to select the specific materials and organizes them in the order of presentation. And of course there is always the school that does not provide any teaching materials and also forgets to advise the Fe to bring their

own.

IV. RECRUITMENT

INTRODUCTION

The only universal guidelines, regulations or laws regulating salary, travel expense, housing, medical or teacher qualifications appear in a 1994 publication of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts (Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, republished in 1999 and 2002). While there are controlling national immigration laws, FE certification requirements appear to vary from province to province, notwithstanding the guidelines of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts. Some of the remote provinces have allowed U.S. high school graduates to teach while Shanghai and Beijing will not.

1. SALARY

Please see the limited, representative salary charts below for public and private schools, by province. This information was compiled simultaneously from www.ESLcafe.com; www.chinatefl.com; and www.abroadchina.org (these three web sites appear to offer the largest quantity and diversity of ESL teaching jobs in China) on a single February 2003 day and is only representative, not comprehensive. They do reflect the differences in salary (which are inconsistent with the guidelines of the State Bureau of Foreign Experts) ranges and numbers of employment opportunities in a given province, comparatively speaking.

KEY

K – Kindergarten

P – Primary

M – Middle

U – University

BI – Business Institute

Pu – Public

Pri – Private

ANHUI:					
SALARY	K	P	M	U	BI
	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri
2,000				1	
3,000				3	
3,500	1	1	1	3	
4,500					1
11 jobs 3,500 average salary					

HAINAN:					
SALARY	K	P	M	U	BI
	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri
2,500			1		
3,000				2	
3,500				2	
5 jobs 3,000 average salary					

INNER MONGOLIA:					
SALARY	K	P	M	U	BI
	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri
2,500			1		
3,000				3	
3,500		1	2		
7 jobs 3,000 average salary					

QINGHAI:					
SALARY	K	P	M	U	BI
	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri
2,000	1	1		1	
2,500	1	1		1	
3,000				2	
3,500		1			
4,000		1			
10 jobs 2,500 average salary					

SHANGHAI:					
SALARY	K	P	M	U	BI
	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri	Pu - Pri
3,000				3	
3,500			1	2	1
4,000				1	1
4,500			1		
5,000			1	1	
5,500				1	
7,000	1	1	1	1	1
7,500				1	
8,000					1
8,500	1	1		1	
9,000		1			
25 jobs 7,000 average salary					

The amount of salary is also tied directly to the degree held, particularly in public universities. The higher the degree, the higher the salary.

The private schools that offer higher salaries usually tie the higher salary to a heavier workload, i.e. more teaching hours per week.

The Central Government guide provides

"According to the invitee's professional level, post held, and academic background and experience, he or she will be paid a salary of between 1,200 and 4,800 RMB Yuan per month. For every year's work completed, the equivalent of half a month's salary is paid as a departure allowance." (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p.52)

This regulation is somewhat outdated by differing salary schedules in various provinces.

2. HOUSING

All schools promise housing. Some go so far as to promise "western style" housing, (with the emphasis on "style"). Some only promise "assistance" in locating housing. Public Universities usually provide on campus housing but a few provide a room in a low class Chinese hotel. Some teachers have been put up with local Chinese families in very unsatisfactory conditions. Private business institutes usually provide their own housing or an ample allowance for off campus housing.

However, even the best of the “western style” housing is still housing in China, designed and built according to Chinese standards and interpretation of “western style housing” by people who have never been to the west. There are instances of regular power outages, lack of adequate heat, lack of adequate hot water, lack of cable or satellite television, lack of a DVD or CD player, lack of any kind of oven, censored Internet access, etc

The Central Government guide provides:

“Accommodation will be provided for the invite and all related costs met, as well as for his spouse and children not over the age of 12 if agreed by the inviting party.” (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p.52)

“According to the relevant regulations of the People’s Republic of China, foreign experts cannot rent and live in ordinary apartments. Such rule is enforced out of consideration of administration, as well as to ensure the expert’s security in China. At present, accommodations for foreign experts are mostly provided by inviting parties. They are usually of three types; A. At the place of work, in either a specially built or converted building. B. At foreign expert’s reception centres. C. In hotels or guesthouses, depending on whether the unit has appropriate accommodation. All types have bathrooms, and the rooms vary in size and number. They are furnished with desks, sofas, bookshelves, TV sets, refrigerators and central heating and air conditioning.” (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p.55)

It should be noted that this regulation is somewhat outdated as foreign experts are now allowed to live in certain designated regular apartments in certain major cities and some schools charge for rent and utilities for “on-campus” housing.

3. VISA/TRAVEL

A good deal of unnecessary confusion is created by too many Foreign Affairs Office and other responsible management personnel, both Chinese and Western, not understanding the true extent and nature of China’s visa system. Much misunderstanding and harsh dialogue has ensued between many a FE and management because of this, creating mistrust and poor human relations situations. This has also resulted in FEs feeling that their school management has “lied’ to them when the truth is a simple lack of understanding on both sides.

“L” visa is a single or multiple entry tourist permit. It is illegal to work in China on an “L” visa. It is very difficult, but not impossible, to convert an “L” visa to a “Z” visa that allows employment in China. It all depends on how much your employer wants and needs you and the extent of their credibility with the local authorities. (Credibility comes in many forms, shapes and sizes and through various means and devices.) Some Provinces close to Hong Kong and Macao will issue multiple entry “L” visas to FE with prior “Z” visas. The further the province from Hong Kong or Macao, the more difficult to obtain a multiple entry visa while working in China.

“F” visa is a single entry permit for business purposes. You must have an invitation letter from your host company. The visa is for 30 days. This visa is easily converted to a “Z” visa before its expiration date that then allows further employment in China past the initial 30 days.

“Z” visa is a single entry permit, usually issued for 30 days. This merely allows you to enter China to apply for your “Expert’s Certificate” and “Green Card” or “Temporary Resident Permit.” Once you have these two documents you are free to stay, work, and travel within China. If you wish to leave China you must surrender your “Expert’s Certificate” and “Green Card” or “Temporary Resident Permit” and obtain an “Exit” visa. You will then need another “Z” or “F” visa to return to your teaching job in China. Vacationing outside China is really discouraged by this entangled process and is a major source of confusion and dissatisfaction with FEs.

4. MEDICAL

Most public Chinese schools offer the same medical treatment to FE as is offered to their own Chinese teachers in the school infirmary or medical clinic. This is basic first aid, Chinese style. It is comparable to the Elementary school nurse in America. Most private schools do not have an on site medical facility and must rely upon the local hospital. Many schools advise that medical insurance first be obtained before leaving the home country. Unfortunately, most medical insurance plans that cover travel and work abroad do not cover the People’s Republic of China, which means evacuation to Hong Kong at a minimum. In the event of catastrophic illness, your China employer will deport you anyway.

The Central Government guide provides:

Foreign experts are to be provided *“medical expenses according to the Chinese medical care system.”* (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p.52)

"Medical Care. The health care system in China covers the whole country. Most of the work units have their own clinics where complaints like headaches, colds, fevers and stomachaches can be effectively dealt with. There are sizable hospitals in each area and patients can get timely treatment without traveling too far. Big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and the provincial capitals all have well-equipped hospitals which employ many experienced doctors and specialists. Many cities have specialist hospitals. Most of the hospitals have special departments for foreign experts where patients receive first-class service. If stated in the contract, foreign experts will receive free medical treatment, but the cost of stays in hospital, registration fees, house calls, spectacles, dental treatment, massage, and non-medicinal nutritional products are to be paid by the patient. (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p. 60)

5. TRAVEL EXPENSE

Most schools provide a one-way airfare re-imbusement after you have taught for six months and a full round trip reimbursement after you have taught for one year. They also generally provide 1,200 RMB for vacation travel within China at the end of a one-year contract. However, this varies with the different schools.

The Central Government guide provides:

"The inviting party will pay travel expenses to and from work." (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p. 52)

"Invitees working for over one year, or over one academic year, will be provided with an economy class return air ticket for themselves and their families. If invitees wish to purchase their own tickets, the inviting party will pay in RMB Yuan the equivalent cost of an economic class air fare by the most direct route." (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts, p. 53)

6. QUALIFICATIONS

a. Education

Most Chinese schools require a Bachelors degree, at a minimum. Unfortunately the degree does not need to be in English, Literature,

Linguistics or Education. There are many circumstances where Native English Speakers have been employed with an Associates degree or as little as a U.S. high school diploma.

xinpai@china.com

*"Xin Pai Foreign Language School Date: Monday, 20 January 2003, at 10:08 a.m. More Job Vacancies Four more teaching positions are now available at Xin Pai Foreign Language School ... but even **those with no experience**, who would like to try their hand at teaching, **are welcome**, as we can provide on-the-job training and assistance"*

<http://www.chinatefl.com/abroad.html>;

*"Frequently Asked Questions: 1. What qualifications should one have in teaching in China? The basic qualifications are: being a native speaker of English, having a minimum BA degree and commitment to teaching, loving China and its people. Clear, well-spoken English and a good knowledge of the fundamentals of English grammar. **Teaching experience/certificate is preferred but not a must.**"*

A major ESL teacher recruiting web site (www.AbroadChina.org) gives the following advice:

What if I do not have a degree?

If you do not have a degree, you must have:

Qualified Teacher Status and at least one years' recent classroom-based experience of teaching English or modern languages, or a TEFL qualification and one years' classroom-based experience of TEFL or teaching another subject.

However, some school will accept you without degree requested, and in some summer program, they may also accept. But some school will not accept you without a degree, so your options will be restricted.

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What if I have limited teaching experience?

With TEFL qualifications or equivalent & less than one years experience. If you have a degree, some host schools still will accept you.

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The above directly contradicts, at least as to public universities and institutions of higher learning, the following official position of the Chinese Central Government:

The Central Government guide provides:

"Those in search of language teaching positions in universities and institutions of higher learning should have a good grasp of their native

*languages and literature and should have **at least three years' language teaching experience**. They should be able to speak their native language in standard pronunciation and intonation."* (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts)

Note that the above is advisory and applies only to universities and institutions of higher learning, presumably public colleges and private Business Institutes, but not kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools or high schools, public or private. The use of the word "should" and not "must" should also be noted. The final and most important observation must be the lack of any requirement that English be the native language of the foreign expert hired to teach ESL.

b. ESL Training and/or Teaching Experience

Most schools request a TESOL, TEFL, TOFL, ESL or CELTA certificate, but actual teaching experience or business experience is an acceptable substitute. (See above.)

Although many schools claim to offer training once the FE is in China, in fact only a handful of private schools provide any pre-employment or on-the-job training specifically for ESL teaching in China.

Most Chinese schools prefer some teaching experience but some do not, let alone ESL experience. Likewise, most schools do not provide any type of teacher training, either on the job or on-line. They use the learn as you go by "trial-and-error" method of teacher training.

6. RECRUITING INDUCEMENTS

Most ESL teachers are recruited to China with very attractive bait.

Travel/Teach English: The Global TESOL Institute, <http://www.eslcafe.com>; ***Looking for a well-paid job to explore China?*** Come to TDM! Posted By: TDM Language College woody@tdmlanguage.com Date: Thursday, 16 January 2003, at 10:04 a.m. *But you are very well paid. Your salary will be more than enough for you to live comfortably, to explore the exciting China, its history, its nature, its people, its culture, its language and its food.)*

Teach in China

... Harbin Star Foreign Language College provides a pathway to exploring China whilst teaching within a Sino-British University environment. ...

teach-in-china.com.view.php?company_id=59 – [Cached](#)
– [Similar pages](#) (Google)

The recruit is usually very young with no prior teaching experience, away from home for the first time, in their first cross-cultural experience, and under the belief that they are about to embark upon a China vacation, which of necessity, must be interrupted occasionally for a little work.

"Too many people with no real interest in the job come here (China) for a good time (very easy to do) and leave the real teachers trying to clean up the mess and repair their image. A white face and a degree, even a fake one, land a job." (Andrew Tamblyn, 1/15/03, www.ESLcafe.com)

"The tragedy is that some folks come here not to teach, but to travel, so they get all romantic and misty eyed. They can't teach, don't want to teach, and want to party like in the good old USA. This devil-may-care, happy camper attitude unfortunately leads them to make immature decisions and to be placed in schools that can not wait to capitalize on these "Rage against the Machine" look-a-likes. They also give serious teachers a bad reputation." (H. Jones, 2/25/01, www.ESLcafe.com)

V. COMPLAINTS OF NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS

WHEN IN ROME, LIVE AS THE ROMAS DO
IN ASIA NOTHING IS AS IT APPEARS
FLEXIBLE PEOPLE DO NOT BREAK
DO NOT SWIM WITH SHARKS

Author: A sage old man

INTRODUITION

A review of (113) complaints containing multiple allegations (409) about teaching ESL in China (posted on www.ESLcafe.com between 1/11/01 and 1/26/03) reveals a number of common complaints in identifiable categories under identifiable management models. (There is no central registry for ESL teachers in China. Direct contact with ESL teachers currently

employed in China would jeopardize their employment status. Contact with ESL teachers after they have departed from China is likewise impossible without a central registry to identify them and obtain their home contact information. The www.eslcafe.com web site appears to be the only centralized contact point with ESL teachers who have complaints about their China ESL teaching experience.)

Bad Management (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 8; Private Schools – 40; Agencies - 7)

The title of this category says it all. With no formal business management education, no special training, little or no experience, no education in cross-cultural relations or human resource management, what can really be expected other than the perception by the FEs that the management has no idea how to run a school or that the management is corrupt?

Bad FAO (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 4; Private Schools – 6; Agencies - 0)

FAO Directors who are perceived to be “bad” usually have no formal education, training or experience in cross-cultural relations, human resource management or the requirements of their job. This results in cultural insensitivity, miscommunications, incorrect advice or instructions and eventually a breakdown in the FAO/FE relationship.

Classes (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 0; Private Schools – 10; Agencies - 1)

FEs are promised various teaching assignments during the recruitment process but when they are on the ground in China they learn quickly that their primary teaching responsibility is oral or conversational English.

China has Chinese English teachers to teach vocabulary, phonetics, reading comprehension, listening comprehension and all of the substantive disciplines from Accounting to Zoology. If assistance is required from outside experts in substantive disciplines, China turns to the visiting Professor system, not the ESL teacher.

The ESL teacher is in China to facilitate conversational English and the classes they are assigned to teach are consistent with this, the exception being private business institutes that offer advanced business courses but offer no degree.

Contract (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 2; Private Schools – 24; Agencies - 4)

The complaints regarding contracts include the failure to have any written contract, the failure to live up to the contract terms and the unilateral amendment of the contract.

Written contracts are the creation of the British Common Law and are foreign in nature and effect to most Chinese. Therefore, the FE's employment contract has little or no value to the Chinese, except that it is required by the Government in order to issue a Foreign Expert's Certificate, which in turn is required to legally employ the FEs.

There are some "sharks" who know exactly how to manipulate the system and the FEs and get away with it. They are often the ones who tell the FEs to hurry up and get to China as quickly as possible, entering on a tourist "L" visa, and promising the moon when the FE arrives.

Class Too Large (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 0; Private Schools – 10; Agencies - 1)

Classes may have up to 80 students. Those lodging this complaint should try teaching an English class with 150 students as the Chinese English teachers are often required to do. (See: Zhichang Xu, Teaching and Learning Forum 2001, "Problems and Strategies of Teaching English in Large Classes in the People's Republic of China.")

Public university classes are unreasonably large in many instances. One of the reasons is economic. The FEs wants a bigger salary so the school must reduce costs and one way is to increase the student/teacher ratio. This is a self-inflicted injury in some cases. Some schools are just too poor to afford smaller classes.

Business institutes and training centers try to limit class size to between 10 to 12 students. This is also a matter of economics. The students pay through the nose for the smaller class size.

Housing (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 5; Private Schools – 24; Agencies - 6)

Construction standards in China are not equal to the Uniform Building Code in America. There are major differences.

Electricity in rural areas and even some larger cities is not static and periodic rolling brownouts are necessary during peak usage periods, just like in California in 2002. Many Chinese peasants and farmers live in areas with no electricity service at all.

Some FE in the warmer area of Southern China complaint about a lack of heat. The Central Government policy is that public buildings North of the Yellow River have heat and those South of it do not. This includes schools and school dormitories. There are many areas South of the Yellow River that have below freezing temperatures from November through February and yet the students have absolutely no heat in the classroom or in their dormitory. Imagine how guilty the FEs must feel sitting in their "Western Style" apartment with electric or gas heaters while their students must bundle up in warm clothes 24 hrs a day, seven days a week. The FEs only understands the plight of their students when they must bundle up to teach in a freezing cold classroom. And yet, some FEs in the warmer climes of Southern China are complaining about a lack of heat.

In areas North of the Yellow River FEs complain about a lack of heat in October and early November because it really is cold but the Government does not turn the heat on with the first freeze. They wait until the cold season has begun in earnest. Public buildings are heated by a central hot water piping system that also serves the FE's apartment. FEs in this situation are no colder than their students and if it is really unbearable, they can purchase a very cheap (50 rmb) electric radiant heater.

Another complaint is a lack of hot water. This issue is variable throughout China. Hot water for drinking is available through the electric water dispenser provided by most schools or can be made simply on the stove by those who have learned to boil water. As to potable drinking water there is no excuse for a school not providing this for the FEs but the FEs can obtain it at a very reasonable expense in the local market (5 rmb for 5 gallons). Hot water for showers may be as scarce for the FEs as it is for some students who never see hot water for showering.

Censorship on the Internet and in the classroom is a real cultural shock for those who have been brought up under the "Freedom of Speech" regime of America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In the classroom the FEs are not allowed to discuss their personal religious beliefs (but they may discuss religion as history or cultural); they may not comment on the relationship between China and its breakaway Province of Taiwan (but the non-political news of Taiwan can be discussed); and there can be no criticism of the Central Government or Communist Party of China (but Government actions may be discussed, objectively rather than judgmentally). For a third world developing nation with a Communist regime, these limitations on "free speech" are not onerous. The Internet censorship is part of the crowd control mentality of Communism. With 1.3 billion people to manage and provide for, there must, of necessity, be some measures that restrict personal freedoms

and this is one of them.

All in all, the Chinese Government has done a tremendous job of unifying so many minorities into one cohesive, law abiding and peace loving society that is progressing rapidly in its attempts to make up for years of seclusion. Cultural sensitivity is what is needed on the part of the FEs.

Some FEs are promised “Western Style” housing by schools who have no such housing available and have no intention of providing any. Instead they intend to house their FEs in a third rate Chinese class hotel. Foreign tourists in China are required to stay in International class 4 or 5 star hotels and are not allowed to stay in Chinese class hotels. This practice is usually instituted by private schools that are both owned and managed by Chinese and teach a primary school curriculum.

Lies (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 10; Private Schools – 35; Agencies - 11)

The amount and variety of “lies” is extensive and runs the gamut of everything having to do with the recruitment process through every contract provision, down to the failure to provide the promised “Z” visa, Expert’s Certificate, and Foreigner Residence Permit.

Many so called “lies” are simple misunderstandings resulting from language and cultural barriers. However, there are some very sharp operators who have refined lying to an art form.

Medical (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 1; Private Schools – 3; Agencies - 1)

Many private schools do not have even the basic infirmary and they attempt to avoid any outlay of cash for medical services on behalf of the FE.

Parental Interference (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 0; Private Schools – 2; Agencies - 0)

Kindergarten parents tend to want to sit in on classes and direct the FEs and prevent any discipline of their child. FEs should be given a cultural introduction to the value Chinese parents place on their children and why. The FEs should also realize that parents of kindergarten age children around the world have a hard time adjusting to cutting the apron strings and allowing their child to leave home. In China, this attachment continues through the senior middle school years as is evidenced by parents seeing their teenage children to and from school. This is a cultural difference.

Plagiarism and Cheating (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 1; Private Schools – 4; Agencies - 0)

Chinese are known for their ability to copy or duplicate. Name brand and designer clothes and watches, movies on DVDs and music on CDs are often available in China in a pirated version before they are available in their intended market. The fact that cheating and plagiarism are rampant and unchecked should not come as any surprise.

Cheating also includes administrative actions that change failing grades to passing ones. No university student in China fails to graduate unless they are guilty of a more serious offense than failing a few courses offered by FEs.

School administrators and directors with basic training in Education Administration would deal with this problem in an effective and productive manner.

Pollution, Crowded, Filth (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 2; Private Schools – 6; Agencies - 1)

This is a common complaint by FEs employed throughout China in all of the management models. Most FEs realize that this is not a situation that the school management has any control over. However, the FEs blames the school management because they may have made recruiting claims about how beautiful their campus was, or how clean their city was, or how their area is a major tourist destination, or how The FEs feels lied to by the school management. What the FEs needs to realize is that the Chinese really believe in the truth of their claims about their area and have never seen the FE's country by which the FEs makes his comparative judgment.

This complaint arises from true "culture shock" and could be reduced or eliminated through regulation of recruitment materials.

Filthy classrooms are a different matter. It appears that dirt, chalk dust, papers and other trash are allowed to pile up in the classroom corners. This is just poor housekeeping for which there can be little reason other than different lifestyles and values.

As to the "crowded" issue; what can anyone expect in a Country with 1.3 billion people? Americans feel entitled to a personal zone of privacy around their personal being. However, Asians are accustomed to rubbing shoulders at every turn of daily life. This is a definite cultural difference.

Prejudice (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 5; Private Schools – 5; Agencies - 5)

There are two categories under the complaint of racism. It is claimed that blacks are routinely rejected and that FEs are only tolerated but not respected or appreciated.

Blacks are in fact routinely rejected, particularly those from the African Continent English speaking nations where English is primarily spoken as a second language. The reason generally given by Chinese recruiters is that no matter what the country of origin, black's English pronunciation is not adequate for ESL teaching in China.

In many areas of China the FEs are treated as a necessary evil or "foreign devil." Partygoers parading around as ESL teachers have given the legitimate ESL teacher a bad reputation and disrespect naturally follows. There is also the small matter of the unforgotten history of western invasion of China some years back. However, there are still many areas of China that have a high degree of regard and respect for teachers in general and FEs in particular. FEs are treated like royalty with first class, red carpet treatment.

However, there is still the attitude that "I like FEs and some of them are my friends. I just do not want one of them to marry my daughter." Chinese girls seen in public with a FEs are often called prostitutes, as no respectable Chinese girl would be caught dead in public with one. This also affects where FEs are allowed to live and why Chinese students and teachers are not allowed to visit the FE's house, particularly in the rural areas.

Profit Before Education (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 2; Private Schools – 18; Agencies - 1)

ESL teaching in China is big business and there are big profits to be had. Some FEs perceive that their school puts profit before a quality education. Some of these complaints have been verified to be valid while young altruistic teachers poorly grounded in basic business management principles lodge others.

There are some sharp operators who consider their school to be a "cash cow" and they fully intend to milk it for all it is worth. It also seems that their primary purpose in inviting FEs is to use them as "shills" to increase enrollment and revenues.

Salary (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 6; Private Schools – 53; Agencies - 8)

FEs complain about not receiving the agreed compensation, not

receiving the agreed overtime pay, receiving reduced pay, pay with unilateral deductions and fines, pay reduced unilaterally, late pay, and that they must argue for their pay.

FEs complain that they do not receive the end-of-contract bonus.

FEs complain that they do not receive the return airfare.

Most complaints emanate from private schools teaching a primary school curriculum. These schools suffer from untrained and inexperienced management which experience constant cash flow problems and owners more interested in profits than education, even if the profits are made off the labor of FEs they cheat.

Security (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 2; Private Schools – 5; Agencies - 1)

Schools with on-campus housing usually have walled, gated compounds with security personnel on guard 24 hrs. a day seven days a week. To many FEs this sounds, looks and feels like a prison. (If it talks, walks and smells like a duck, it is probably a duck.) The Chinese staff and students appreciate the secure compound because they know what evil lurks outside its walls.

The FEs not only feel imprisoned because they must be in their apartment from 8:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. the next day and they may have no overnight guests; the FEs can not understand how under all of this security their apartments are still ransacked, yet no culprits are ever caught and stolen items are almost never returned.

Support, Teaching Materials (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 3; Private Schools – 31; Agencies- 8)

The crux of this complaint is that the school FAO is either dodging its duties or there is no FAO at all and that the FEs are left to fend for themselves in all matters.

There is the secondary complaint that there is no Chinese teacher to assist in the classroom.

Third, there is either an inadequate curriculum or none at all; and little or no teaching materials, combined with broken or non-existent teaching equipment and supplies. Again, this situation may be a matter of economics or poor training for the Management and FAO Director. This however can also be the result of sharp practices to enrich the school at the expense of both

the student and the FEs.

Toilets

Chinese toilets are open trenches over which one squats on their haunches. Most westerners find this both physically difficult and offensive. The stench emanating from a Chinese toilet room permeates the entire building, even seeping into the classroom. This is most distracting to the FE. This is the sole reason China joined the WTO. No, not the World Trade Organization, the small WTO (World Toilet Organization). China is well aware of the need to improve its toilet facilities. (See: www.worldtoilet.org).

Visa – Foreigner Residence Permit – Foreign Expert’s Certificate (COMPLAINTS: Public Schools – 2; Private Schools – 24; Agencies- 1)

Some schools that are unlicensed or do not have authority to hire FE promise a “Z” visa after the FE enters China on an “L” visa. The “Z” visa is never produced and the teacher has resulting immigration problems. Some such schools offer invitation letters on another company’s letterhead upon which an “F” visa is issued with the promise of a “Z” visa after the FE enters China. When the “Z” visa is not timely issued, the FE has immigration problems.

This problem can be avoided if the FE will simply insist that he be provided with the “Z” visa before entering China. Reputable and experienced schools are very capable of complying with this request. Schools that encourage entry on an “L” visa or “F” visa are the major source of subsequent “Z” visa problems.

Even licensed schools play games with the visa for their own economic reasons. After all, FEs without a “Z” visa is at the mercy of the school and can be convinced to accept lower pay, inadequate housing and changed contracts.

Without the “Z” visa it is impossible to obtain the Foreigner Residence Permit or the Foreign Expert’s Certificate.

CAVEAT: A limitation on this review is that the reviewed web site containing the complaints from expatriate teachers of ESL in China is devoted almost exclusively to recruiting for non-public schools and hence the complaints are more likely to come from teaching experiences in private schools. This should not be misconstrued to mean that there are fewer complaints from those employed in public schools. The two web sites devoted almost exclusively to recruiting for public schools do not maintain a forum to post complaints (www.chinatefl.com; www.abroadchina.org). Hopefully they will consider

doing so in the future as it might assist in identifying areas of needed improvement in the ESL system in China. The authors had no previous relationship with any of the web sites referred to herein and had no contact with any of the complainants regarding their published complaints.

With 100,000 FE teaching ESL in China each year, the number of published complaints does not initially appear to be worthy of serious consideration. However, tacticians inform us that each published complaint represents a significant number of unpublished complaints. Further, the number of complaints can be viewed as rather large in comparison to the number of ESL employers ("1,076 universities and institutions of higher learning" 1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts).

<u>COMPLAINT</u>	<u>PUBLIC SCHOOLS</u>	<u>PRIVATE SCHOOLS</u>	<u>AGENCY</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Bad Management	8	40	7	55
Bad FAO	4	6	0	10
Classes	0	10	1	11
Contract	2	24	4	30
Class Too Large	0	10	1	11
Housing	5	24	6	35
Lies	10	35	11	56
Medical	1	3	1	5
Parental				
Interference	0	2	0	2
Plagiarism	1	4	0	5
Pollution etc.	2	6	1	9
Prejudice	5	5	5	15
Profit First	2	18	1	21
Salary	6	53	8	67
Security	2	5	1	8
Support	3	31	8	42
Toilets	2	1	0	3
Visa etc.	2	24	1	27
TOTAL	55	302	56	412

VI. CHINESE STUDENTS

Introduction:

FE teachers often perceive Chinese students, who are predominantly from single child families, as spoiled, undisciplined, selfish and disrespectful, a perception that may or may not be true but must be dealt with as a real and

not imagined reality. The fact that so many of them cheat and plagiarize wantonly does nothing to dispel this perception. The fact that school administrators refuse to punish cheating and plagiarism helps to perpetuate this perception.

Kindergartens

These kids are out of control and parents will not tolerate anyone to discipline their child. The pay is higher but there should be a hazardous duty bonus. Teachers who work in these pressure cookers have many complaints.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are some FEs who think teaching kindergarten is the cat's meow. Of course they may be influenced by the higher than average pay they receive.

Primary Schools

Public primary schools do not normally invite FEs.

Private primary school FEs are so busy complaining about their employers that they make very few comments about their students.

Middle Schools

Middle and senior middle school (high school) students are the most industrious, hard working and disciplined students in China. They are up at 6:00 a.m. and go to school and/or study until at least midnight and sometimes later.

Their entire economic future and social stature depends upon their passing the university entrance exam and being admitted to a top university. These kids are under tremendous pressure and have no time to fool around, not even on weekends.

These schools produce the least FEs complaints.

Top Tier Universities

These students passed the university entrance examination and were admitted to the University of their choice. They are eager learners and a real challenge to teach because they keep the teachers on their toes.

2nd Tier Universities

These students worked hard to get into top school but wound up in this second rate place and are bitter, discouraged, unmotivated, lazy, feel betrayed, even hostile. Discouragement is sometimes contagious and teaching these students is a lesson in self-motivation. The major complaint from those employed in this teaching situation appears to be the constant need to try and motivate these students and the lack of appreciable results. There are always a handful of students in each class that excel and make the teaching experience worthwhile.

3rd Tier Colleges

These students realize that they are very fortunate to be in any program of higher education and are very enthusiastic, cooperative, attentive, humble, respectful, and very disciplined. It is a pleasure teaching these students and this teaching situation generates very few FE complaints.

Business Institutes and Private Colleges

These students are in school because they want to be and they pay a hefty price for the opportunity. They are eager to learn and very pleasant to teach. Many of these students are preparing to go abroad for further higher education or employment.

Unfortunately, these institutions are more interested in profit than education which leads to FE dissatisfaction and a revolving employment door that sees FEs constantly coming and going. Some classes will be taught by three or four successive teachers due to FEs leaving before their contracts expire.

Training Centers

These students are generally business employees who are in class to improve their chances of promotion at work. They are highly motivated to learn and are a pleasure to teach. The very nature of the student mandates that classes be held in the evening and on weekends which leads to teacher dissatisfaction and a high turnover rate.

Caveat: All of the research leading to the above evaluations was based upon the authors' personal experiences; personal interviews with more than 40 FEs, comments made by FEs in Internet chat rooms and from published comments at www.eslcafe.com. The authors had no prior relationship with any of the persons or sources providing information for this study.

CONCLUSION:

Nothing is worth doing unless done right

Author: A sage old man

The main objective of the ESL industry is the production of people capable of effectively communicating in English as their second language. As in all production type industry, utilization of untrained or unqualified labor, use of defective materials, inadequate management and lack of quality control results in a defective product.

Based upon our preliminary research we make the following suggestions for further consideration by those policy makers who are in a position to further study the matter and take effective corrective actions:

All ESL schools should be licensed by the Government and should meet certain requirements. (Unlicensed schools should be closed with penalties.) All private school administrators and directors should be required to be certified as having successfully completed a special training course in Education Administration, Business Management and Human Resource Management, in order to work in an ESL school. No ESL school should be licensed or allowed to maintain their license without certified Administrators and Directors

All public and private Foreign Affairs Office Directors should be required to be certified as having successfully completed a special training course in FAO Administration, Cross-cultural relations, and Human Resource Management. No one should be allowed to be the director of a public or private FAO without this certification. No public or private school should be allowed to invite FE to teach ESL without having a certified FAO Director.

The Government, after meeting appropriate criteria, should approve these certification programs. There should also be a system for revocation of the certifications or sanctions if FE complaints against the administrator or director are found to have merit.

This would infuse the much-needed professionalism into the ESL program and give it needed international recognition and credibility.

All ESL curriculums should be approved by the Government and performance standards for the schools should be established and enforced. Object evaluations or proper quality control measures should be designed, implemented and enforced.

FE recruiting should be overhauled. False or misleading recruitment

advertising should be prohibited. FE qualifications should be spelled out and enforced. Compensation packages should be more specifically regulated and enforced.

Upon arrival in China, FE should be given a "Welcome" package that includes the immigration laws of China, customs laws of China, cultural information, basic Chinese expressions, Consulate addresses, location of necessary services, emergency telephone numbers, telephone use instructions, and other information that will assist the FE to adjust to life in China more readily. The FE should also be required to attend a training session to become familiarized with ESL teaching in China and have their immediate questions answered.

If there are not enough qualified FEs to fill all of the ESL teaching positions, the inviting school should be required to pay for the untrained or inexperienced FEs to take an on-line ESL teaching course within 30 days of their initial employment in China.

Teaching ESL in China is an important component of the educational sector of the general economic-business community. It should be subject to the same type of regulation and quality control standards as any other production industry and then some.

The State Bureau of Foreign Affairs has the mandate of: "A. Studying and formulating principles, policies and regulations on the introduction of foreign experts. B. Working out long- and medium-term development plans, examining and approving the annual plans of each institution and organization concerning employment of foreign experts as well as overseas training plans." (1994, Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China, State Bureau of Foreign Experts)

This authority should be maximized to create and implement the type of regulations that will assure the ESL industry produces the best possible product for the future economic and social development of China.