



## **Worlds of English**

*The Expansion of English in China*

### **YOUNG CHINESE PUPIL**

Good Morning Miss. My name is Amelia. I am from Class 1, Grade 3. There are 23 students in my class. Shang Li is a beautiful school where we can get a good education and have nice days. I love our school and my classmates. Au revoir.

### **NARRATOR**

In China today most school children learn English. But until the early nineteen seventies China was largely isolated from the world and English was rarely spoken.

### **BOB**

When I was a child the English language was viewed as almost like a tool of imperialism, of hegemonism in kind of other words because we knew that Americans spoke English and the British spoke English.

### **BOB**

None of us in our family actually, in the entire compound believed, ever ever never ever thought that one of us would end up speaking English later on, that Russian was possible, was one possibility but although in those days China had already a very difficult relationship with Russia so no foreign language were allowed to speak so in other words it was very actually dangerous to speak, to be able to speak any foreign languages.

### **NARRATOR**

China began to open up to the outside world in the mid nineteen seventies and Bob Shi had his first English lesson.

### **BOB**

The text that we used were all very very politically charged and I remember my first ever English lesson I took in 1975 was to remember all twenty six English letters. I thought 'My god, how am I gonna remember twenty six of them, that's so many of them', I said I can only remember like A B C and what is the next letter again, D or F? So and it was difficult and our teacher couldn't remember them all either. But actually my first full sentence was "long live Chairman Mao" the next sentence is "long live the Communist Party of China".

### **NARRATOR**

Mao died in 1976 and subsequently a market economy was introduced in China. The pace of change increased rapidly and in 1981 a new English language newspaper, China Daily was established.

### **LI XING**

After the reforms a lot more Chinese started to learn English because they saw it as a way to, not only to communicate with the outside world but also to enrich themselves because English opens you to a world of cultures, not only British culture, American culture or culture in Australia but also wealth of western civilisation and western technology and advanced ideas.

### **NARRATOR**

With the rapidly developing economy, English was increasingly recognised as the language of opportunity.

### **BOB**

If you are just the only person living in Asia, in Africa in North America and you want to get rich and become a more important person, a richer person you have to study English first

before anything else and this is true in China too. If you want to get rich in China today, if you want to become any important you study English first. If you don't have English then you don't really get anywhere.

**NARRATOR**

The arrival of multinational companies has led to a growing interest in English. The American computer software giant Intel now has offices in Beijing and day to day business is conducted in English.

**SUNIL**

Because that way we are in Shanghai, you don't have anything else going on. Clearly as China becoming bigger and bigger part of the world economy and as people start travelling much more outside and as multinational companies coming into China and the Chinese companies are having collaboration with outside other companies, clearly there is a recognition that they have to learn more than one language because more than Chinese so and English is one of the dominant languages they want to learn and they do learn English but the problem is even though I see people who tend to start using more and more English, their ability to be comfortable in their conversation, English is very very difficult in China.

**JING**

I am born in Beijing and I live in Beijing and Beijing have the best education system in the PRC, in China so I learn English in my middle school but most English is a text book and there is not a lot of the spoken English learnt so I began to speak English much more when I work for and an American company.

**NARRATOR**

The enthusiasm to learn English has led to the rapid growth in language schools. The Wall Street Institute based in Beijing caters mainly for young professionals.

**TIM**

Thirty years ago in the entire country almost nobody could speak the language, you were famous just for having being able to speak English. Twenty years ago you could walk into almost any company you wanted to purely through the fact that you could speak English. Now when especially you look in the premier cities across China, Beijing, Shanghai and Canton as well it's an expectation. When you're a young professional going into the corporate world you're expected to learn English and that's a huge difference now as well, the expectation level and so that need and the pressure to increase and improve their English level has become that much stronger.

**TEACHER**

What about profit...profit?

**STUDENT 1**

The money I earn or the company earn.

**TEACHER**

Ok earns, Ok good. Resumé?

**STUDENT 1**

A kind of profile when you applying for a company.

**TEACHER**

Ok right.

**VIVIEN**

I pay myself to the course and I want to... I want some day I can give, give a presentation in English with my boss.

**TEACHER**

What about overwhelm?

**STUDENT 1**

I was overwhelmed by the beauty and of this city.

**TEACHER**

I like that, it's a good example.

**IRENE**

For most young people who want to learn English because maybe for two reasons, one their parents urge them to do that because they want their children to be excellent and to be more competitive and for another reason some of the people just like me they love English so they have a great affection for English so they want to learn it.

**BOB**

We are gonna see a massive expansion and continuous expansion of English language, for the rest of China for many more years to come because what we are seeing today, the usage the widespread usage of English is only found in the coastal provinces, on China's eastern coastal provinces. In other words we have many many secondary cities, provincial capitals where students and teachers don't speak English at all. So what we do need is really good English teachers and that's what's missing.

**TIM**

I think certainly for the next ten to fifteen years we can identify the urban elite. They will be the key factor, probably the, you know, maximum 10, 20 per cent of the population already well one hundred to two hundred million people will be at a level where they can communicate fluently. Certainly for us and we believe also for China, the next stage of Chinese development is what we call the second tier cities so these are cities with only a population of five million or so but there's already a minimum of twenty to thirty of these cities across China as well so this is the next stage for us for growth and development as well and that will take us the next five, ten years. We hope to open up to a total of a hundred schools within the next five years or so.

**PUPILS**

(Children chanting)

**NARRATOR**

The demand for English has also led to the establishment of English medium private schools like Camford Royal.

**TEACHER**

Breakfast!

**PUPILS**

Breakfast!

**TEACHER**

Breakfast!

**PUPILS**

Breakfast!

**TEACHER**

But listen, part two listen, tick tock twelve o'clock, its time for...?

**TEACHER**

Ok, lunch.

**PUPILS**

Lunch!

**ZHANG YUTONG**

You know my father don't know English and when I was very young he often taught me that he lost many many valuable chance just because he don't know English, so he don't want to me like him. He wants me to study English well and talk to foreigners, and I will have many chance.

**WEIFANG ZHU**

Parents usually don't speak English well. When they know their kids can speak English they feel fascinated. You know once these parents invited me for dinner with the children and he want to see how their children can speak English. So we kind of talking in English and the parent's kind of watching, observe they'll feel so happy and they feel proud of their children.

**NARRATOR**

A major priority of the school is to enable their students to gain places in foreign universities.

**WEIFANG**

Most of them are highly motivated because their aim is so clear. They have in their mind they want to go to Cambridge and they want to go to Oxford, you know Yale and Harvard, those, the top fifty universities name in their mind, they want to go there.

**CHEN FENG**

China is really such an open country now and Chinese people and the Chinese parents and the Chinese children would love to go to other countries to explore their study, explore their career development.

**LI**

For parents I also think it's a very important, I think we should give my son the chance to go to overseas, specially very developed countries like England and US. So even he wants to go to abroad to study, or course English very important.

**ZHANG**

My dream is go to Cambridge University and I know it's the best university in England and I must come back because I love China.

**ERDONG**

I think I will major in chemistry or physics in university and as for the university I would like to go to maybe MIT.

**NARRATOR**

In the past Camford student's preferred UK universities but today they are increasingly looking to America.

**DR LIU**

I think it's just because the American economy is much more influential compared to the British ones right and also we see it all on films and, well, computer internet, web sites you know which are you know founded or set up by American companies so it's the culture and economical and other kind of you know influence which made it like that.

**NARRATOR**

There is also a growing shift towards American English.

**LI**

When China Daily was started we used British style book, we used British style spelling and we only changed our style a couple of years ago. There was debate over whether we should use American spelling or British spelling but in the end I think the idea for the suggestion for American style, American spelling won.

**TIM**

I think the key change has been the change from the theory until the reality of language learning as well. When I first came to China people were still using Victorian English. When

they were coming in a lot of the language was extremely out-dated and it was very much focussed on traditional language learning techniques but also the traditional learning English.

**TIM**

The key change and especially with the input of the internet is the ability to actually update themselves constantly with the real language, so I think the people who have in English language professors and teachers from China, compared to the students today there's a bit of a cultural gap from that. It's something we try to be sensitive to as well here by having teachers from all across the world and really being very clear that it's a global language.

**YI'AN**

When I was a learner of English the only standard English was a kind of BBC English, the Queen's English but in the nineties there were changes and people began to talk about transatlantic kind of English as our model. Nowadays people know about world English's so the standard is to an extent loosened I feel.

**NARRATOR**

But Chinese people lack the opportunities to practise their spoken English and many language corners have appeared, like this one at the People's University in Beijing, which takes place every week.

**JAMES**

Every Friday they come here spontaneously because this English corner is most popular in Beijing or even around the world because you know you can find these English Corner now even on Wikipedia so this is very famous.

**LANGUAGE STUDENT 1**

And at night you know we can have a beer or something but it's not the crazy club type, its fun.

**LANGUAGE STUDENT 2**

Yeah and opened by your friends with you?

**LANGUAGE STUDENT 1**

Yes. They are my friends, they came from United States, they gonna open this bar next month.

**SU**

We come here to practice our English, spoken English especially and some people speak much more better than the others but they come here to...only to learn and to have fun.

**ANNOUNCER**

Like 'I have a dream', or 'Change, yes we can', yes we can, yes we can'. Those words actually can reach the audience interest then they can know what you are talking about, so they are useful techniques, but the most important thing is, you are right, use your hearts.

**NARRATOR**

There are concerns though that this enthusiasm for English will have a negative effect on the Chinese language.

**BOB**

A lot of linguistic experts in China are seriously worried about it, so for instance in the next edition of the Chinese, official Chinese dictionary are we are going to include all these hundreds of new words directly from English into the new version of the Chinese language dictionary. We don't say like dian shi anymore we say TV. We say DVD, these words didn't exist in our language right even officials today they will say CPR instead of (Communist Republic of China) They will say GDP instead of (Gross Domestic Product) and so that is happening a lot.

**LI**

A lot of people they say that the simplicity of English language may affect people's thinking and writing in Chinese because Chinese is a pretty sophisticated language so now people are writing even simpler language and that they say is a bad influence.

**YI'AN**

Everything has two sides. China's modernisation really needs English. In this sense English is a good force but on the other hand if we are not careful, you see, we might develop English language learning at the expense of the Chinese language learning, the mother tongue. So I see this as danger.

**TEACHER**

Ok, speak loudly Ok, one, two,"A, a", one, two, go...

**PUPILS**

[Chanting] A, a, a, a, B, b, b, b, C, c, c, c, D, d, d, d, E, e, e e

**NARRATOR**

And some fear that the expansion of English may threaten the Chinese identity.

**PUPILS**

[Chanting] W, w, w, w, X, x, x, x, Y, y, y, y, Z, z, z, z.

**BOB**

Well you can't study any language for so long like in my case I've studied English for over thirty years now, without really seeing any deep changes in you, both in the way you look at your own country, the way of thinking exactly, living your lifestyle so everything is different now.

**BOB**

It is causing some kind of identity crisis because you keep asking yourself, you know, is my heart really Chinese now, is my you know, you know psyche my soul completely Chinese now, why I'm thinking like a foreigner.

**YI'AN**

In my view and in many of my colleagues view, actually English is more than natural because language and thought and language and culture are tied to each other inextricably. The learning of English has an impact on the identity of our learners, who you are.