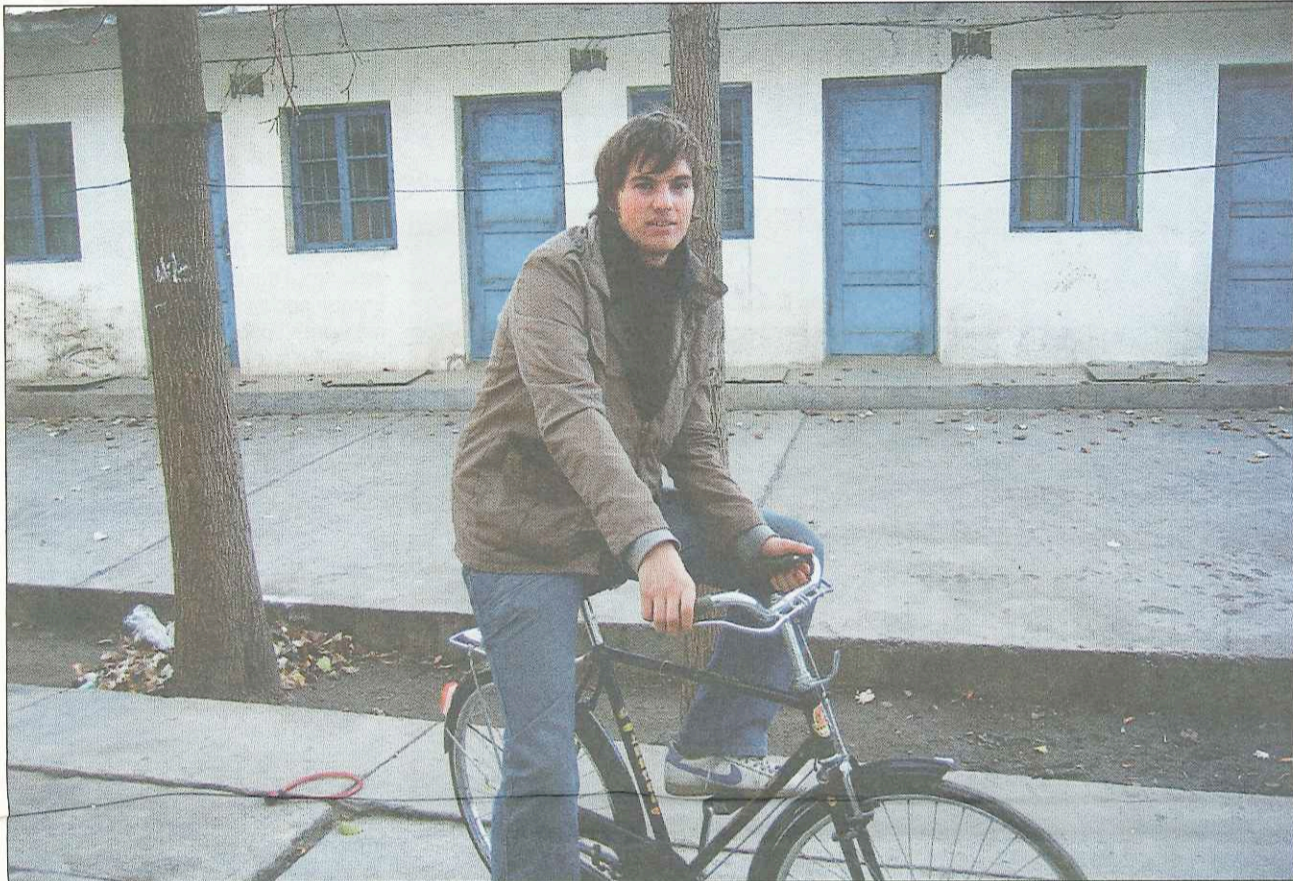


Unsafe abortions

Five million women aged 15-19 have abortions every year, 40 per cent of which are performed under unsafe conditions.

Source: UN World Youth Report 2005



Danish Kristian Holmelund teaches English in China.

Jealous of liberties in the West

Hardworking youngsters need top grades to go abroad or move to the city

By Kristian Holmelund

Young Chinese look for jobs, where they can make a lot of money. To achieve this, they need top grades in school. The students are aware of this, so they are very hardworking. Their final exams are extremely important, and they have no oral examinations. This forces the students to focus on written skills.

A lot of Chinese students dream of going abroad or moving to the modern and industrialized parts of China. But going abroad is very expensive, and getting a visa can prove difficult. Moving around in China is also troublesome. The government controls everything, and people wanting to move to another city need the approval of the local government and their former employer. This means that young people don't have a lot of opportunities and in many cases have to settle for less than they had hoped for.

The Chinese people have a positive attitude towards the West. Foreign investment and businesses mean jobs and better living standards for the average Chinese citizen. They are also very jealous of our liberties in the West. The Chinese public faces a lot of control and regulation from the government. The media are entirely government-owned and therefore subject to censorship.

But most young people and especially students use the internet. Few have inter-

net in their homes, but there are a lot of internet cafes.

The young people mostly listen to Chinese pop music, which is greatly inspired by Western pop music. But some Western artists are very famous in China. The most famous are Michael Jackson and the Backstreet Boys, but Danish groups such as Michael Learns to Rock and Aqua are also extremely popular. The most popular Western song is probably Take me to your heart by Michael Learns to Rock.

Glossary

boom have højkonjunktur
offspring afkom, børn
shopping mall butikcenter
disposable income disponibel indkomst
rural India "på landet i Indien"
decade årti
growth vækst
dormitory sovesal
peasant bonde
agricultural products landbrugsvarer
through mylder, vrimmel
day labourer daglejer
A-levels studentereksamen
dormitory sovesal
annual exam årlig eksamen
oral examination mundtlig eksamen
approval tilladelse
average almindelig
censorship censur

And then I went to China...

Kristian Holmelund is 20 years old. He graduated from "Hjørring Gymnasium" in Denmark in the summer of 2005. Then he went straight to China - to teach.

E-mail interview

Having finished his A-levels at 'Hjørring Gymnasium', Kristian Holmelund started right away as a teacher - not in Northern Jutland, but in China.

He now teaches in the Xinjiang province, 3,500 kilometres west of the capital, Beijing.

»I live in Yining, a city with a population of 400,000, located one hour's drive from the border of Kazakhstan. There are many different minorities in the area, because it is so close to the border. Almost half the population of Xingjiang is Uighur, a Turkish Muslim minority. The mix of cultures makes it a very interesting place. I have been working in Yining for 6 months«.

- What made you go to China?

»An old family friend is doing business in western China. He is building a new international school and helping other Chinese schools finding foreign English teachers. I was asked if I would be interested in teaching English in China for six months or a year.

Travelling to China seemed like a great opportunity and adventure, so the decision was easy. After the 9th grade I spent a year in the United States as an exchange student, so I know what it means to be far away from home and I am comfortable with speaking English«.

»I now teach students of all ages. They range from 6 to 25. Each age has its own challenges. The younger students are noisier and generally harder to teach, because everything has to be at a very basic level of English. Often I ask the young students a simple question, and they answer a completely different one (example: How old are you? - I am fine, thank you). I teach 22 lessons a week in three different schools, and I have a total of almost 700 students in 18 different classes. It makes it impossible to remember any of their names. There are 35-50 students in each class, and you need to be very flexible in your teaching because of their different levels of English«.

- What kind of place do you live in?

»I live in an apartment on the school in campus. It is a three-room apartment with two bedrooms and a living room. The shower is in the hall, and the toilet is literally a hole in the ground. The conditions are pretty good, though, compared to the dormitories for other teachers. There is no kitchen in the apartment. I have to eat out every night. But prices at restaurants are very low, and dinner costs about five Danish kroner«.

- Do you make friends among the Chinese students or teachers?

»The Chinese are very hospitable, so it is easy to make friends. But my circle

of friends is basically limited to Chinese English teachers, because they are the only ones with good English. Sometimes I play basketball with some of the teachers and do other activities where speaking isn't essential. Most of my students are younger than me, and they don't really have any spare time. They go to school all day.

On numerous occasions I have been stopped in the street by people speaking to me in English. They are really interested in practicing their English skills, because they see it as a gateway to a better future. Once a taxi driver invited me to his house to meet his family and have dinner«.

- How would you compare the lives of a Danish student and a Chinese?

»Danish students are very lucky. The students in China live a very tough life. They basically go to school from 9 a.m. till 6 or 7 p.m. A lot of the students come from the countryside, so they live in dormitories on campus. The students living on campus have to attend night classes lasting until midnight. A typical day for a student at the school where I teach begins with lessons from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. They have a lunch break from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m., then a dinner break at 7 p.m. Night classes are from 9 p.m. to midnight. They go to school on every other Saturday and have only Sundays off. The students' future possibilities depend on the results of their annual exams. If they are lucky to get into university, they still have to face an enormous unemployment rate after they graduate«.

This interview was conducted by email.