

The Chinese Contact, Part 3

This is the conclusion of correspondence between Bob Grigg and the director of the film being made by China Central Television, Jing Cao Hu, as well as Chinese government officials and members of the department of education in Guangdong Province. This province is home to both Hong Kong and the former Portuguese colony of Macao, which is on the west bank of the Pearl River due west of Hong Kong. It is also the origin place of the SARS epidemic, which has caused great disruption in our plans and correspondence, as all schools remain closed (as of June, 2003, at least), and economic and social life remain on hold.

From Beijing, Jan. 7, 2003, Hi Bob, Let me tell you the story of Zhu Hai. You got it in your previous letter. It is quite near Hong Kong; in fact it is the neighbor of Macao. (You know both Hong Kong and Macao were handed over to China a few years ago.) There are special cities in China; two of them are Zhu Hai and Shen Zhen. Shen Zhen is the neighbor of Hong Kong. In China they are called a special economic zone, and people need a kind of special passport to go to that area, but it is no big deal! This economic Zone developed very quickly because they got special economic policy from the government, and because of their special locations. Zhu Hai is in Guangdong Province.

A little north of here, on the coast is Fou Chow, the city where the China and French war happened in 1884, when 4 of our boys died.

The thing I said "it is serious for some of the Chinese people to contact with foreigners" is not because of some kind of political factor, but because they are not used to doing this kind of contacting with foreigners. Whenever it happens, they think it is a kind of very big thing; they need to talk about it among themselves before they contact you. And since they need to write it in English, maybe they need to ask someone to write it and have some other 'expert' correct it before you can finally read it. They like your proposal! And Chinese people are very friendly to Americans. Do you have a plan to pay a visit to China again?

I will pay a short business trip to Tianjin, a city near Beijing this afternoon.

Best, Jingcao"

From Beijing, Feb. 22, 2003, Dear Bob, All those ordinary, plain news of Tan at the newspaper in 1870's and 1880's are something earth shaking (I like this expression) for us! Would you please save Tan's story as well as the [title page] of different newspapers? It is shocking when all of them are put together. Jingcao.

Sometime during February I received an e-mail from an unknown source in China which read: "Mr. Bob: I read your letter. I will tell the headmaster of Zhengxiang School to communicate with you. Thank you!" [It was unsigned.]

2-21-2003, from Beijing, I just figured out that the lady who sent you the e-mail is the official who directs the Propaganda Dept. of the Zhu Hai Government. She has great interest in what we are doing, and when I told her of your suggestion for the international contact of the two schools, she was very interested. But I am sorry that they

have not answered your mail until now. Zhu Hai is the most important city of our story in China, since many of our boys came from there, and it is the hometown of Rung Wing, but I must say that most of their interest in what we are doing comes from the fact our work will contribute to their work. (I am sorry to say that.) That's why there is no spontaneous motivation for them to answer your mail as soon as possible. But we know what we want to do is to help those young people to have more chances to know each other! That's very important for the future. Have fun with the snow! Jingcao

2-23-2003, from Beijing, Dear Bob, What you are planning to do with those newspaper clippings is just what we want, Many thanks! And thank you for your long letters everytime. In fact, reading English is much easier than writing and speaking English for me, so do most of the Chinese people.

It comes another busy week. Be happy with your research. Jingcao

March 13, 2003, Zhenxian Primary School, Dear Sir, I am a teacher working at Nanping Zhenxian Primary School. It is my pleasure to get in touch with you. [He then explains about the city and the school.] We have 13 classes with about 700 students and 30 teachers. In our school, pupils are polite and hard working; teachers are qualified and experienced. We try to train our pupils for professions.

Table tennis is a traditional training course in our school. You will find both pupils and teachers love playing table tennis. It would be nice if we could meet and have a competition.

Welcome to our school! I am looking forward to your reply. Zeng Jianwei

It was at this point that the SARS epidemic hit Guangdong Province, and we have yet to reestablish contact with the school.

I will end this series with a reply to my question about her name, as I feel it gives an insite into Chinese culture.

Dear Bob, As for those questions of the spelling of our names. The biggest difference between us is that we put the family name at the very beginning. Take my name as an example. In Chinese, I am called Hu Jing Cao. Hu is my family name; Jing Cao is my name. On my business card you see Jingcao Hu - that is for foreigners. We do that when we introduce ourselves to foreigners, because of your custom of putting the family name at the end. The reason I put Jing Cao together as "Jingcao" is also because of your custom. In China, naming a baby is a big project for the parents, as every word has a very special meaning, and when two words fit together, it means something extra special. Since the foreigners do not know that, we change the spelling of our names to make it easier for them; that's why I put Jingcao together. But literally, Jing means "strong, sturdy", Cao means "grass", so the meaning of my name is "sturdy grass". I was born during the Chinese Cultural Revolution when my parents were sent to the country. My father gave me this name because he wants me to be as strong as grass; grass looks very soft, but it is the strongest plant in the world.