

English Camps Open Door to Gospel in China



Young professionals relax in a bar in Beijing, China. (AP Images/Dima Gavrysh)

Teaching English is a big business in China. According to figures reported in state media, the English-teaching industry was worth 15 billion yuan.

As China emerges as a business giant in the global economy, senior business leaders are required to have fluency in English in order to communicate.

As a result, Erik Burklin with China Partner says: "Many young people, especially teenagers, really want to learn English. One of the motivations for them, of course, is to get wealthy, to get a better job. Many have a dream to someday travel overseas."

Burklin says they've teamed up with Reverend Cai, a pastor with long ties to the ministry. He shepherds a registered church and has taught at a Bible school in Chengdu. But, Burklin says, he felt there was more he could do.

"His passion was to reach out to young people, and one of the ways he could do that was to provide English classes, or what he calls 'Conversational English training.'"

Reverend

Cai also heads a group called Hua Mei International. "Hua" is a Chinese reference to China. "Mei" is the first letter of the Chinese word for "America," hence "Hua Mei"—a China-America partnership between the churches.

Under the auspices of Hua Mei, two-week English camps are held. Burklin explains that "the Chinese church is using this opportunity also, to be a blessing and to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ to these young people."

Burklin goes on to explain that Cai invites Americans and Canadians to help facilitate the camps. "This trip, there were 75 high school and middle school teenagers who came to this particular English camp." He adds that 13 individuals from Colorado and Florida joined him to serve.

The camps provide a group of college-aged teaching assistants who act as translators as the group begins to interact. The interaction often provides opportunities, Burklin says.

"Relationships start to develop, and then you have many chances to share about your personal faith," he explains. "So, you can share the Gospel without being preachy."

This year, Burklin adds: "At the end of our two-week time with this English camp, one of the TA's (teacher assistants/translators) came to one of our teachers saying, 'Can you please help me become a Christian?'" The team

member was able to provide a Chinese-English Bible to the TA. Because of Hua Mei's connection, there are now opportunities for follow-up to the questions.

Burklin says their team treads carefully when it comes to answering the questions, although that's part of the model they're following. In the protocol briefing prior to the trip, "They are very clear that foreign teachers are not to openly share their faith in a classroom setting. However, that is not so much our purpose. I see our purpose of teaching English well to these teenagers as an opportunity to sow the seed of the gospel."

Participants are encouraged always to be ready with an answer to the deeper spiritual questions, because they will be asked. "Last year we did a camp, and actually one of the students accepted Christ after the two-week camp. That happens numerous times."

The end result? The hope of Christ penetrates hand-to-hand. It's also likely that more teams with church-to-church connections between the U.S. and China will form. That's just one more thing that clarifies the mission for China Partner.