

School Profile of Tongzi #1 Middle School (Resided February 2010 - August 2011)

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## The school



There are two high-schools in Tongzi. #1 Middle School and #2 Middle School. I taught at Number 1 middle school.

It's a fairly crowded school with roughly 3100 students, divided into three grades. Many of the students are made up from residents of the small towns and villages around the surrounding country-side.

Each grade has about 16-18 classes. Typically, the Foreign Teachers are each assigned one grade, which means about 16-18 classes a week.

## Classroom



Currently, the classrooms are pretty old-school, basically containing a black-board, a podium, and a sea of students. Each class has about 65-70 students, which makes re-arranging desks to accommodate certain activities largely impossible. There are plans to upgrade classes with more modern facilities, but even without, there are plenty of activities and group-work that can be done without any problems at all.

## Students



Like anything, certain students are more interested than others, but generally the students are awesome. English proficiency also varies from class to class, as students are grouped together based on test scores. Even with the most adept classes I have found it sometimes difficult to keep a class of 70 teenagers active and engaged, but when something works well, it's a great feeling, and having so many students can work to be a huge advantage when doing a competitive activity (peer pressure is a strong motivator). Students love giving gifts and invitations to “go play”. For the first few months, you will never have to feel alone. Personally, the sweetness of the students was the main factor for me staying at the same school for so long.

## Teachers and FAO

Besides the 2 foreign teachers, there are roughly 24 Chinese English teachers at

the school. In my experience, they are all very polite, but very few of them will go out of their way to build a relationship with you, possibly out of fear of losing face. That said, though most of them primarily keep to themselves, there are exceptions, as a couple of my closest friends here have been English teachers.

For the past year my FAO has been a nice, young woman named Sunny. She has a reputation of being one of the best English speakers in town, and is more than capable of answering any questions or fulfilling requests. She mostly serves as a messenger between the head administration and you, as well as dealing with any household or maintenance problems.

While not technically the FAO, another notable member is Mr. Jiang. He is the vice headmaster, and also an English teacher. When dealing with Visa documentation and medical checkups, you will most likely go through him. He is a busy man, but very helpful and kind.



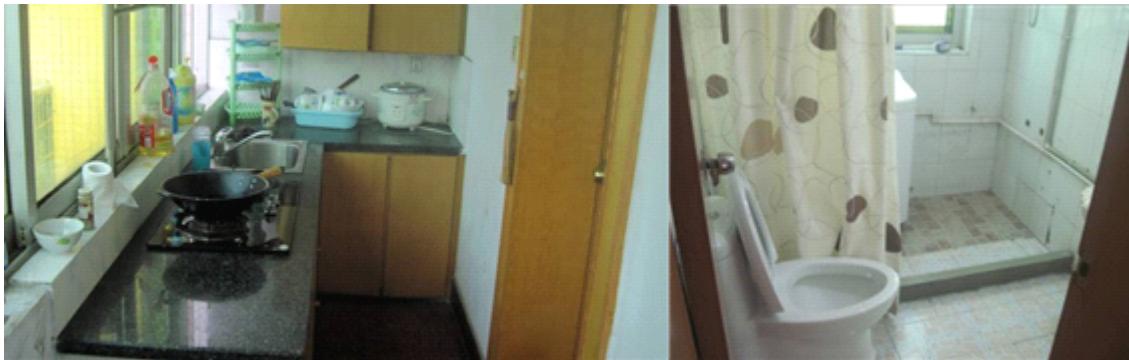
School-sponsored dinners are sporadic, but are always a welcome treat. They almost always involve many "Gan Bei's" and are a jovial time all around. The school tends to hold the foreign teachers in high regard, and in general, I feel like I have been treated very well by the school administration.

## Apartment



By most standards, it's a large apartment. There are two bedrooms, separated by a living room. Attached to one of the bed-rooms is a small but perfectly adequate bathroom. Also there is a long, windowed hallway which connects all the rooms, and also contains the kitchen. There's a wall-mounted air-conditioners in each room, and a fairly big refrigerator. The TV is fine, although of course almost all of the channels are Chinese.

### Kitchen & Bathroom



The kitchen is small but serviceable. It has a gas stove, rice-cooker, and plenty of cabinet space containing all the pots and pans you'll ever need. A nice view of the river, park and mountains while you do dishes isn't bad either.

The bathroom contains a washing machine and the prized western toilet. The water-heater has been recently replaced, and there's no short supply of hot water, although the water pressure itself has been known to be a somewhat... spotty. The novel idea of a shower curtain and divider has also been constructed at the

beginning of the last term, which is a nice touch if you want to avoid a near constantly wet bathroom-floor.

## Building



Most of the building is used as administrative building for the education department. The foreign teacher's apartment are on the top 4th and 5th floor, and the rest of the building is office space. It's located adjacent to the park, and it's only about a 7 minute walk to the school.

There is a courtyard leading to the building, the entrance of which has a gate. Next to the gate is a tiny security house. During the day they usually leave the gate open, but at night it's always best to remember your keys lest you find yourself in the slightly embarrassing position banging on the gate and waking up the security lady/man late at night to be let in.

## Tongzi



Even just in the year and a half of living here I've witnessed dramatic changes in this small town. New shops open every day, and there is a high-rise apartment building soaring into the sky where there was just a pile of trash and rubble mere months before. A fancy shopping area and a couple newly built, posh hotels stand in stark contrast to the dirt and dust of the country-side surrounding the city. For the first 16 months of living here, the nearest place that had a semblance of "foreign" food was in Zunyi, a bigger city about an hour bus-ride away. I Now, there is a bustling, shiny Dico's downtown. Like most places in China, change is happening and it's happening fast.

## People



As rapidly developing as it is though, Tongzi is still very much "small-town China". You will get stared at. You will hear near constant shouts of "Hullo!" and "Laowai!" But if you keep an open mind and a smile on your face, you will find that this is one of the friendliest places on earth. Every store you enter you will find the staff just thrilled to have you there and restaurant owners will try their best to make small talk. Children will follow you around like the Pied Piper. In this little place, everyone knows everyone. Foreigner status goes a long way and it's not difficult to become embarrassed by special treatment.

## Shopping and Nightlife



There are three "clubs" in Tongzi, each barely distinguishable from each other. Insanely loud electro music, alcohol, and occasional in-house entertainment in the form of gussied up singers belting out pop tunes. If you are looking for sensory overload, and constant drinking contests and beer-shots with hyper-friendly fellow patrons, these places are where you want to be.

More low-key options include lounge-stye places which are becoming more popular lately. It seems like every other week a new "milk-tea" bar opens up. And during the summer, the streets are lined with tables, making out-door hanging hugely popular.

For locals looking for-late night fun though, KTV is king in Tongzi. From the top of the range, glassy blinged out hotel KTV's to the hole-in-the-wall places, which amount to a small room with a tv on the wall, this town has it all.

## Surrounding Area





Poor. Rural. Beautiful. Bike riding out into the countryside can be spectacular. Some of the most fun I've had was just choosing a mountain off in the distance and heading for it.

While Tongzi itself is almost completely flat, the town is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Atop these mountains sit a handful of colorful temples. Your students might often invite you to go visit these places, or even have a picnic there. It's a popular pastime for the kids, and a nice thing to do on a day with nice weather.

Also out in the country side are rivers, and swim spots which are amazingly refreshing when the weather gets hot. Xiao Xi Hu and Dai Jia Gou are the most popular spots for the locals to cool off on a warm day.

The pride of Tongzi though, is called Lou Shan Guan. It's a location about 15 minutes away from the city. At this site was a historic battle, and plenty of statues and even a museum have been built there commemorate it. While very little of it is translated to English, Lou Shan Guan is Tongzi's only legitimate "tourist attraction".

## Transportation, Cost of living.



Walking is easiest, as nothing is out of walking distance in Tongzi. But if you are in a hurry, or just feeling lazy, an electric (or non-electric) tricycle-taxi can be had for 2 or 3 Yuan. A real, car-version taxi can also take you anywhere for 4-5 Yuan.

Besides that, the school is obligated to provide a bicycle, which is nice to get outside the city but can be somewhat terrifying riding around town, considering locals seemingly "relaxed" interpretation of traffic laws.

Cost of living is cheap. Almost everything is cheap. Although inflation caused food prices to increase about 1 Yuan over the course of the time I've been here, you will be hard pressed to find a meal over 10 Yuan unless you want to get fancy. I've found that spending lots of money truly is a difficult thing to do here, which is ideal for saving.