

## “Eyes Wide Open” ECBEA Board Visits China

This past October, the directors of the ECBEA board were invited to go over to China by the Confucius Institute of Edmonton along with five elementary school representatives which included principals or their designates teachers from the mandarin bilingual program in the Edmonton Public School system.

For many of us it was our first trip into China and for others on the board, it had been over 20 years since they had been back. It was a very enlightening trip for the members of our board to see how modern and progressive China currently is, in comparison to what our western views were of China before the trip. Our thoughts on China were similar to a group of high school students we had met in Jinan and how their views of North America are . I am hoping that they too will get a chance to come over here and have their eyes open up by what we have here in North America to offer.

During our stay in China we had many opportunities to speak about our association at the Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing; to the Shandong Education Ministry in Jinan, visited the Shandong Experimental High School in Jinan (which will be twinned with ME LaZerte High School ) and then to the Jinan Foreign Language School (which will be twinned with Parkview Junior High School).

Our board members also had a chance to visit the Kildare Elementary School’s twinning school Shandong Experimental Primary School and a visit to Meyonohk’s Elementary School’s twinning school Donfang Bilingual School in Jinan where school twinning agreements were signed by the respective principals. What a momentous occasion and one that the association had the honor to share with our program schools.

At each of these twinning schools we were welcome by the students and staff where we were honoured to received special performances of dance , song and tea ceremony. The hospitality of all of these schools extended to elaborate lunches and dinners, where we were taught about the intricacies of where we sit at a dinner table and the required number of toasts that must be done by the host and co-host and even how to toast. We were certainly made to feel at home in this land thousands of miles away from our own family.

It was at the Jinan Foreign Language School where we encountered these bright and articulate students that spoke very good English. We were all impressed with these students, that had spoken of Shakespeare; the environment and the teachings of Confucius. After talking to them we can see that they were very similar to our children and had dreams of bettering their world thru concerns about the environment and thru the philosophy of Confucius. After this visit and tour of their school with the students it made many board member homesick and longing to be with their own children.

Amongst all of these visits to the schools, the Learning Ministries and CI Headquarters we did squeeze in some site seeing, such as the Great Wall, Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, up the mountain in TaiShan and to Qufu the birth place of Confucius where we had taken in a beautiful cultural performance of Confucius’s life.

It was a great visit and one that the ECBEA board members would like to thank the Confucius Institute of Edmonton for arranging. It gave us an opportunity to see modern China and speak to the education ministries about our association. My memory cards of my digital camera were getting full by the end of our trip, similar to the memories in my head that will last and will stay with us for a long time after the blare of car horns are only a distant memory. This trip to my parent’s homeland was certainly an eye opener for this Canadian born Chinese boy and an affirmation of our children’s distinct advantage in learning the mandarin language in their everyday bilingual school life here in Canada.