

CHINESE CULTURAL GROUP MERTON

AUTUMN 2013

18th October 2013



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Welcome to our Autumn issue and, amidst all the changes in the Chinese Cultural Group Merton, to our terrific and dynamic new Chair, Sissi Wong, who will, no doubt, inject fresh ideas. We are forever grateful to Eugene Byrne for all his indefatigable support and expertise on Chinese culture.

Not to be outdone by Boris Johnson's trade mission in China this week, Paul Hider is trumpeting the British flag quite loudly. Food and literary aficionados would like to immerse themselves with the eclectic Hakka cuisine, Eugene's travelogue, the wonders of rice and Chinese literature. The Taiji Qigong Shibashi is advancing onto an invigorating stage, led by Leonie Tarratt. Other forthcoming events are the British Museum visit, Chinese art exhibition, Chinese opera, Christmas party, and the popular Chinese New Year banquet in February 2014.

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Word from the Chair-Sissi Wong

First let me express my gratitude to our former Chairman, Mr Eugene Byrne, for his hard work in leading the group successfully since October 2010. As you know, Eugene took early resignation as Chair due to health reasons although he will continue to be an active Committee member and give talks on Chinese culture.

I am deeply honoured to have been selected as the Chairperson of the Group after serving on the Committee during what was a very enjoyable year. I must admit I was truly stunned when I learnt about my nomination. However, I feel privileged to take on this position and lead this well-established group.

I would never have had this opportunity if it was not for Helen Marti who introduced me to this group when she realised my passion and interest in Chinese culture. I am also very lucky and hugely

grateful to have the committee members and Eugene giving me all their guidance and providing me with unreserved support for this role. We should be proud that our group has a very strong committee, a band of enthusiastic and loyal members, and the generous support of the Wimbledon Guild.

As many of you already know me, I am Chinese and I come from Hong Kong. I am a trained Chinese language tutor teaching both Cantonese and Mandarin privately. I do voluntary work regularly for the Guild, as well as providing occasional administrative cover for the office at the Wimbledon Counselling Service. Previously, I worked at the local NHS Trust Head Office for over 10 years as a key member of the administrative staff.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me via our email: chineseculturalgroup@gmail.com



Flying The Flag

I wonder what you think is the flag most commonly seen around Kunming city – on bags, clothes, shoes, mopeds, cars and notebooks? The Chinese flag? The Stars and Stripes? The Soviet hammer and sickle? Nope – it's the Union Jack. By far. You actually see more British flags than all other countries' flags put together. I asked some of my students why, and got some interesting answers – the colours go together well, the design is different from all other flags, there are a lot of famous British designers who like to use the flag-even that the shape spells out the character for rice (飯)!



Generally, Britain, and the British, are viewed very positively by the Chinese. Americans are often stereotyped as loud and aggressive (though most young people yearn to travel there for study and jobs), the Japanese as evil and untrustworthy (WW2 rumbles on) and Africans, probably due to years of one-sided media coverage, as lazy and unhygienic. In contrast, the British are invariably referred to as a "polite" and "gentlemanly" people. This, and the popularity of the Olympics and Premiership football, must also be contributing reasons why the

Union Jack is so often used for decoration. It seems the Opium Wars and similar one-sided dealings with China have been largely forgiven and forgotten!

Please

請

Qǐng

Thank you

謝謝

Xièxiè

I had a chat about politeness with my (Chinese) wife the other week, after a day when I felt I was being taken for granted. Why do I never get a "please" or a "thank you" anymore, I enquired, let alone a "sorry"? There are certainly Chinese words for "please" and "thank you", but they are not often heard in public. "It's because you are family" she explained. Family and close friends are expected to do their duty for each other without the need for overt requests or acknowledgements. Jiajia argued that were she to "please" and "thank you" everything I do, she would be treating me like a stranger. It's a cultural difference that I struggle with, and sometimes fight against. I'm still unwilling to receive change from a shop assistant without a "xièxiè", but I'm pretty resigned now to helping out around the house without receiving the formal politeness I was raised to expect.

Hakka Cuisine 客家美食

by Jacques K. Lee

(His latest book, a novella, *The Sugar Baron's Women*, is available from Amazon)

In the last article I wrote about our origin and our dialect, currently spoken by some 90-100 million Chinese worldwide. In this issue I'll describe our cuisine: are there any differences between ours and the food eaten in the rest of China?

History has shown us that Chinese people as a race can endure intolerable levels of hardship, extreme manual labour in far away foreign lands and long family separations. One thing they can't do without, however, is their traditional food.

One thing Chinese used to have in common was that, after they had settled in a new country, at the first opportunity, they'd plant vegetable seeds that they'd brought with them. Having fresh ingredients with which to prepare their traditional dishes was all-important to them.

Those of us who live in the UK don't have to worry about such things. As far as the Hakkas are concerned, however, the food served in Chinese restaurants in London and elsewhere is not all what we're used to. The original owners of these eateries were mostly from Hong Kong, who hailed from Guangdong Province. Their cuisine is therefore mainly Cantonese.

Since China opened up to tourism, we've discovered that the food in different regions of that vast country isn't all the same. It varies according to where it originates from: the climate, the ingredients available, local preferences, all are responsible, down to the techniques of preparing them. The main ones which have become the most popular include Cantonese, Sichuan, Shandong, just to name a few.

Hence it's not surprising that Hakka cuisine has also developed a gastronomy that's quite distinctive. It consists partly of the way of cooking assimilated during the 'long migration of 2,000 years' through so many regions. We have also had to change from a staple food mainly of flour in the North to that of rice in the South.

Owing to being on the move for so long, our

ancestors had had to look after their own health, which accounts for many of our traditional food and cakes containing medicinal herbs, which also ensures that hot balances cold. These are eaten to this day for our well-being as well as to satisfy hunger. It may interest readers to know that new Hakka immigrants arriving in Mauritius only half a century ago wouldn't eat uncooked food, such as salad.



Hakka Lei Cha, a nutritious herbal drink

http://www.whatsonxiamen.com/wine_msg.php?titleid=1372

Over the centuries the Hakkas have perfected different ways of preserving food, such as drying, pickling, salting and fermenting. Some processes require no cooking or doing it with the minimum of fire and oil, such as cooking in the ground and preserving "100-year-old" eggs.

Some typical ingredients of ours are not even used by Chinese from other parts of China, such as kiuk, kojie red rice, used in making the dish foong moon choo niuk and essential in the making of rice wine.

In our parents' days in Mauritius, Chinese wives had to know how to make *niang* wine. This is cooked with chicken and chopped root ginger and used to be eaten three times a day for a month by women who have given birth. It's believed to replenish all that a woman loses during confinement. It's well known that many husbands also partake of this delicious nourishment - only for medicinal purposes, of course.

Continued on page 4

Quotes from Confucius (551–479 BC)



You cannot open a book without learning something.

A great man is hard on himself. A small man is hard on others.

It is not the failure of others to appreciate your abilities that should trouble you, but rather your failure to appreciate theirs.

The hardest thing of all is to find a black cat in a dark room, especially if there is no cat.

In a country well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.

Continued from Page 3

Hakka cuisine, a distinctive gastronomy

A by-product of this glutinous rice wine is *chow*, an essential ingredient in all Hakka households, used to flavour vegetable dishes and various soups.

Today many of our traditional dishes are still based on preserved vegetables, stewed meat and fried items, eg *ham choy kon*, *niuk piang*. Owing to our former agrarian life style, our cuisine is also more savoury than sweet.

Hakkas living in SW London who have 'forgotten' how to prepare our traditional dishes need not despair. Dalchini restaurant in Wimbledon Park specialises in Hakka cuisine. In Central London there are now a couple of similar restaurants but they're rather on the expensive side.

Our ancestors considered anything round in shape as symbolic of reunion. When relatives gathered from different parts of the country at special events, they sat at a round table to eat traditional fare. Many of these, and the various cakes eaten at festival times, are also round in shape. Even traditional Hakka houses were circular.

(Hakka architecture will be the subject of my next article).

Correction: *The photo used to illustrate my article in the last issue had the caption 'Hakka farmers in Mauritius'. The men at work may well be Hakka but Chinese immigrants in Mauritius did not work in the fields but in shops. Judging by the crops being worked on and the buildings in the background, the photo could have been taken somewhere in Guangdong.*

Jacques K. Lee



Jenny Yan, a student member of LJKOA, performing Kunqu opera

London Jing Kun Opera Association will stage a Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera Recital with English and Chinese subtitles at Islington Chinese Association, 21 Hatchard Road, London N19 4NG on 7th December 2013, 2.00-4.45 p.m. (Nearest tube station: Archway, Northern Line and 8 minutes' walk)

Entrance: Free-of-charge/small donation welcome at the door after the event

V & A Museum: Masterpieces of Chinese Painting AD700 - 1900

From 26th October 2013 to 19th January 2014, the Victoria and Albert Museum will exhibit over 70 works of the finest examples of Chinese painting, from small-scale intimate works by monks and literati through to a 14 metre-long scroll painting, from AD700 to AD1900. Admission £12.00.

For more details: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/masterpieces-of-chinese-painting/about-the-exhibition/>

A Memorable Train Journey by Eugene Byrne

I have read in the press that a new high-speed train, with its streamlined rolling stock, runs from Guangzhou to Beijing at a speed of 300 km per hour, taking 8 hours to complete a 2,298 km journey, despite 34 stops on the way. In 1985 I made the same journey (actually from Shenzhen) by steam train, stopping only once, halfway, but it took two days and a night in between.

I was travelling with a group of English students to a one-month Mandarin summer course at *Renmin Daxue*, the People's University. In those days the carriages in the more expensive section consisted of four-bunk compartments that opened on to a corridor running the length of the carriage. The bunks were spartan but adequate, and in the corridor were tip-up seats on which you could sit and watch the passing scene. I shared my compartment with three lively young students from Yugoslavia who were returning from a summer holiday to do their second year of Mandarin at Beijing University, in which language they talked to each other and with me and only afterwards did it occur to me that they probably came from the different countries, with their different languages, that made up Tito's Yugoslavia at that time. They had no English so Mandarin was probably the only language that we all had in common.

I spent most of my time sitting in the corridor to watch the changing countryside that provided a fascinating illustration for the Chinese geography set book (printed in Beijing) that I had just finished studying in my O Level. We started with the paddy fields in the deep South that helped me to understand later on why the Mongol invaders from the steppe in the thirteenth century had found it so difficult to reach so far on their ponies. There was the farmer in his large straw hat, trousers rolled up,



<http://www.greenpeace.org/eastasia/multimedia/slideshows/food-agriculture/china-rice-paddy-fields/china-paddy-field-rice11jpg/>

standing knee-deep in the water to tread down the weeds, for this was the two-crops-a-year rice area. Watching him was the inevitable village small boy with a stick, guarding a water buffalo...

In a previous issue I reproduced some comments made by Elisabeth Scurfield in her *Teach Yourself Chinese*, about the Chinese openness with strangers in discussing their personal circumstances. On this occasion, however, I met an exception that proved the general rule. Sitting opposite me in the corridor was an athletic-looking young man in an open-necked shirt and jean-type trousers. He spoke Mandarin and we chatted. At one point I asked him, what was his job. He took a gaze through the window, finally repeated "My job?" (*Wo de gongzuo?*) and changed the subject. I could only sense from this that he was probably a plain clothes member of the *Gong'anju* (Public Security Bureau i.e., the police) and did not wish to share this information with a foreigner. So I did not press the question.

Finally we reached the less tropical one-crop-a-year area, when suddenly we all jumped up excitedly shouting at each other, as we traversed the mighty bridge across the Yangtze at Wuhan. Then on to the cereal crops country up to Beijing.

Wang Wei 王維 (AD699-759) was as a Tang Dynasty Chinese poet, musician, painter, and statesman.

紅豆生南國，春來發幾枝？

願君多採摘，此物最相思。

One Hearted

When those red beans come in springtime,
Flushing on your southland branches,
Take home an armful, for my sake,
As a symbol of our love.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Wei_\(8th-century_poet\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Wei_(8th-century_poet))

Did you know that as a cereal grain with the second-highest worldwide production, after maize, rice (*Oryza sativa*) is the main staple food in the Asia Pacific region where 56% of humanity lives, producing and consuming more than 90% of the world's rice? The Chinese traditionally believe that "the precious things are not pearls and jade but the five grains," of which rice is the first followed by barley, wheat, millet and beans. Food security, growing, selling, and eating rice are fundamental to many cultures. The rice products are used for fuel, thatching, industrial starch, and artwork.



Genetic evidence has shown that rice originates from a single domestication 8,200–13,500 years ago, in the Pearl River valley region of China. Rice was introduced to Europe through Western Asia, and to the Americas through European colonization. African rice has been cultivated for 3,500 years. However, it never developed from its original region of Niger River Delta, and was taken over by the Asian species in the early Common Era spreading from East Africa.

The varieties of rice in the form of long, medium and short-grain rice and culinary preferences tend to vary regionally. Wild rice (*Zizania aquatic*) and rice are close cousins, and are both gluten-free. In the Far East or Spain, people prefer softer and stickier varieties, e.g. steamed sticky glutinous rice with chicken (Lo Mai Kai 糯米鸡), fanciful sushi rolls, and



seafood and chicken paella. China's rural culture has developed around the growing of rice e.g. the Spring Festival marks the start of the rice cultivation season. In some cultures, rice is considered so sacred that it is served as the main part of the meal and cooked as plainly as possible. The aromatic rice with distinct aromas and flavours are Thai fragrant rice, Basmati, Patna rice, Vietnamese fragrant rice, and Texmati, a hybrid cultivar from America. Studies have shown that

pigments in only red and black rice varieties may offer nutritional benefits such as in lowering the cholesterol levels. However, rice kernels do not contain vitamin A leading to risk of vitamin A deficiency. In the East, rice is eaten with foods and sauces made from the ubiquitous soya bean which is rich in protein (containing essential amino acids), fats, calcium, vitamins A & E, and fatty acids. Rice and rice products contain arsenic, a known poison and carcinogen, but rice from Thailand and India contain the least arsenic among rice varieties according to one study. Cooked rice can contain *Bacillus cereus* spores. When storing cooked rice for use the next day, rapid cooling is advised to reduce the risk of toxin production.

Significant losses post-harvest at the farm are due to poor infrastructure, the lack of proper storage and retail network, pests, diseases and birds. The stability of the rice production is linked to social and political stability of the Asian-Pacific countries. In recent years, due to global warming and droughts, the production of rice has decreased. The increased use of grains for animal feed, US subsidies for bio-fuel production and rising oil and petrochemical prices have led to increased prices of the commodity, thus compounding poverty and hunger in developing countries. Furthermore, China encounters less land available for utilization and development, limited water resources, migration of labour to urban areas and less modern technology. To address the issue of feeding the world's ever-growing population, particularly in Asia, scientists are developing high-yielding varieties with the use of nitrogen fertilisers and intensive crop management particularly for cultivation in Africa and other dry ecosystems. Their research covers genetically modified rice which will have beneficial effects on health and resistance to pests. It also covers the utilisation of more advanced and efficient technology in the management of water and irrigation systems.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice>

CCGM PROGRAMME: November 2013-March 2014

All meetings are conducted in English for anyone interested in Chinese culture at the Guild House, 30 – 32 Worples Road SW19 4EF, on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, beginning at 3.30 p.m. with 45 minutes of Taiji Qigong Shibashi exercises followed by a talk or activity. £3.00 per session (Tea & refreshments included). £5.00 for annual membership from 1st April to 31st March.

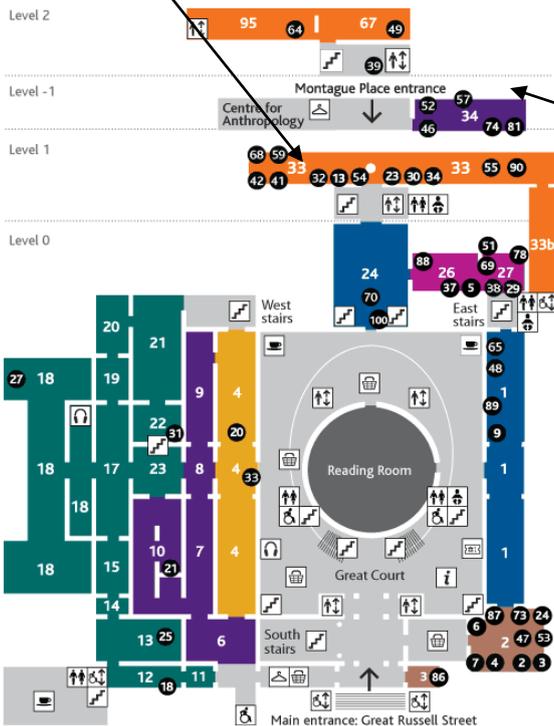
Leonie Tarratt will continue with Taiji Qigong exercises once a month and lead a specific type of Taiji for treatment/prevention of arthritis, back pain, diabetes, and a special variation for over 55's. We will celebrate the Year of the Horse with a Chinese banquet at Man's Chinese Restaurant, 92-96 Coombe Lane, London SW20 0AY on 4th February 2014 at 1.00 p.m. Price yet to be agreed, but tickets will be available from the Treasurer. In the meantime please contact Helen Marti for further details and bookings on 020 8946 0735.

Date	Time	Programme	Speaker
5 th November 2013	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Mahjong session	Helen Chiew Paul Wong
19th November 2013	10.30 a.m. Meet Christine Evans at Wimbledon Station	Visit to British Museum- Please meet Eugene Byrne at the The Joseph E Hotung Gallery - China, South Asia and Southeast Asia (Room 33) at 11.30 a.m. See more information on page 8.	Eugene Byrne Christine Evans
3 rd December 2013	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi The Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, Part 2.	Leonie Tarratt Eugene Byrne
17 th December 2013	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Christmas Celebration with Carol Singing	Alex Roney Ivy Salvage Sissi Wong
Merry Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous New Year -2014			
7 th January 2014	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Beautiful Guilin, former capital of Guangxi Province	Leonie Tarratt Sissi Wong
21 st January 2014	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Lao She, a Modern Chinese novelist The life and work of Lao She (1899-1966), a modern novelist and incidentally a SOAS (London) alumnus.	Eugene Byrne
4th February 2014	1 pm: Lunch at Man's Chinese Restaurant	Chinese New Year Celebration-The Year of the Horse 馬年賀歲午餐	Sissi Wong
18 th February 2014	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi Lantern Festival	Leonie Tarratt
4 th March 2014	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi With the Japanese in Shanghai: 1940 A living witness of history: Maureen Bird will describe her vivid memories as a child of living with her parents under the Japanese in Shanghai in 1940. Her talk will be introduced by Eugene Byrne with a brief recap of the historical background.	Eugene Byrne
18 th March 2014	3.30-5.30 pm	Taiji Qigong Shibashi	Leonie Tarratt

A Visit to the British Museum by Eugene Byrne -19th November 2013

On 19th November 2013, Eugene Byrne will guide us through the history of Chinese civilization in classical times in the British Museum's Joseph E Hotung Gallery, where he used to be a voluntary tour guide.

The tour, which will last about 50 minutes, will take us from prehistoric times to the Qing Dynasty (to AD1910) especially the colourful and productive dynasties in between. Artefacts ranging from jade stones, ceramics, bronze vessels to the teachings of Buddha, Confucius and Laozi which promoted Chinese philosophies and culture are on display at the museum. Please meet Christine Evans at Wimbledon Station at 10.30 a.m. Meet Eugene Byrne at 11.30 a.m. in the Hotung Gallery – China, South and Southeast Asia – (Room 33) situated on the first floor at the rear of the Museum. See map below. Free entrance. There is a lift. To confirm that you are coming with the group, please give your name to Helen Marti on 020 8946 0735 by Tuesday 12th November.



British Museum, Great Russell Street

London WC1B 3DG

Alternative entrance on Montague Place

Tube: Tottenham Court Road, Holborn,
Russell Square, Goodge Street

We welcome your contributions and feedback, and would love to hear from you about Chinese culture, history, food and contemporary events. Please email to chineseculturalgroup@gmail.com or contact Helen Marti relating to any queries on Chinese activities. Check <http://issuu.com/ccgm/docs> for our archive files.

Chrysanthemum (Juhua 菊花)

The chrysanthemum is a symbol of autumn and the flower of the ninth moon. It is also a symbol of longevity because of its health-giving properties. During the Han dynasty (206BC- AD220), chrysanthemum wine was drunk on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in order to prolong their life. Nowadays, the Chinese continue to drink chrysanthemum petal tea for its health giving qualities.

Visit to Royal Pavilion -16th July 2013 By Alex Roney

It was perhaps unfortunate that we chose the hottest week of the year for our trip to Brighton! Sadly only two members accompanied me to visit the Royal Pavilion - but we were the lucky ones! Cool, air conditioned trains from Clapham Junction sped us to BRIGHTON. A swift bus ride, and a short walk through pretty gardens and we were there looking at the gilded opulence. Lovely cool building with surprisingly cosy corners, magnificent fittings, and Chinese dragons galore. We explored it for two hours, had lunch, then took a short walk to look at some lovely planted gardens, and the sea, cooled all the time by the sea breeze. A crowded esplanade persuaded us it was sadly time to go home to miss the rush hour. We emerged on to Clapham Junction to be met by a wall of heat! You who did not come really missed a treat!

Chinese Cultural Group Merton

Guild House, 30/32 Worples Road

Wimbledon, London SW19 4EF

**For more information, contact
Helen Marti, CCGM secretary**

on 0208 946 0735 (Tues/Thurs)