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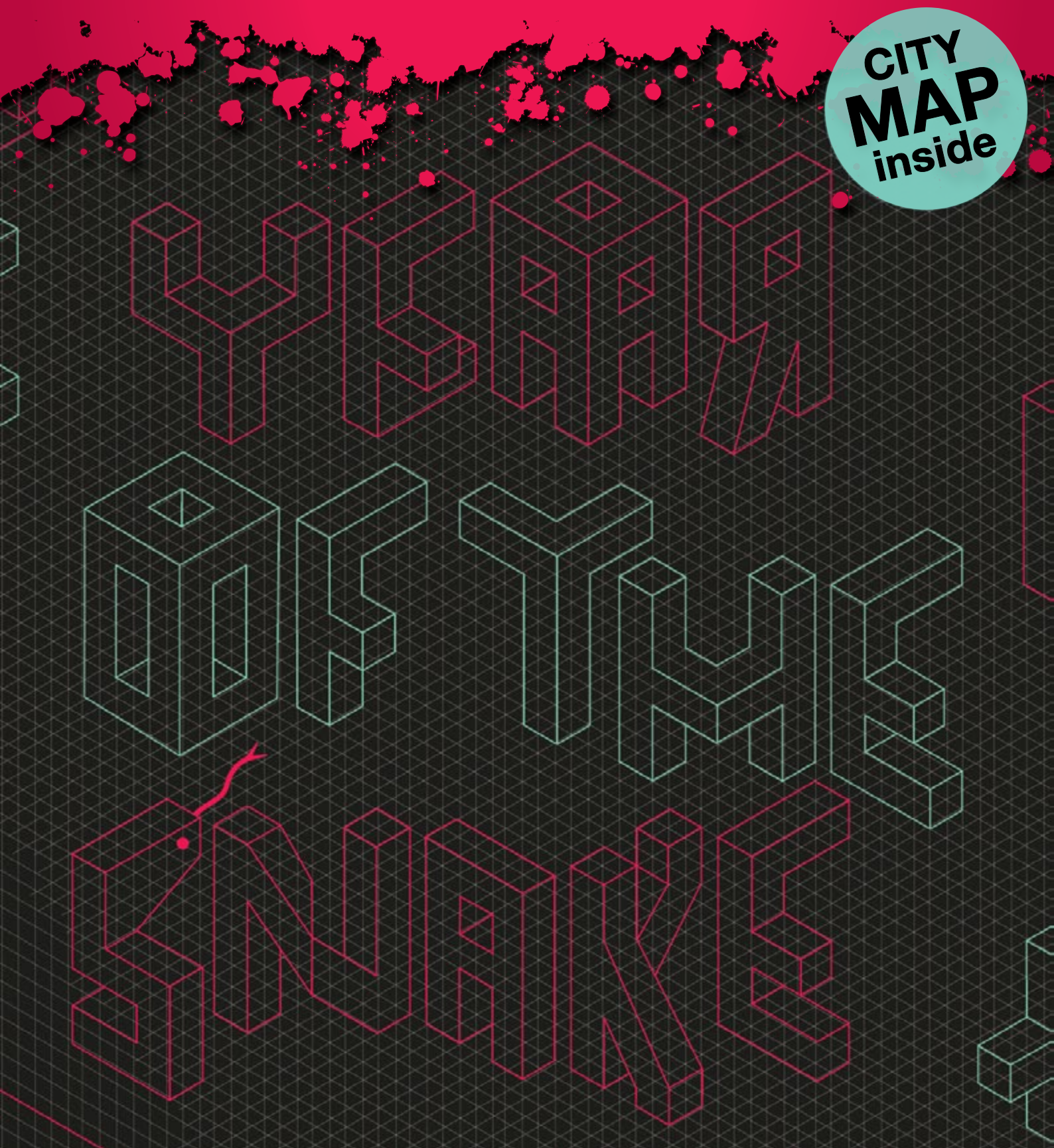
CITYLIFE

062

FEB 2013

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18:00~Dinner Time,

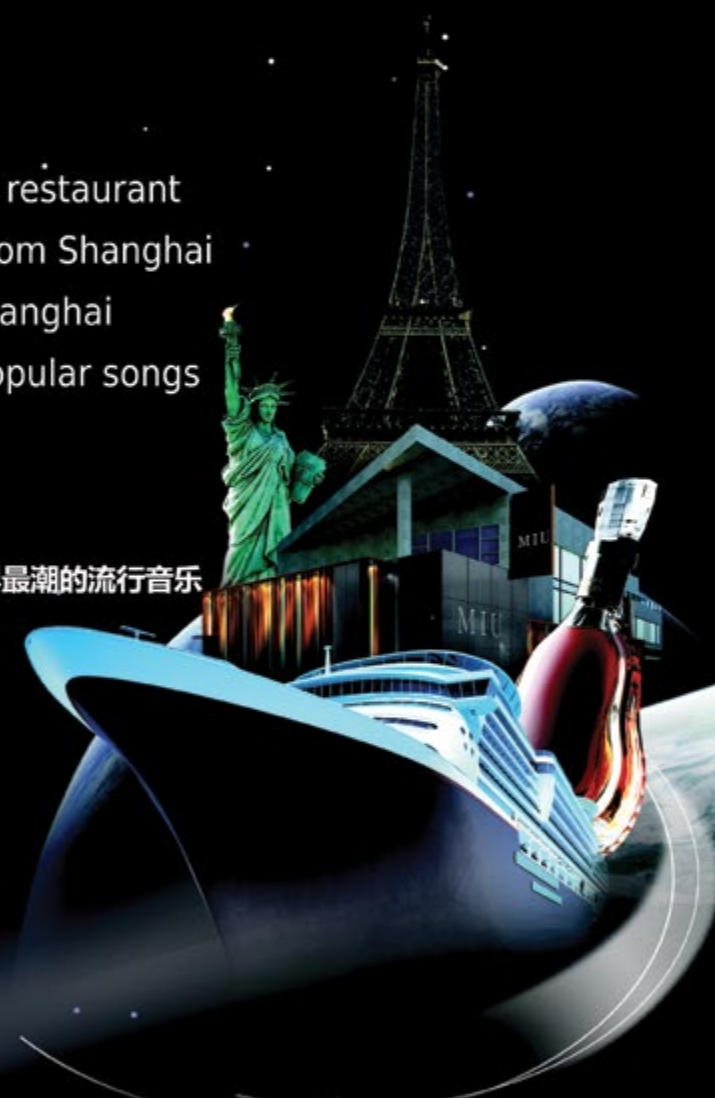
19:00~Happy hour, lounge\Jazz\Country

21:00~Club Time, 中国最好的Live Band\以及来自世界最潮的流行音乐

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Spring Festival Knowledge

the beauty and subtlety of the Chinese couplet

By Lucy Wang



Leading up to spring festival, you probably noticed that your some of your neighbors' doorways were decorated with red paper banners. These banners feature Chinese couplets printed in black or gold and are pasted in doorways before the new year and taken down afterward, creating a festive atmosphere for the holidays.

Generally, you will see two banners hung vertically and one hung horizontally above those. In the center of these three, you might see a large character, 福 (fú), which represents good fortune. The vertical banners are printed with couplets known as 春联 (chūnlián), and they are one kind of the more general Chinese couplet (对联/duìlián). The horizontal banner at the top features a 对联.

The history of the Chinese couplet can be traced back thousands of years, and like Tang-dynasty poetry, Chinese couplets are considered to be subtle and deep. Couplets follow a set structure: Each consists of two lines of verse, the "head" and the "tail," which correspond with each other in part of speech, phonology and syntax, word for word and phrase for phrase. The themes of the verses suggest good luck and wishes for happiness.

In ancient China, those who wished to become officials for the emperor were required to take a couplet-writing exam. In such exams, the first line (the head) would be provided, and the examinee would be required to write the second line (the tail) according to his wit—and, of course, to the rules of couplet writing.

A few common rules for Chinese couplets:
1. The number of characters used in each line

must be identical.

2. The part of speech must be the same. For example, if the first word in the first line is a noun, then so must be the first word of the second line. Noun for noun, verb for verb, adjective for adjective.

3. The meaning should be relevant. If the first line is about good luck, so should the second line.

4. The sounds must be coordinated.

These are the basic rules; there are some other small details that people may not be so strict with these days.

Here's an example:

一帆风顺年年好, 万事如意步步高
yīfānfēngshùn nián nián hǎo, wànshìrúyì bù bù gāo
(Best wishes year after year; fly higher step by step.)

Let's see if it follows the above rules. The first part of the first line (一帆风顺) is an idiom, and the first part in the second line (万事如意) is also a idiom. Also, they both have similar meanings—all the best, hope everything works out in the best way. 年年 means year after year, 步步高 means step after step. 好 is an adjective that means good, and 高 is also an adjective, and it means high—and the two characters rhyme.

All correct, right? Subtle? Absolutely. We've got something even better.

There is one super classic and subtle Chinese couplet—a "character for character" couplet. The whole couplet is only two characters. The first line is 墨 (mò/ink), and the second line is 泉 (quán/springs). No clue what that means?

There is no obvious connection between ink and springs. But take a look at the characters themselves: 墨 consists of two components, 黑 (hēi/black) and 土 (tǔ/soil), and 泉 consists of two components, 白 bái and 水 shuǐ. 白 and 黑 are both colors, and total opposites. And 土 and 水 are both part of the five elements held by the ancients and used in traditional Chinese medicine.

There are numerous well-known couplets in Chinese. I'll leave some them here, so grab your e-dictionary and enjoy digging the subtlety and beauty in them! And maybe you can come up with some English couplets better than "Study hard, work hard, make money more and more. Eat well, sleep well, have fun day by day."

书山, 学海
shū shān, xué hǎi

水底月, 镜中花
shuǐ dǐ yuè, jìng zhōng huā

东南西北, 春夏秋冬
Dōng nán xī běi, chūn xià qiū dōng

翱翔一万里, 来去几千年
áo xiáng yī wàn lǐ lái qù jǐ qiān nián

岂能尽如人意, 但求无愧我心
Qǐ néng jìn rú rén yì dàn qiú wú kuì wǒ xīn

五湖四海皆春色, 万水千山尽得辉
Wǔ hú sì hǎi jiē chūn sè, wàn shuǐ qiān shān jìn dé huī

5 Spring Festival Traditions You've Never Heard Of

and five more that you probably know

By Coco Feng



Maybe you spent Spring Festival huddled in your fat alone and away from the fireworks, or maybe you spent it inside a family home watching the CCTV gala, or maybe you were outside the country altogether. Regardless of how you spent it, understanding all the nuances of the holiday celebrations can be a daunting task. Here are some of the Spring Festival traditions that are commonly observed in Sichuan and other parts of China, listed chronologically.

You may know > 小年 (xiǎonián/"Small Spring Festival")
New Year's Eve falls on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month (February 3 in 2013), and it's known as the "Small Spring Festival." On this day, preparations for the new year, including a thorough cleaning of the home, shopping for new year decorations and gifts, and preparing food for the new year. It's a busy time for domestic activities.

But do you know this? This year, 立春 (lìchūn/the start of spring) occurred before the first day of the new year, making the lunar year 2013 a "blind year" (盲年/máng nián) or "widow year" (寡妇年/guǎfu nián). Just as the name implies, it is considered unlucky to get married in such years, so unlike in some years, people aren't rushing to the marriage office.

You may know > Shower for the new year
When all the preparations are almost finished but before the lunar new year, on the 27th or 28th day of the twelfth lunar month, it is time to take a shower and get a haircut. These acts symbolize washing away all the bad things of the previous year and welcoming good fortune in the new year.

But do you know this? Another reason for getting a haircut in the last few days of the old year is that getting a haircut in the first month of the lunar new year is considered unlucky. There's a saying that on February 2, the dragon raises its head (二月二, 龙抬头/lèryuè èr, lóng táitóu). As the dragon is the holy animal in the ancient Chinese mythology, people go for a haircut on that day for a good omen. It's better to keep your hair intact before that.

You may know > 年夜饭 (niányèfàn/new year's eve dinner)
Here in Sichuan, the new year eve dinner tables usually boast offerings richer than just dumplings, which is more of a northern tradition. Fish is a must, usually steamed in clear soup, as are chicken-broth, homemade ham and sausages, fried crispy pork, pork hock in brown sauce, eight-treasure rice pudding, and more.

But do you know this? Before the new year eve's dinner, a sacrifice ceremony is held to honor the family's ancestors. Offerings are made of incense, candles, a kilogram or two of joss paper, alcohol and sacrificial food, including a small bowl of cooked rice and some cooked meat. Traditionally, joss papers were made in small workshops with very simple tools that are very rare nowadays. The craftsman used a special type of paper with a crepe-like texture so that it would burn easily and thus be "sent" to the deceased. The papers are divided into dozens of small, even piles and wrapped up in white wrapping papers, upon which is written in black calligraphy to whom the money should go, from who, the total number of the packages, and the exact send date. Then, they are piled up like a maze, together with the other offerings. Family members, in turn, report their achievements of the old year and make wishes for the new while adding joss papers to the fire. Only after all this is done does the new year's eve dinner begin.

You may know > 拜年 (bài nián/visits to friends and relatives on the first few days of lunar new year)
From the first day of the lunar new year (大年初一/dànián chūyī), people visit their friends and relatives to pass along greetings and gifts.

But do you know this? Similar to the aforementioned taboos against showering and haircutting, on this day, dusting and sweeping the floor are not advised. Everything, including dust, dirt, and trash, should be kept inside the house on the first day of the lunar new year. By so doing, you can keep your fortune in the new year. Traditionalists also avoid cooking rice on this day; in Sichuan dialect, the word for cooked rice (饭) is pronounced the same as the word for offend (犯), which is inauspicious. People tend to eat sesame-paste glutinous rice balls (汤圆 tangyuan) or noodles instead.

You may know > 元宵节 (yuánxiāojié/Lantern Festival)
The Lantern Festival falls on the 15th of the first lunar month. Old traditions for this day including eating sweet glutinous-rice balls called *yuanxiao* or *tangyuan*, going to lantern displays at local parks, and watching performances such as dragon dances or stilt walking.

But do you know this? Young people in suburbs and the countryside have fun on the day of the Lantern Festival by stealing vegetables from nearby fields. The activity, called "stealing the green" (偷青), was, in more conservative days, a good chance to make friends with people of the opposite gender. The "thieves" often steal firewood too, in order to cook their "trophies" in the field like a picnic. The belief goes that the harder the farmers curse, the better the luck that befalls the thieves.

Timeline of Major Spring Festival Events

Event	Date in 2013	Date in 2014	What Happens
Chunyun (春运/the Spring Festival mass migration) begins (approximate date)	February 6	January 27	People all over the country return home. All transportation systems are jammed with people—better stay away from the airports, inter-city bus stations, train stations, and any other vital transportation hubs.
Chuxi (除夕/Lunar New Year's Eve)	February 9	January 30	Any shops that are still open close early in the afternoon on this day, and it's hard to get cabs. Best to do your shopping beforehand so you can stay at home and watch the biggest of the fireworks displays.
Chuyi (初一/First Day of Lunar New Year)	February 10	January 31	Major shopping outlets like supermarkets reopen, but most remain closed.
Chunyun return begins (approximate date)	February 14	February 4	Workers start their return trips. A second strain on the transportation system. Things gradually go back to normal over the following days.
Lantern Festival (元宵)	February 24	February 14	Go to the park to see the displays and eat <i>tangyuan</i> at home.
Last day of zhengyue (正月), the first month of the lunar new year	March 11	February 28	Marks the official end of the Spring Festival.



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Bookworm International Literary Festival Special

Every year since 2008, the Bookworm has brought to us the country's largest English-language literary event. The weeks-long International Literary Festival features a lineup of author talks and readings, workshops, panel discussions and poetry performances with highly acclaimed figures in literary circles in China and abroad. Events are held simultaneously in the Bookworms in Chengdu, Beijing, and Suzhou, and audiences always seem to leave the events a little more informed, entertained, or inspired. Two of this year's speakers, the Chengdu-based authors Jen Lin-Liu and Derek Sandhaus, spent some time talking with us before the festival. For complete event listings, see our calendar, opposite, or <http://chengdu.bookwormfestival.com>. Plus, keep an eye out on GoChengdoo.com for special announcements and ticket giveaways.

Jen Lin-Liu

After five years of working as a journalist in Beijing, American Jen Lin-Liu decided to enroll in cooking school in 2005. The experience wasn't quite what she had been hoping for, but she earned her certificate and began apprenticing in restaurants. Her first book, *Serve the People: A Stir-Fried Journey through China*, chronicles that period. Along the way she opened up the cooking school and restaurant Black Sesame Kitchen in Beijing. Her second book, *On the Noodle Road: From Beijing to Rome, with Love and Pasta*, is a culinary travelogue that follows Lin-Liu and her husband on their journey along the Silk Road to find out whether there is any connection between Italian pasta and Chinese noodles. It's set to be published in July.



You've talked about your parents' expectations for you, as a first-generation Chinese American, and those didn't involve pursuing a writing career and moving to China! So what do they think about your cooking—and your career—now?
They think it's fine. They love the *jiaozi*. I think that they prefer southern food, like they grew up with, and my cooking tends to be more northern or Sichuan. They're happy with the way things turned out. I think, as a parent—I can understand it now—having a child of my own, you want them to be happy, and your parents sometimes think they know what'll make you happy. But at the end of the day if I'm happy, then I think they're happy.

What do you think about the state of food writing in China?
I think domestically it's a profession in China that hasn't gotten a lot of respect. People

don't really believe reviews; they think critics are getting paid off and that kind of thing. I hope that will change and that food writing will become something that's taken more seriously in China as it is now in the west and many developed countries.

The genre of foreigners writing about China is largely constituted of white males. Obviously, you don't fit this stereotype.
I think it's changed a lot in the last decade that I've been here. I think there used to be a much greater proportion of white men in the profession, and that's changed, starting in the '70s and '80s, and now, I think there are a lot of female voices. I think there are a lot of Asian Americans and Asians of any kind of descent who are writing about China for a wider audience, so that's encouraging. I think that everyone comes in with their own perspective, whether you do have a background with



China or you don't have a background in China and you use that to your advantage. Everybody has to have a niche, so it's not like one is better than the other. Certainly some people have more connections or know the industry better, but I think if you work hard at it and you find a unique perspective, I think it's still a place that outsiders are interested in understanding, and I think there's lots of room for differences.

How do you feel about being compared to Fuchsia Dunlop?

I think it's an honor. I think she's written amazing cookbooks, and she knows a lot about Chinese food. I think she's done great things for the understanding of Chinese food. I haven't met her in person, but we've certainly crossed paths and had acquaintances and friends in common, and I'm sure I'll have the chance to meet her someday.

Would you count her as an inspiration for your work?

I think I'm doing something a little different—I thought about writing cookbooks, but I haven't really gone in that direction yet. I take more of an anthropological approach in my own writing; I'm not just interested in food—I'm interested in the things that go on around food, and I think that comes across a lot in the book I'm working on now.

Chengdu is often described as a culinary capital. Do you think this title has merit?

I need to explore more! I haven't really done enough to give you a qualified answer. I do find it interesting that the Sichuan food that my husband and I know from Beijing is kind of different from what people eat here. I was really surprised, like the love of rabbit—I didn't know there would be so much rabbit and rabbit head. Some of the dishes my husband and I liked to eat are sometimes hard to find, like your kungpao chicken or the Chongqing laziji. It seems there's a huge amount of hotpot, and that sometimes gets old. I think we definitely need to do more exploring, and I'm confident we'll find the good places to go.

What do you make when you cook at home?

We do a mix—since it's hard to find good Western food here, we probably do that a little more. It varies. But our daughter likes spicy food, so that's encouraging.

Anybody you're looking forward to seeing at the Lit Fest?

My husband, Craig Simon. Who else? Chad Harbach ... he's been getting a lot of attention this year. Derek Sandhaus.

Any final thoughts for our readers?

Send me good restaurant tips! Anyone can send them to me; I'd love to hear from people!

Jen Lin-Liu speaks as part of a panel on writing about China at the Bookworm International Literary Festival on Saturday, March 10, at 7:30 p.m., and about her books on Tuesday, March 13, at 7:30 p.m. See calendar for more details. Learn more about her work at www.jenlinliu.com

Derek Sandhaus

As a university student in the American Midwest, Derek Sandhaus had his eye set on filmmaking. When plans to enroll in graduate school in Berlin didn't pan out, he decided "on a complete whim" to move to Shanghai and teach English for a year.

Like many long-term foreign China residents, he soon realized that one year wasn't enough to experience China ("I don't know if 'falling in love' with it is the right word," Sandhaus explained. "Maybe, like how a fly gets stuck on fly paper, maybe that's more what happened"), but it was enough to convince him he needed to find another line of employment. Armed with encouragement from positive feedback to the occasional mass e-mails about his China adventures that he had sent out to friends and family, plus a degree in philosophy, a minor in German, and knowledge from "one introduction to Asian history class that covered China and Japan ... that was a requirement to graduate," Sandhaus set out looking for writing work. He found it in the form of writing historical tours of Shanghai. Eventually, Sandhaus landed a full-time position as chief editor at Earnshaw Books, where he edited *Décadence Mandchoue* and authored *Tales of Old Hong Kong* and *Tales of Old Peking*.



You had a relatively quick ascent to success in the China writing world. What's your secret?

I think a lot of people are trying to balance the idea of making more money with the idea of doing what they want to do, and I think those are two very different goals. So for me the concern has always been what will get me the next step on the ladder, not what will get more money in my pocket. I was at least a couple years into the process before I was making anything like I could have made being an English teacher. There's not a lot of money in it, but if you can stick with it, eventually the people who are just doing it because they want to be able to tell their friends they're a writer, those people drop out when they realize there's no money there, and then there's just the crazy assholes who are OK working for nothing. Like myself.

You're very prolific, publishing a book a year since 2009. Can you talk about your work process?

For the book that I'm currently working on, the average working day would involve outlining what I wanted to write, getting all my ducks in a row in terms of making sure I had all the research that I needed for that bit of writing at hand. And then maybe having lunch, I'd have a Chinese lesson somewhere in there, too, walk the dog, maybe. And then in the afternoon is when I'd do most of my writing. The general goal per day is one to two thousand words.

Obviously you can go on researching forever and always, so it's important to give yourself a date and say that's enough and if I miss something I miss something. I think if you're disciplined and if you don't have too many distractions, I think a book a year is not so crazy. If you can get the research down to half a year, and you can write a thousand words

a day, which is not a small amount, but is not an unreasonable amount, say it's a 75,000 to 90,000-word book, you can do the writing in three or four months, and then a couple months to clean it up.

And I don't want to give the wrong impression—I've spent a lot of hours at my house, sitting around in my pajamas and looking at the 50th Internet article so that I don't have to write because I'm just not feeling it that particular day.

So what do you do on those days?

I generally read the articles on the Internet.

Do you think this book is going to seal your fate as "the baijiu guy?"

I just went up to Shanghai last week, and it seems like "the baijiu guy" was kind of how people were identifying me there. Which is great, because my last book is about gay sex—I love that book, *Décadence Mandchoue*—it's a really interesting book about the gay community in Beijing around the turn of the 20th century, but obviously alcohol is more accessible to people. But I think it gives people a bit of a mistaken impression about me that I'm really drunk all the time. I'm more interested in cultural/historical perspectives. I drink baijiu, but not all the time.

Do you think baijiu enhances the quality of life?

Depends on the day, doesn't it? I think it can. One thing about baijiu is that it's something that's not really frowned upon the way that maybe hard liquor is in the west. In a social setting, drinking baijiu and even getting completely shitfaced is totally OK. Drinking baijiu is a great way to get people to let their guard down and tell you about what they're

actually thinking as opposed to what they think you want to hear about. It's a really great way to make friends.

But the act of drinking it itself?

I think there are a lot of aspects of it that are unusual to the foreign palate. The smell is a big hurdle that people need to get around because it just does not smell like things that we're used to putting in our body outside of China. However, one thing that I've found, drinking quite a bit of baijiu from all over the country, is that the taste is often not so bad. There are baijies in my liquor cabinet at home that I think are a fine drink to sip at out of a glass like you would any other hard liquor.

Most people outside of China are not used to drinking liquor that is as strong as baijiu—just the fiery sensation can be off-putting. It's also consumed in a very different way. I think most people like to drink their hard liquor in cocktails, and baijiu is not traditionally consumed in cocktails. [That said,] it does mix well, but you can't make the same cocktail that you would make with other spirits and just substitute baijiu because it has such a distinct flavor. A lot of these experimental cocktail bars in Beijing and Shanghai are starting to add cocktails that have baijiu to their menus.

Beyond that, alcohol plays such an essential role in Chinese life, and this is one aspect of Chinese culture that has been overlooked by just about everyone. Nobody talks about Chinese alcohol in the same way that they talk about tea or Chinese cuisine or dragon boats or pandas.

Do you think it's possible to be successful in business in China and not drink baijiu?

In terms of the business world, it really is quite

essentially that you be able to drink quite a lot. However, I think this is changing a bit. [For instance,] I think a lot of people drive when they could have just as easily have taken a cab because the act of driving gets them out of this binge-drinking ritual. There's tremendous pressure to drink here, and that's pretty new in Chinese history. In the early Communist years baijiu was rationed so you wouldn't have been able to drink several bottles in one setting.

You relocated to Chengdu in fall 2011. Was that specifically for the baijiu?
No, I might mislead people a little bit on my blog in the idea that maybe I moved out to Chengdu because it's so important to the baijiu world, and Sichuan is the center of the baijiu world, so that was a lucky coincidence. The real reason I'm out here is because my wife is a diplomat and was posted to the consulate in Chengdu.

So you're here for a few more months. What's next?
Then we go back to [Washington,] D.C. for about nine months and then our next posting is in Buenos Aires. There's a few book ideas I'm looking at that are going back to Chinese

history, but the book after that is definitely going to be about South America.

You've spoken at the Bookworm Literary Festivals in Beijing, Suzhou, and Chengdu. Any favorite talks?
I feel very honored to have had so many opportunities to bore audiences with my stories. I had a lot of fun last year because my topic was colonial decadence in old Beijing, and there's nothing more fun than just talking about vice for an hour. So I guess I'm going to be doing that again this year, with a different vice.

I like these events. It's good to know that your work connected with another human being, as sad as that sounds. It's good to know that another human being actually read the thing.

Does it bother you if people show up without having read your book?
I don't have that expectation of an audience. The one sentence that I hear writers say that puts me off more than anything is, "Well, you'll know this if you've read my book." I think it's kind of pompous to have an expectation that your words are so important that someone

else should—*must*—have read them to have a complete knowledge of the world. A million books are published every year, so you have to be pretty selective with what you read. So I don't hold it against anyone who hasn't read my book. If I did, I would dislike most people I meet.

If they come to see my talk I'm going to do my best to entertain them for that hour. I'm not going to give a lot of long-winded self-indulgent references to my work and what they should know about it.

Derek Sandhaus speaks on China's drinking culture at the Bookworm International Literary Festival on Saturday, March 9, at 7:30 p.m. and as part of a panel on writing about China on Saturday, March 10, at 7:30 p.m. See calendar for more details. For more about his research and notes on baijiu culture, see <http://300shots.wordpress.com>

Bookworm International Literary Festival 2013 Schedule of Events

Sichuan Women Writers Across the Generations <i>Friday, March 8, 7:30 p.m.</i> Panel discussion with local writers Wang Erbei, Zhou Yuxia, Liao Hui, Yan Ge, and Liu Guoxin	China Drinks! Derek Sandhaus <i>Saturday, March 9, 7:30 p.m.</i> Reformed baijiu skeptic discovers Chinese drinking culture, plus baijiu tasting. <i>See interview this issue.</i>	Young Blood Sifiso Mzobe <i>Sunday, March 10, 5 p.m.</i> The South African novelist Sifiso Mzobe's discusses his debut novel.	Covering China <i>Sunday, March 10, 7:30 pm</i> A panel discussion with China-based writers Jen Lin-Liu, Tom Miller & Derek Sandhaus.
China's Urban Billion Tom Miller <i>Monday, March 11, 7:30 p.m.</i> A report on how China's cities will change by 2030, when the urban population hits 1 billion.	Serve the People Jen Lin-Liu <i>Tuesday, March 13, 7:30 p.m.</i> A discussion with the author of two culinary memoirs, <i>Serve the People</i> and <i>On the Noodle Road: From Beijing to Rome with Love and Pasta</i> . <i>See interview this issue.</i>	Brothers on the Page Boualem Sansal & Lars Saabye Christensen <i>Wednesday, March 13, 7:30 p.m.</i> Algerian and Norwegian/Danish writers discuss style and subject in their acclaimed fiction.	Future Perfect Dr. Pam McIntyre <i>Thursday, March 14, 7:30 p.m.</i> Is technology, with its increasing audio-visual impact, making us smarter, or just leading to a new age of distraction?
Nobody's Perfect Lionel Shriver <i>Friday, March 15, 7:30 p.m.</i> The renowned novelist and journalist gives an insight into her work.	Write On Kids! Alison Lester <i>Saturday, March 16, 11 a.m.</i> Hands-on children's workshop with Australian best-selling and award-winning writer and illustrator. Ages 4 to 8.	The Devouring Dragon Craig Simons <i>Monday, March 18, 7:30 p.m.</i> Simons argues that China's most important 21st-century legacy will be above all environmental.	The Lady and the Peacock Peter Popham <i>Tuesday, March 19, 7:30 p.m.</i> A biography of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's vision and courage.
We the Animals Justin Torres <i>Wednesday, March 20, 7:30 p.m.</i> A new American coming-of-age tale explores the power of family bonds and the pain of alienation.	Alain Mabanckou & Nikil Saval <i>Thursday, March 21, 7:30 p.m.</i> A conversation between one of France's most acclaimed novelists and literary journal n+1's Saval on telling stories, animal friends and creating Congo-Brazzaville's first literary festival.	n+1 plus The Art of Fielding <i>Friday, March 22, 7:30 p.m.</i> Chad Harbach and Nikil Saval discuss Harbach's fiction, the literary journal n+1, the Occupy movement, and the role of independent media in social movements.	Spoken Word CJ Bowerbird <i>Saturday, March 23, 7:30 p.m.</i> Australian Slam Champion Bowerbird at work.
Live Poetry & Open Mic Luis Valdez <i>Saturday, March 23, 9 p.m.</i> American-Mexican writer showcases his poetry and invites residents to join in with their own performances.	The View from the Plateau A Lai <i>Sunday, March 24, 7:30 p.m.</i> One of Sichuan's most prominent writers discusses his novels and his rise to literary fame and editing the world's most widely circulated sci-fi magazine.		

Entrance to each event is RMB50 (includes a glass of beer, wine or soft drink).

Mega Bites Snacking on snake with dandoval

Photos by Dan Sandoval



What better way to ring in the year of the snake than by feeding snake to Dandoval? Or so we thought, until we tried to find a restaurant that served snake. Not that we'd ever tried before, but we were under the impression that this would be an easy task.

Finally after numerous phone calls, we found a two-year-old restaurant with a minimalist menu. The manager recommended the Guangzhou-style snake hotpot, and although he couldn't help us with live cobra heart or snake eggs, he offered an exotic alternative: a (paradoxically) green-colored baijiu infused with the gall bladders of two snakes ("It's like a cheap vodka mixed with a cheap baijiu and a strange, strange flavor," remarked Dan after a sip.) As Dan cringed and his voice became wheezy, the manager smiled and informed us that a *jìn* (approx. 500g) of snake gall bladder costs RMB2,000.

In the meantime, the hotpot had come to a boil, and Dan's

chopsticks snaked through the greens and veggies floating on top to snap up a bit of the boiled meat and skin. "Pretty good. Not like fish at all. Not like rabbit. More like beef," he began, dipping little chunks into his sauce bowl.

The next dish arrived, a big fried chunk of a halved snake, its skin magnificently intact. Dan tore right in: "It's nice and meaty, and the bones are never in the way as you rip the meat and skin off with just one bite." The crispy-on-the-outside skin earned Dan's compliments. "The texture reminds me of fish, but the way the meat is laid out, dried yak meat is the closest thing."

Dandoval, who claims to have killed, grilled, and eaten rattlesnakes, continued singing praises: "Snake is the new white meat. Actually it's like dark meat chicken. This should be on the KFC menu. Fuck chicken feet. This is the snack of the future. I like this. This is a nice lunch, and it's different from anything I've eaten in recent memory."

But Dandoval's voracious appetite quickly died as he turned his attention to the snake in mala sauce. "This is a lot more like fish. But much softer, and better than fish. The problem with mala is that it covers up the flavor." After three bites, his annoyance turned to rants about the boring, chewy, oily dish. "There's so much oil dripping down, you wonder why Exxon is wasting their time in the Middle East."

Verdict

During the course of our late lunch we started wondering why snake is not much more commonly eaten: The fatless meat seems more healthful than most other animal flesh that's widely consumed and also more delicious and versatile. This restaurant in particular boasted a nice and very attentive staff, and we heartily recommend coming with friends so that you can try a variety of snake dishes and also afford the spectacle of ordering the entire snake (RMB200 to 300). Unless you're

averse to mushrooms, start the meal with the delicious RMB15 snake soup. The Cantonese snake hotpot is worth a try, and the aromatic fried snake is an absolute must-order at RMB25 per snake steak. The snake in mala sauce is not worth the time or effort and the same goes for the white snake baijiu (which might lead to bad puns about '80s hair bands anyway and definitely leaves your throat with the feeling of just having smoked two packs of cheap cigarettes). The green snake baijiu, on the other hand, is a must-try for its unforgettable visual impression and everlasting aftertaste.

Noteworthy: The baijiu contained some kind of cobra (菜花蛇) known as king ratsnake, stink snake, or "stinking goddess." This name, according to Wikipedia, "refer[s] to this species' highly developed post-anal glands which, when the snake is picked up, are frequently emptied, with a very strong, bad odour." Mmmm.

Yewei Longfengshe Bianlu 20 Shujin Lu 野味龙凤蛇边炉 蜀金路20号 Tel. 86139855



Solutions to the last month's CHENGDOO Crossword Puzzle
(issue 61 p.10)

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Across

4. PAERDUO

7. TAobao

10. CHOUDOUFU

11. JINTANG

14. ZAHA HADID

18. CIVET

20. INDIVIDUAL

22. MAO

23. MEXICO

24. PSB

26. TIANFU SQUARE

28. TAN

29. RONGCHENG

31. KFC

32. JIANCHUAN

35. NINE

36. CHUNXI

37. BA

38. WUERBA

43. HUAJIAO

44. MAFAN

45. HONGQI

47. GUANXI

↓

Down

1. POPPY

2. BEICHUAN

3. SUN

5. LADUZI

6. DACI

8. TEA

9. OCEAN PARK

12. WENJIANG

13. WUMING

15. JIAOZI

16. CTU

17. DICOS

19. COMPUTER

21. LI BING

23. MASHANG

25. LUANQIBAZAO

27. FIREFOX

30. PRIDE

33. NEOLITHIC

34. HONGKONG

36. CAOCao

39. FACE

40. XIAOGAI

41. SHISHI

42. SAZI

46. HUAXI

48. XLY

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Xinjiang Grasslands

Photos and text by Dan Sandoval



Xinjiang usually conjures images of the vast deserts of the Gobi or ancient stops along the ancient silk road—but much of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is covered in beautiful grasslands that extend to the northwestern edges of China.

Heading west from the deserts of Urumqi will lead you to Ili (known as 伊宁/yīníng in Chinese), the capital city of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (伊犁州/yīlǐzhōu) in the northwestern-most reaches of the country. The road from Urumqi to Ili is long (eight to ten hours by car), but the journey offers spectacular views and places to stop, including the huge, crystal-clear Sayram Lake (塞里木湖/sàilǐmù hú). The marvelous natural scenery that surrounds the lake is dotted by Mongolian homesteads offering horseback rides (RMB20 to 40 per hour) and is an ideal stopping point for a late lunch before continuing on the journey.

After a late-day arrival in Ili, rise early the next day to visit the Nalati (Narat) grasslands (那拉提草原/nàlādī cǎoyuán), which are divided into two parts—to the right, a plateau grassland that is the summer home to a large nomadic Mongolian population (wintertime snow drives them to lower ground during the cold season). At this part of the grasslands, locals offer horseback rides, meals (including locally made cheese), and yurt-stays to tourists. The other part of the grasslands is mountainous and much less set up for tourism. Although it can provide the traveler a glimpse at the winter residences of the locals, any additional sightseeing comes at a premium that seems a much lesser value than the offerings of the other side of the grasslands. Entrance and bus tickets for both parts of the park are sold separately.





To the southeast of Nalati is the Bayinbuluke prairie (巴音布鲁克草原/ bāyīnbùlǔkè cǎoyuán). The terrain here is a mixture of grassland and marsh; the large, grassy fields teem with life. For anyone interested in birding, this location—which was until recently closed off to foreign visitors due to its military bases—offers a fantastic array of migratory birds. The highlight of the marshland is a winding river that snakes from one side to the other as it disappears into the horizon, a view immortalized in poetry. The park has a hill that overlooks the bends as far as the eye can see, guaranteeing one of the most amazing sunsets in the world (weather cooperating).

Practicalities

The most practical way to explore this sprawling region is by hiring a car and driver, which allows you to stop along the road (highly recommended). Finding accommodation can be tricky at times, and the area’s tourism industry is still very much under development. It’s best to ask around for prices before choosing a place. For all of the above places, snacks and good hiking shoes are essential. Temperatures can drop, so layers are recommended, even if the daytime weather doesn’t require them. Use of mosquito repellent is highly advised, especially at dusk around the marshlands.

Photos provided by PureQuest Adventures. For more adventure ideas, please visit www.purequest.com.





Can Tho, Vietnam

Photos by Dan Sandoval

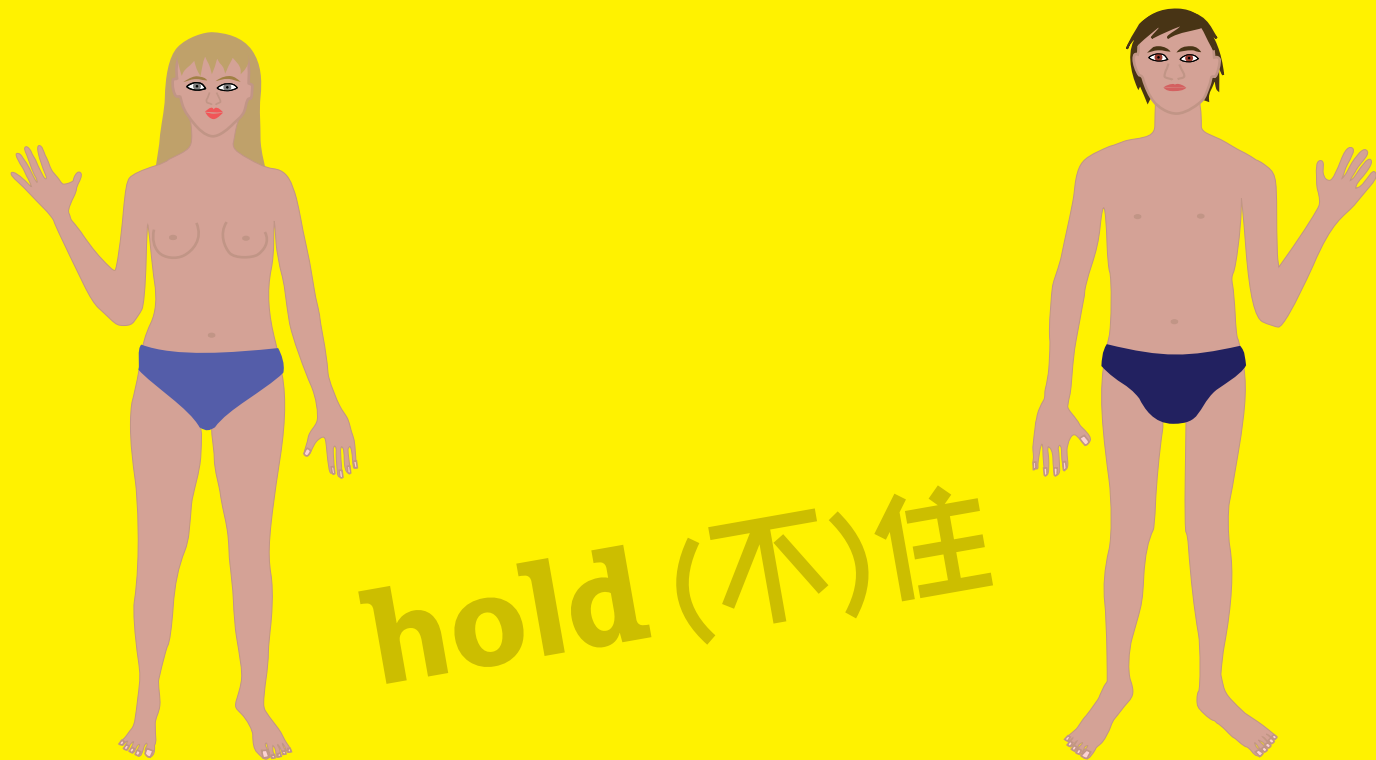


Can Tho, the biggest city in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, is a three-hour bus ride south of Ho Chi Minh City and the central traffic hub for discovering the southern tip of Vietnam. Cruise boat operators will offer to take you either northwest across the Cambodian border and all the way to Phnom Penh, or around for the day to floating markets and the surrounding villages that are connected only by waterways. Longer two or three-day tours lead you to relaxing beaches in the southeast and tropical islands. Despite being one of the densest populated areas in the world, the tiny region produces more rice than Japan and Korea together and offers a variety of flora and fauna protected in many wild sanctuaries and national parks.



POP SLANG TOP 10

By Lucy Wang



New vocabulary appears frequently on the Chinese Internet. Here are 10 of the most frequently used slang phrases, most of which allegedly originated online. These days you see and hear them almost everywhere—on the street, on the phone, on Weibo, and more. Amaze and impress your local friends by casually dropping one or two of these in-style phrases into your next conversation.



1. 坑爹 (kēngdiē) to cheat; to be cheated or deceived
Literally, this can be translated to “cheat your father,” but used in this fashion, “father” represents the speaker. People use it as a joke when they feel something is unfair, or when they feel shocked or astonished. For instance, If I find a bug in my bowl of noodles at a restaurant, I might yell, 太坑爹了 (tài kēngdiē le)! It can also be used when one is not very satisfied with how things turn out—for example, if I thought I passed my Japanese exam, but it turned out that I had actually failed it, I would say 坑爹呀, 我的日语挂了 (kēngdiēya, wǒde rìyǔ guàle/Unbelievable! My Japanese failed me).

2. 伤不起 (shāngbùqǐ) can’t stand the pain; easily hurt
Rumor has it that a student of French wrote this phrase on Weibo (micro blog) to complain about how hard French is: “学法语的人你伤不起啊” (xué fǎyǔderén nǐ shāngbùqǐ ā/You have no idea how painful it is to study French!)

3. hold(不)住 (hold [bù] zhù) can (can’t) handle it
This is a very popular example of the mix of English-Chinese language. In a TV show, a guest said in a fierce voice with her unique accent and amusing English, “我快要hold不住了” (wǒ kuài yào hold bùzhùle/I can’t take it anymore, and the audience loved it. Since then, young people started using “hold不住” (bùzhù) when they are astonished or challenged, and it’s even become a popular catchphrase in advertisements. It can also be used without the negative to indicate that one *can* handle it.

4. 屌丝 (diǎo sī) loser, slacker
This is one of the most famous buzzwords on the Internet. Millions of young people—mostly males, but the term is becoming increasingly popular among females—call themselves 屌丝 self-mockingly. Baidu legend has it that the term originated from posters on a forum about the football star Liyi. Liyi fans are known as “yisi” (from yi + the si from 粉丝/fēnsī/fans), and on the forum they were complaining about their lives. Observers started referring to them as diaosi, and the phrase caught on quickly to refer to any young man who doesn’t have much going for him in terms of wealth, looks, or cool factor.

5. 爱疯 (àifēng) iPhone
The literal translation is to be crazy in love, in love to the point of madness. And the pronunciation is identical to the Chinese pronunciation of “iPhone.” Coincidence?

6. 卖萌 (màiméng) to play cute, to pretend to be cute
Literally, 卖 means sell, and 萌 means cute. This term can apply to both males and females, children and adults (including my 35-year-old teacher, when he makes a baby face). And those people who post their photo on the Internet trying to look innocent, or doll-like? Totally maimeng. It’s also used in jest between friends, as in 别卖萌了 (biè maiméngle)!.

7. 亲 (qīn) dear (as a form of address)
Frequently used by Taobao sellers to address customers. This word has its roots in 亲爱的 (qīnàide), which means sweetie or honey but is too intimate a form of address for a seller to a customer. So it has been shortened to 亲, which is also commonly used by friends, colleagues and classmates without the very intimate connotation of 亲爱的.

8. 裸婚 luǒhūn a “naked” wedding
This expression refers to young people bucking tradition by marrying before they buy a car and apartment, sometimes even without even a party. This is a trend because of rising costs of living.

9. 高富帅 (gāo fù shuài) tall, rich, and handsome
Some female Internet posters claim that this is their criteria for boyfriends/husbands.

10. 打酱油 (dǎjiàngyóu) that has nothing to do with me
An oldie but goodie, this expression literally translates to “buying soy sauce.” A man-on-the-street interview in 2008 about the Edison Chen sex-photo scandal led to the popularization of this phrase as meaning “That has nothing to do with me.” The interviewee, when asked about his opinion, replied, “It has nothing to do with me, I was just stopping by to get some soy sauce.”





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