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No. 10 – November 2020

November meeting
KIRSTEN WONG AND THE VENTNOR
MEMORIAL PROJECT

Friday, November 27, 5:30 p.m.



In 1902, the ship *SS Ventnor* set out for China carrying the bones of 499 Chinese men who had died in New Zealand. Sadly the ship hit a rock off the Taranaki coast and eventually sank off the Hokianga Heads. This was a great catastrophe for the community, as it was believed that far from family and in a watery grave, there would be no-one to tend to the men's spirits in the afterlife and they would be homeless spirits. Despite a careful and thorough search immediately after the sinking, no remains were found.

In 2007 the Chinese community in New Zealand became aware that at least some of the remains may have been found. Wellington writer Kirsten Wong has since been following the story of the *SS Ventnor* for the Wellington Chinese Association. When they heard stories about Māori involvement with their

Chinese history, she and other Chinese decided to travel to the Hokianga to meet iwi leaders. They were surprised to find that local iwi had cared for the bones that had been washed ashore from the shipwreck.

Kirsten will bring us her story of how two cultures have bonded together because of a tragedy and a shared custom of honouring and caring for their ancestors.

The meeting will be at the usual place, Hearing House, 354 Trafalgar Square (next to Synagogue Lane). We start the meeting at 5:30, the meal arrives at 6p.m. and the guest speakers may begin after 6:45 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

If you wish to have the catered meal it costs \$15. Pay cash at the meeting or by Internet banking to our new NZCFS Nelson account, 03-1354-0490726-00, use your name as reference, and contact Barbara Markland as below.

**To arrange catering, please contact Barbara Markland
 by Monday, November 23.
 ph. (03)544 4712 text: 021 447 180 e-mail: erm@xtra.co.nz
 Please make sure she knows you are coming!**



October meeting

On Friday October 30th we heard John McKinnon's stories titled 'Silk Roads of the Desert'. Surprisingly John's quest started in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston where he was intrigued by silk textile samples called Ikat. These textiles were prepared from silk threads unwound from silk-worms in the usual way. The threads are bound and dyed, then rebound and dyed in different places with different colours before the fabric is woven. Thus the Ikat fabrics, as in the photo, have characteristic fuzzy-edged patterns.



John and Diane McKinnon decided to search in Central Asia for the home of Ikat weaving. After several trips, they did indeed find Ikat dyers and weavers working in Uzbekistan, using the traditional methods. For many centuries, Bukhara was an important hub on one of the many 'silk roads' that crossed the desert trade routes between west and east.

Ikat fabrics were for everyday wear for Uzbeks, and they are still obvious in the market places. Traditionally, the more colourful fabrics were worn by the men.



John brought 279 slides with him, but of course we could see only a proportion of those. Every slide came with its own stories of the McKinnon's trips to villages, ancient towns, and modern cities.



In his travels along the silk routes, John has continually expanded his knowledge of the ancient history of China. Many of his slides were of the various art forms including tomb paintings, ceramics, carvings, calligraphy, historical stories of the lives of emperors and their families. The Buddhist history is also important in China, especially in the desert areas where Buddhist carvings, artwork and statues are preserved in the dry caves in desert areas such as Dunhuang. John reminded us of how these ancient relics are being preserved as tourist attractions along with imperial tombs such as those near Xi'an.



John also linked in some of the legends of China, including the creation story of Pangu. The story says that in the beginning was nothing and the universe was featureless. Within the primordial egg, which lasted for 18,000 years, the perfectly opposed principles of **yin and yang** became balanced and Pangu emerged from the egg, and began creating the world.

John McKinnon extended our knowledge and understanding of Ikat tapestries as well as many other aspects of the cultures of the desert silk roads

NMIT Confucius Institute prizegiving

The annual prizegiving was held in October.



Nigel Hucklesby receives the national calligraphy prize - third time



Clifton Terrace School pupils perform



Sharon (Chen Xiaolu) and Jane Lister

From other branches

At a recent Wellington meeting Libby English Lyon talked about her engagement with China and her own Mandarin learning journey. Libby was born and grew up in Wellington and had an interest in world affairs from a very young age. Her parents went to China when she was 10 years old and the photographs, postcards, and gifts they brought back with them made her, in her own words, ‘desperate’ to know more. She worked for her father at Agribusiness NZ, and in 2015 accompanied him to China, returning from there with a desire to learn Mandarin and to ‘be part of this place that really felt like the future’.

In 2019 she spent a year in Beijing on a Mandarin language scholarship, and spoke about the challenges of sharing a dorm room ‘with a total stranger’, getting from A to B, and setting up a bank account. Her classmates were from a range of countries including America, Japan, Pakistan, Israel, Britain and Netherlands. Later, when her language proficiency had improved and Libby was able to get around a little more easily, bargain with stallholders, and order food, ‘all the day-to-day challenges and hard work became worth it.’

After returning to New Zealand, Libby has had experience project managing this year’s Chinese Language Week.

Singles day (Adapted from South China Morning Post)

The annual shopping spree in China which falls on November 11 every year, called Singles’ Day, is the world’s largest online shopping festival and seen by many investors as a proxy for consumer spending in China as well as an important barometer for economic health.

Written numerically as 11/11, November 11 looks like “bare branches”, a Chinese expression for the single and unattached. In the 1990s, some Chinese university students decided they would celebrate their singlehood on this date, which they dubbed Singles’ Day or Double 11. This became seen as an anti-Valentine’s Day of sorts, and many of China’s singles began splurging on themselves on the day as a way to rebel against social pressure to be in a relationship.

Shoppers scoop up everything from consumer electronics to luxury items and even cars during Singles’ Day, which was being closely watched this year as a barometer of consumer sentiment amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

From Nelson Executive

- 2021 Chinese New Year is February 12. Nelson AGM and Banquet will be Sunday Feb 14
- China Week 2021 – ideas are being considered
- With COVID-19 making travel unlikely for some time, ways of keeping contact alive with our sister cities were discussed, particularly for students.
- Consideration is being given to how to maintain the Appo Hocton Scholarship programme with students not able to travel to New Zealand.

From Yangjiang

A letter Jane Lister recently received from Julia, our contact for student exchanges at Guangdong Liangyang Senior High School.

Dear Jane,

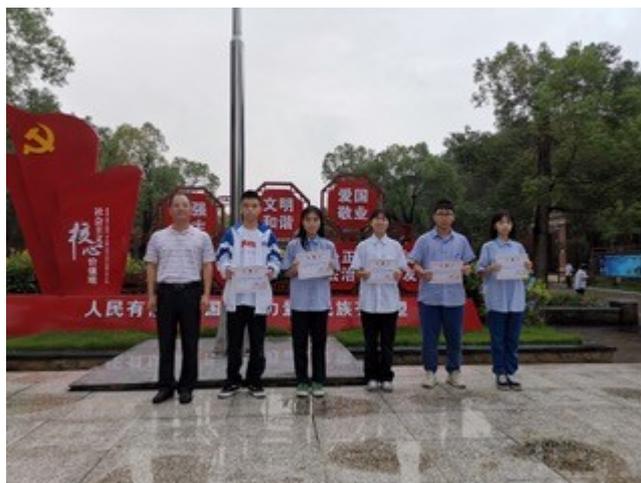
It's been a while. How are you all getting on? The new semester has already begun and everything here in Yangjiang has returned to normal. With the COVID-19 still going on around the world, our city is still taking strict measures to guard the customs but inside the school we are free from masks except those who catch colds or are not feeling well. Also, there are more reports and paper work about everyday health report of students including colds, sickness and especially fevers. Every student who has a fever is required to have a COVID-19 test in the hospital and should return to school in 48 hours with a negative test report. I am wondering whether schools has returned to normal in Nelson and how things are going on in your city. Hopefully everything is alright and all of you keep healthy.

I have included some photos with students who won the awards last time. They wrote wonderful letters and were awarded prizes. Sincerely hope we can still keep the cultural exchanges between Nelson and Yangjiang going! Keep me informed of any good news about it .

Tomorrow is our National Day and Mid-autumn festival, so I would like to send my best regards and wishes to you, Ian, Barbara, Roy and all the exchange students as well as their family!

Happy Mid-autumn festival and stay healthy!

Julia



New member

Welcome to Rosemary Braithwaite who, with Sally Warren, has been on a John and Diane McKinnon Silk Road tour.