

THE CISS ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE CISS ALUMNI COMMITTEE



PHOTO: AILSA BROWN



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SUCCESSFUL GRADUATES AND
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

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2017-2018

ALUMNI OPINIONS: CHINESE
RESTAURANTS, BOOKS AND MORE!

A CELEBRATION OF THE ALUMNI

WELCOME!

In our newsletter this month, you will find:

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UPDATE FROM CISS

大家好!

We can't believe we are halfway through 2022! It's been a great year for the CISS Alumni so far, with our first in-person meet ups in over two years, Alumni celebrations of new jobs and academic achievements, and of course, the announcement of the November event: "A Celebration of the CISS Alumni".

There are now seven years of CISS Alumni scholars who have experienced this trip of a lifetime in Tianjin, China. Many of the scholars have now graduated from university and are thriving in the world of work. We are now at a stage where the more experienced scholars are able to mentor and give advice to younger scholars about their studies, internships, and the world of work; something which we hope continues far into the future as the scholarship expands. We feel this new perspective of age and wisdom has allowed us to grow as an organisation and meet our aims of mutual support and learning.

As such, it feels like a fitting year to celebrate the alumni. We are so proud of all of our scholars and everything they have achieved in their lives so far. We have no doubt that the Tianjin scholarship had a great impact on that trajectory of success, and we hope that the work of the Alumni Committee can act as an extension to that by bringing us all together.

Don't forget to keep an eye on upcoming events, and in the meantime, we look forward to seeing you in November!

Best wishes,

Erin, Chair of the CISS Alumni Committee

INTERVIEW WITH ARIANA HARDIE

This month, we had the pleasure of speaking with Ariana Hardie. Ariana took part in the Tianjin scholarship between 2017 and 2018. She is approaching her graduation from Nankai University in Tianjin with a degree in Chinese with Business. She has been living in China since 2017.

What made you want to stay in China after taking part in the Tianjin scholarship?

I was fortunate enough to be a part of the scholarship in 2017/18. Before coming to Tianjin, I never imagined I would still be here five years later. A few months into the scholarship I realised how fun the whole experience was and how genuinely interesting Mandarin is. If I'm honest, I'm not naturally gifted at learning languages, so it was actually a surprise to me how much I enjoyed learning Chinese. I decided I wanted to study Mandarin to a more advanced level, so I decided to stay.

How was your second year in China?

It was around January/February time of the scholarship that I decided I was going to stay. At that point, I wasn't sure if I was ready to commit to a full degree in China, so I wanted to apply for another year of learning Mandarin with Tianjin Foreign Studies University (TFSU) (basically the same classes as the scholarship). I had no idea how to do it, so I began asking questions straight away, contacting the office, emailing the school etc. I then followed the online application process, paid the fees and extended my visa.

The second year of being in China was very different. I came back after the summer holidays once the scholarship was over, completely alone. The safety blanket of having the other scholars with me was gone so I was quite apprehensive as to how it was going to be. The year ended up being amazing, allowing me to meet more friends from around the world and having a lovely Korean roommate. It forced me out my comfort zone and my overall confidence improved. I felt as though I had been exposed to a whole new experience at TFSU. Although the scholarship was amazing, coming back independently for a second year allowed my Chinese to improve much quicker.



What was your initial experience starting your degree in China like?

After my second year at TFSU, I was finally ready to commit to studying a full degree in China. I was accepted into Nankai University to study a degree in Chinese with Business. If I'm honest, it was a little overwhelming at the beginning. The teaching style of Nankai was much more strict and I felt as though I was drowning at the beginning. If you've ever been to Tianjin, you'll know that there's a large population of Korean students. Often, but not always, Korean students are shy and not as confident speaking up in class. As a result, the teachers would often make me speak more in class. I became quickly aware that other people are more shy than me so it was important to speak up and help everyone feel at ease. After a few months, everything felt normal, and the teaching style helped my mandarin significantly. At that point, I also decided to move out the school and rent my own apartment, which improved my overall experience living in China.

How did your university studies differ from your time on the Tianjin scholarship?

I wasn't living in the university dorm anymore so got to experience a more independent lifestyle. I could cook, got myself a cat and overall felt more at home. It started to feel more permanent than living in a small dorm room. The scholarship is a great experience for obtaining a basic understanding of Tianjin but coming back for my degree allowed me to fully immerse myself in the culture. It allowed me to build up enough confidence to use all the apps Chinese people use, go traveling by myself and just properly live my life.

What was the initial covid outbreak like?

The initial covid outbreak was very surreal. I remember hearing on the news there was a virus going around in south China but didn't think much of it. Two days later, I went out to 711 and realized there weren't many people on the street. Once I got to 711, it was completely shut with the lights off. I went home and heard the city was locking down. People started panic buying food, water and running to their homes. Unfortunately, I had booked a ticket to go to Singapore the following day to meet my family (flying from the UK). I had to make a split decision whether I was going to go or waste the ticket and stay. I had a strange feeling that it was going to be serious so decided to stay in case I couldn't come back. Looking back, that was the best decision I have ever made. I then stocked up on supplies and locked myself in my apartment. I was alone in lockdown from the end of January 2020 to mid-April 2020. Lockdown in China was extremely strict. At that time people weren't even allowed to go outside for a walk. It was scary because at that time we were still unclear how deadly covid was and it felt very apocalyptic. I was very lucky that my apartment was in the city centre, not in an enclosed community. I was able to go outside and take a walk along the river every few days, which was very therapeutic.

Even though it was difficult on my mental health, I never seriously considered going back to Scotland. I knew how strict China managed covid and I knew if I left, I wouldn't be able to come back for a very long time. After 3 months of strict lockdown, everything opened back up again & went pretty much back to 'normal'.

What are the current restrictions like?

China maintains a zero covid policy which basically means there is a zero tolerance for any covid cases. Even if there is only one case, the whole city goes in lockdown. It is very strict but allows us to go back to 'normal life'. It is still mandatory to wear masks when you go out but everywhere is open like normal. If you go into a restaurant, shopping mall etc. you have to scan a QR code on Alipay and show your health information. It's basically a QR code that shows if you've been vaccinated or not and prove you're from a low-risk area (i.e., no covid cases). If your city has any covid cases, your health code will change from green to amber or red (depending on the seriousness). This will then restrict your ability to travel or go outside and you will have to comply with the lockdown rules implemented at that moment. Although I miss my friends and family, I feel lucky to have stayed. The strict restrictions have not only kept me safe but allowed me to 'go back to normal life'. The main downside to all the restrictions is that university classes are still online. Because there's not many foreigners in China, the university decided to do it all online. I have had online classes from 2020 until now

What differences are there between pre- and post-covid China?

The most notable difference is that there are not many foreigners anymore. When the pandemic broke out, most people went back to their home country. Because covid is still a serious problem in many western countries, many Chinese people became more cautious of foreigners as they were scared they might get covid.

It felt very upsetting for a while as people treated you differently, but it is important to remember people are just trying to protect themselves.

What are your post-graduation plans?

I am preparing to graduate in the summer and start to my career here in China. I don't have immediate plans to study a masters degree but never say never. I think I am ready to get some work experience and properly figure out which direction I want to go in. I am a very creative person so my dream would be able to pursue a career which allows me to combine both my creativity and ability to speak Chinese.

How long do you see yourself living in China?

I'm still uncertain. I love China and it will forever be a big part of my life. Whether it is living here full time or part time, it will always be a part of my career. I am very open minded so who knows - we will see where the wind takes me.

What is the best way to make the most of the immersive language experience?

The best way to make the most of the immersive language experience is to hang out where locals hang out, try your best to make Chinese friends and practise your language. Making friends with people from other cultures is easier said than done, of course, not just from a language perspective, but a cultural perspective. If you're open minded and willing to adapt to different cultural behaviours and ways of thinking, making Chinese friends is a fantastic way to boost your language and knowledge about the country. Making Chinese friends at university is a good way to create multi-cultural friendships. Later when you feel braver, perhaps go to a cafe or bar and start a conversation with some locals. I also think using Chinese social media, such as douyin (抖音) or weibo (微博), is a fantastic way of learning about our generation's fashion trends, slang, humour etc. and will help you get a more accurate understanding of modern China.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to live in China?

Try not to focus too much on the negativity of international politics and international media. Every media outlet in every country is biased - remember that when reading about international affairs.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to pursue a degree in Chinese in China?

100% do it. The key to learning any language to a proficient level is surrounding yourself in the right language environment. Doing your degree in Chinese in China will boost your language ability significantly faster. Take note that Chinese language majors are all taught in Chinese - so don't worry if you feel overwhelmed for the first semester or two, things will get easier!



We are incredibly grateful to Ariana for giving up her time and speaking with us!

ACADEMIC PROFILE

Margaret Driscoll (2019-2020), Second Year Law at the University of Edinburgh

Tell us a bit about your academic career?

This is my first degree. I have mostly only studied Law but was lucky enough to be able to study Mandarin as well. I started university in the first year of the pandemic. I think I've had a fairly non-standard undergraduate experience. I have never had an in-person lecture! I am not yet sure whether the new system will have been a benefit or a hinderance

What is your research focus?

All law programs are pretty rigorous in the first two years and follow a fairly structured scheme. This means that there is little scope for self-driven research arising naturally within the course at this point. I have a forthcoming article in a student law journal being published by the Edinburgh Women in Law Society. This issue is a collection of reports taking an intersectional view on areas of the criminal law. My article focuses on the treatment in court of female complainers in sexual offences trials. I feel very strongly that there are many inequalities both within the legal system and as a cause of it. I am very interested in looking at where these exist and how to change these, so that we have a more just and equitable society. While criminal law is the area of my previous research, I am hoping to focus more on international law, human rights law, and public law (which is the area governing the state and government).

Have you had any hurdles to overcome in your academic career and how have you done so?

I have a visual processing disorder called Mears Irlen Syndrome. It manifests itself with symptoms very similarly to dyslexia. The main impact it has is on my ability to read large chunks of text - pretty much anything more than a PowerPoint slide. I was fortunately diagnosed when I was still in primary school so lots of adjustments were already in place. The main thing I have had to do since going to university is change my mindset. I no longer feel that I have something to prove. I don't have to be the best to have earned my spot and that I am not studying law at Edinburgh because I have an advantage I shouldn't. Both of these ideas are a manifestation of imposter syndrome and I think it is very easy, for whatever reason (sex, race, disability etc.) to feel that you don't belong. We do belong in academia/ university and it is important that we are confident in that.

What is next on the cards for you?

I am super excited to be going to Hong Kong for my year abroad in the new semester! (Of course provided I can get there!) I hope this will be challenging academically, linguistically (I have yet to start learning Cantonese) and culturally. I will then have one more year before graduating. I hope to do more individual research projects perhaps with a focus on human rights in East Asia.



CAREER PROFILE

Erin Duffy (2015-2016), Content Developer at Coffee Break Languages

What is your job? What did you study?

I am a Content Developer at Coffee Break Languages. I studied English Language and Linguistics and Spanish at the University of Glasgow.

What led you to working in this job?

I took part in an internship with Coffee Break Languages back in 2017, which I actually found out about through an event hosted by the CISS Alumni! I was then offered to continue working remotely with the company during my year abroad 2018-2019. I worked on Chinese lesson materials and social media posts for Coffee Break Chinese Season 1 until the course finished in 2019. I stayed in touch with the CEO Mark on social media, who reached out to me after I graduated in 2021 to offer me a full time position as a Content Developer for Coffee Break Chinese. The job was perfect for me and the timing couldn't have been better, so I was delighted to accept!



What does a normal day look like in this job?

The job is very varied. As well as my core role developing Chinese content, my other areas of focus are social media and marketing. One day I could be writing lesson notes at my desk at home, the next I could be filming videos for social media in the studio! The job involves a lot of creative thinking, so I am constantly coming up with ideas, whether it's for a social campaign, a blog post, or a lesson. I'm working on areas I haven't much experience in yet like video editing, SEO research and graphic design, so there is a lot of learning on the job which is great!

What is one thing you really like about your job?

I love that I get to work in a multilingual, multicultural environment. All of my colleagues are language learners in some capacity, so it's great to get to work with so many language enthusiasts like me, and talk about language learning every day without the people around me getting sick of it!

What advice would you give to someone wanting to pursue a career in this area?

At university, I continually worked and pursued internships in order to make connections and find out what suited me. For me, this was a great way to find out about myself and about the world of work, so it is definitely something I would recommend if you don't know what area you want to work in yet. In my experience, if you pursue what you enjoy the right thing will come to you.

What skills do you need for this job?

Communication skills are really important as you are constantly thinking about what message you want to put across to a customer. I work with a variety of mediums including written, audio and visual content, so whether it is a social media graphic, an email, or a course description, you need to be able to express yourself well in order to represent the brand and the product in the best way possible.

CELEBRATIONS

Congratulations to **Sorcha Rowan Kennedy** (2016–2017) on her new role as Erasmus and Study Abroad Administrator at the University of Reading! Good luck 😊

Good luck to **Leah Duncan-Karrim** (2016–2017) for her new role as Assistant Policy Officer at Children in Scotland. She has spent the past eight months learning about children's rights at the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. We are sure she will be amazing!

We are also very proud of **Nathan Epemolu** who was awarded "Volunteer of the Year" at the Strathclyde Students' Union STAR awards last week, for his work as BAME representative at the University of Strathclyde.

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

Rendezvous, Edinburgh 5/5 Stars

One of the oldest Chinese restaurants in Scotland. Near to Princes street. Lovely authentic Chinese food. Delicious dumplings.

The Hanoi Bike Shop, Glasgow West End 4/5 Stars

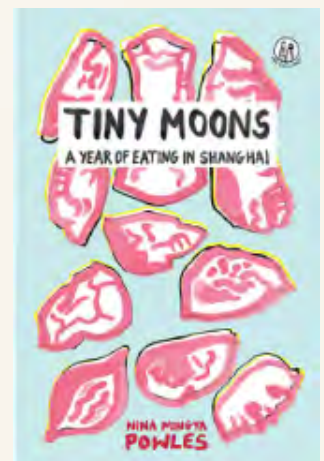
Not a Chinese food recommendation this time, but Vietnamese! This has been a popular Asian restaurant for a long time now, and is well known in the area. The food is delicious, the prices are reasonable, and the restaurant has a great atmosphere. It seems to focus on really fresh ingredients and simple dishes. The menu is varied and also has plenty of vegan and vegetarian options – something for everyone!

BOOK REVIEW

Tiny Moons: A Year of Eating in Shanghai by Nina Mingya Powles

Beautifully written record of the food and the memories and feelings they evoked over the course of a year studying Chinese in Shanghai. The food is the star of this small collection of short essays. It is almost painful to read about all the glorious food without being able to taste it. Food aside, the setting, being so similar to studying in Tianjin, transported me back to relive some of the eating I myself did. The author also explores her own heritage and feelings of loneliness and belonging. I would highly recommend for a bit of nostalgia of your time in Tianjin or just for some dining inspiration! 9/10

– By Margaret Driscoll (2019–2020)



CHENGYU OF THE MONTH

共襄盛举 gōng xiāng shèng jǔ – join together to accomplish a great task

Literal translation: together help each other in great undertakings

Example:

发生了地震，大陆及港、奥、台三地以人为了救灾共襄盛举，举办了多场演唱会。

Fāshēng le dìzhèn, dàlù jí Gǎng, Ào, Tái sān dì yìrén wèile jiùzāi gòngxiāngshèngjǔ, jǔbànle duō chǎng yǎnchànghuì.

When the major earthquake occurred, entertainers from the mainland and the three areas of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan joined together to accomplish the great task of providing disaster relief, holding numerous performances.

Source: "500 Common Chinese Idioms," by Liwei Jiao, Cornelius C. Kubler and Weiguo Zhang

TV SHOW REVIEW

理智派生活 The Rational Life, Netflix, 3/5 Stars

This show appealed to me as the female lead was older than is usually cast, and seemed not to fall into the trope of helpless female lead commonly found in Chinese romance series. The show makes a point about the impossibility of women "doing it all": having a successful career, getting married and having children before thirty, and keeping their parents happy whilst also being happy themselves. Whilst the lead doesn't fall into the weak lead female trope, she does heavily fall into the "girl boss" stereotype. Whilst the topics in this show are interesting, I'm still really hoping to see some more nuanced female leads in Chinese dramas! Probably wouldn't watch another series.



CHINESE COURSE RECCOMENDATIONS

Peking University HSK Courses on Coursera

Are you looking to self-teach yourself through an HSK course, or simply revise previously studied HSK materials from your year abroad? These free courses from Peking University are great. It's amazing that they are free! With lesson notes, exercises, and a video lesson from a Chinese teacher for each lesson, this is a wonderful online resource. You can also interact with other learners on the platform. As these course were "active" in 2021, the teachers themselves will no longer reply, but all the materials are still available. You can access the range of courses here: <https://www.coursera.org/courses?query=hsk>

UPCOMING EVENT

Don't forget to RSVP to the very exciting "A Celebration of the CISS Alumni" event coming up this November. Check your email inboxes for more details. If you are a CISS Scholar and have not received an invite please don't hesitate to get in touch with us or with CISS. It is going to be a night of reminiscing, dancing and catching up with old friends! If you live far away please get in touch so that we can arrange transport for you, funded by CISS. We can't wait to catch up with you and we really look forward to seeing you there!



YOU ARE INVITED TO

**A CELEBRATION OF
THE CISS ALUMNI**

AND 10 YEARS OF THE CONFUCIUS
INSTITUTE FOR SCOTLAND'S SCHOOLS

Join us for drinks, dinner and a ceilidh

NOVEMBER 25, 2022 | 7 PM
THE NATIONAL PIPING CENTRE, GLASGOW

*CISS will contribute to the travel expenses of
those travelling from further afield*

CLICK HERE TO RSVP

Decorative elements include a 10th anniversary logo in the top right and a stylized sunburst at the bottom center.

GET INVOLVED WITH CISS ALUMNI

Hey guys, we want to thank all alumni who have given time, effort and ideas to make this newsletter happen, we hope it's been an insightful read and gives a glimpse of the expertise, passion and achievement of the alumni since inception. But that's not everything, we are working harder than ever this year to create something truly professional and unique here in Scotland. And we'll need as many of us as can to get involved to see the CISS Alumni grow from strength to strength. There are multiple ways you can do this!

Subcommittees

Even if you have a spare hour a week, this can be a way to get involved without having to commit to a full committee role. This is an informal role, helping with the current work of the CISS Alumni committee. We have subcommittees in the following areas:

- Social Media
- Glasgow Events
- Edinburgh Events
- Alumni Liaison
- Newsletter

If you are interested in getting involved with a subcommittee, drop as a line at: ciss.alumni@outlook.com or message our Facebook or Instagram pages (both found at "cissalumni")

Newsletter

If you would like to contribute to the next newsletter, you can write reviews or give someone a shoutout for the celebrations page using the following Google Docs:

Celebrations:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeU8IfcftN9wzImkyxy6TCpIPzU8ImX8qxEWTJNDjG5bMl4Gw/viewform?usp=sf_link

Book recommendations (any books!):


https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScHszlsO8rd9yFTqo4Av-5pLgNgG0vnITohLYFGrGwlbTewIQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Restaurant recommendations (any restaurant!):

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeO6NjPJsz8-cl5O6cnVhcfzG7vtNE7OJQYTrNDXr-aRFbEzQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

We are really keen to make sure this alumni makes and creates things that at first instance, interest the alumni, if you want Chinese classes, say so, help us plan them! **Get in touch** via:

@ ciss.alumni@outlook.com

 <https://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/confuciusinstituteforscotlandsschools/scholarship/cissalumni/>

 <https://www.instagram.com/cissalumni/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/CISSalumnischolars>

 Group (for scholars): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1931393547136913>

 LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ciss-alumni>