

**By Carolyn Lee**

### ***The Imperial Republican***

When Brandon Bishop of Imperial returned to the University of Wyoming (UW) in Laramie last week, he wasn't sure how easily he'd slip back into American culture after a year and one-half in China. He did know that the winter weather would be milder than in China.

Bishop, 22, studied language in China through a program offered by UW. He spent May of 2008 through May of 2009 at Harbin Normal University (HNU) in Harbin, then May through August at Harbin Institute of Technology.

Harbin is a city of nine million people in the province of Manchuria in northern China. Temperatures range from 40 below in the winter to 80 degrees in the summer. Bishop said it was usual to wear three pairs of pants in the winter.

The UW senior studied Chinese language and the culture while in Harbin. He had taken two and one-half years of Chinese at UW, but said that was minor compared to the "immersion experience." He had been learning "book" Chinese, while there are many dialects in Chinese.

Bishop studied standard Mandarin, the official or state language taught in schools. Most Chinese speak standard Mandarin at work, and their own regional languages at home, he noted.

The son of Mark and Nadine Bishop studied some classical Chinese, which was mainly used from 200 B.C. to the early 1900s. "This was the academic language for the scholar class," he said, "for emperors to use to administer their provinces."

It is also a common language, such as Latin, from which the many Chinese dialects evolved.

Bishop, who is a senior majoring in geology and minoring in creative writing, decided to study in China "in order to get my Chinese to a useful level. To do that you have to go and study for a long time."

He plans to use the language within the scientific field after graduation.

"Sciences don't communicate with each other outside the English-speaking world," he commented. "I hope to bridge that gap. There are good things being done" in both the English and non-English countries. Bishop hopes to work within the geological scientific community, specifically.

He lived in a dormitory with mostly Russian and Korean students. His roommate was Chinese. Bishop's favorite food was a barbeque similar to shish kabobs. Most of the Mandarin food is very spicy with peppers. That is washed down with tea in the educated culture, or tea or beer in the working classes.

The division of classes isn't as clear as it used to be in China, Bishop stated, mainly due to the fast growth. "You can be rich one day, poor the next, and rich again," he explained.

Harbin is a "new city," being only 100 years old. It was established by Russians as a railroad was built there, and features much European architecture. New development is making the city spread out.

Language is the major difference between Bishop's life at UW and in China, of course, but there are a lot of little differences, too.

Most Chinese use coal with which to heat homes during the winter. "Some days there was a layer of coal dust everywhere," he observed.

The Manchurian province is more exploited for its resources, with a lot of mining and logging, Bishop said. "There is a movement to protect the environment, but people also want to grow

and prosper,” he noted.

The Chinese culture emphasizes a family’s own rules rather than the culture or the country’s rules, Bishop said.

There is “quite a bit of freedom of speech but not assembly,” he added. You may protest a topic, but you mustn’t organize a demonstration, for example.

“The people have the feeling that the government has protected them from being turned into another country’s colony,” he said of the view of the Communist government.

Bishop most enjoyed “the opportunity to learn so much about the culture. There’s a lot you don’t expect.” He said Americans tend to have preconceived ideas about the Chinese culture, confusing it with “movie culture.”

As for the language, Bishop said he felt “caged by your own language abilities” while learning it. When asked if this article could include something along the lines of “This was my year” in Chinese, Bishop explained that not only would the computer not have the characters for the words, but that each Chinese word has a sound part and a meaning part. The word “fish,” for example, would represent both the fish figure and a sound.

In classical Chinese, four words can mean a whole paragraph. Standard Chinese tends to be “very wordy,” Bishop said.

There is no past or future tense in Chinese. Therefore, you must say “tomorrow” instead of “I will do it.” It is a very specific language.

“It’s very difficult to get anywhere fluent in it,” Bishop concluded. He hopes that his year at HNU, and the half year at the Institute of Technology, where students aren’t allowed to speak English in public, have armed him with the abilities he needs to pursue interests later in life.