

# INTERNATIONAL TEACHING JOBS

## Focus Upon Asia

By Merwin A. McCoy

*Without a doubt, teaching in American and international schools overseas for seven years provided the most rewarding personal and professional experiences of my life. I answered a newspaper ad and obtained my first position, but now, international teacher and administrator recruitment is more sophisticated and competitive. In the essay that follows, a number of job-hunting tips and helpful resources are provided for those who seek international elementary and secondary positions. Although a substantial amount of the essay's content can be utilized by any native English speaker who wishes to teach in a foreign country, Asia-related possibilities are given special attention.*

In a competitive market such as the one for international teaching positions, the prospective international teacher needs to have knowledge of the job market, including important information concerning the types of schools and the countries where they are located. There are several classifications of international English-speaking schools, many located throughout Asia, that regularly recruit teachers from the United States. They are described below:

**Independent international schools** generally offer a US-type curriculum and employ mostly faculty who attended an American university. There are over 500 of these schools worldwide,—the majority private. An American candidate must have a teaching credential issued by an American state to be hired. Schools need this documentation to obtain an appropriate work visa from the respective country. Candidates with at least two years of teaching experience are preferred. Although hiring practices vary, these schools give preferences to single teachers or to teaching couples without dependents. However, there are exceptions. Many schools will hire well-qualified couples with children and a few will hire single teachers with dependents. Contracts are usually for two years, but some schools in developing countries in Asia and elsewhere will offer one-year contracts. Salaries vary considerably worldwide, but generally enable teachers to enjoy a reasonable standard of living in the host country and also opportunities to save money. Compensation depends on the cost of living in the host country, the size of the school, and the isolation of the location. Most of the international schools offer retirement benefits; almost all provide housing or housing allowances, and health insurance.

Generally, salaries and some benefits at these schools relate to three classifications of teachers: *locals*, *local hire expatriates*, and *overseas hires*. Host-country nationals receive less salary and benefits. The local expatriate hires make the same salary, but do not receive benefits such as housing and airfare. The overseas hires are contracted through registration with the major teacher recruiting agencies and related recruitment fairs. It is more lucrative to teach at a school as an overseas hire; however, if you already live in the area, employment at an overseas school can be the first step in getting started in the overseas teaching circuit. If a native English speaker already lives in the country where he or she would like permanent educational employment, systematic volunteering and substitute teaching can often lead to a full time position, since administrators have prior encouraging evidence.

There are many advantages to teaching in these overseas, independent, international schools. Since most faculties are handpicked by school superintendents, teachers are generally intelligent, giving, creative, hard-working, and professional. The faculty tend to be team players and appreciate the opportunity to experience life in a foreign country. In the overseas schools where I taught (unlike many schools in the US), the teacher's lounge was the place to be during free time.

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The exchange of ideas and knowledge with some of the best teachers in the world was a real treat and enabled me to grow as a teacher and as a person. After-school hours were often shared by colleagues who had much to offer in the way of friendship and expertise in a variety of subjects. Especially in the more prestigious schools, one of the biggest attractions of teaching overseas is being part of the school faculty.

Independent international school students and parents are another asset. Class sizes are small and consist of mostly high-achieving, well-behaved youngsters from all over the world. For example, in 2006, the International School of Bangkok, with a K-12 enrollment of almost 2,000, revealed that twenty percent of its students were from Thailand (“host country nationals”), thirty-four percent were from the US, and forty-six percent were identified as “third country nationals,” kids coming from all over Asia and the world. At Escola Graduada, the international school in Sao Paulo, Brazil, students in my seventh grade social studies classes were from every country in South America; there were also many students of European and Asian families. Japanese students made up about ten percent of my classes, as Sao Paulo has one of the largest Japanese populations living outside of Japan.

**Privately owned language institutes** offer the most opportunities for non-credentialed individuals to teach English overseas. Some programs require formal credentials to teach, such as certification in Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language (TEFL, TESL, or ESL). However, many programs and teach-abroad opportunities do not require any expertise other than being a native English speaker and having a college degree. Lucia Novara lists the advantages and disadvantages of securing a position through a placement program in the United States, such as through Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program and AEON.<sup>1</sup> JET, sponsored by the Japanese government, offers teaching opportunities in elementary and secondary schools for college graduates. Advantages of the program include knowing before departure that you have a secure work visa, a job, and set income. However, the application process consists of several stages, and competition can be keen in certain regions of the US or other English-speaking nations. The Japanese Consulate General’s office is the best source of information on the JET program.

ESL teachers can use other strategies in finding work in Asia. Positions can be secured before leaving the states or after arriving at the final destination. These programs and organizations, like CIEE (The Council on International Educational Exchange) and CEAIE (China Education Association for International Exchange), place teachers and assist them in acquiring work visas and placements. Interestingly, individuals are often successful in obtaining teaching positions by first traveling to the country on their own and then finding work. Novara suggests that you obtain a tourist visa before leaving. After a contract is signed, the employer often will help you get a work visa. This is particularly common in China and Korea, but is not legal in Japan. In her article, Novara provides job-hunting tips and an English-teaching “scouting report” on teaching opportunities in a variety of Asian countries. She concludes that because of the prevailing poverty, the English teaching job market is not good in South Asia between Pakistan and the Philippines. Also, since Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei employ teachers from Britain, job-hunting for Americans is difficult in these countries.

Several universities have programs that place students in English-teaching positions overseas while at the same time offering courses

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**SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS.**

*The best way to secure a good teaching position overseas, or any job for that matter, is to be successful in your present one.*

towards ESL certification. I taught English at the University of Shenzhen (China) Middle school in 1998–99 in one such program that was affiliated with the University of Memphis. This was an excellent experience, one quite different from what I found in the independent international schools. In this program (which was discontinued as a result of the SARS outbreak in South China several years ago), Chinese school administrators placed American teachers in elementary and secondary schools after undergoing interviews with principals, who also observed them teaching actual English lessons to Chinese students. Unlike most private international schools worldwide, teachers in Shenzhen lived in school campus housing. Salaries were below average, but the program offered credit in the Memphis ESL degree program, free tuition and, last but not least, a chance to live and work in China! Similar “Teach in China” programs exist in other American institutions of higher education, such as those at Marshall and Drake Universities.

The US Department of Defense operates about 220 K–12 schools all over the world; in Asia, most are located on military bases in Japan, Korea, and The Philippines. DoDDS (Department of Defense Dependents Schools) hires teachers in the US with appropriate teaching certification and operate similarly to public schools in the US. The application process is extensive and competitive. The facilities and teaching environments are generally high quality; students are children of military and civilian personnel working on the bases. While teaching

seventh grade social studies at DoDDS’ Wiesbaden (Germany) Middle school, I had an excellent salary and great benefits, along with opportunities to travel all over Germany and Europe. Teachers in DoDDS schools pay federal and social security taxes because they are federal employees. In other educational environments described earlier, the income of US citizens is generally excluded, although teachers must file a US tax return. In 2008, this income total must have exceeded \$87,600 and employees must have been physically present in the foreign country for at least 330 days of the year.

The US Department of State is also in the K–12 education business, and its Office of Overseas Schools operates almost 200 schools in many of the world’s capitals. Working conditions for teachers vary considerably in these schools. Both DoDDS and the US State Department have publications that describe the schools they operate.

**SUCCESSFUL JOB HUNTING PROCEDURES**

Success breeds success. The best way to secure a good teaching position overseas, or any job for that matter, is to be successful in your present one. Overseas administrators of English language schools, particularly those operated on an American model or by Europeans, will look very closely at letters of recommendation, as well as who wrote them. If possible, you should have positive, confidential letters written by present and former principals or supervisors sent to prospective employers overseas, or to the various placement agencies described in this article. Principals and superintendents of independent, private overseas schools will often contact supervisors before making hiring decisions.

Before contacting schools, obtain a listing of the overseas schools and their relevant information, such as the school description and application process. A good way to access up-to-date listings is through the TIE (The International Educator). This publication offers a free guide to teaching overseas, as well as full and online subscriptions, which include access to international teaching job ads placed by hun-

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*Overseas administrators give preference to candidates who are healthy, energetic, have overseas experience (at least in travel), and can work in extra-curricular activities, especially sports.*

dreds of overseas schools. TIEonline gives candidates information about recruitment fairs, instant job notification of openings in particular fields, and helpful hints on securing an overseas position. Some of these suggestions include: (1) Start your search early. Contact schools that you are interested in by November, providing a cover letter, resume, transcripts, and at least two letters of recommendation. (2) After researching the agencies that specialize in placing teachers overseas, select one that fits your needs. Consider location, dates, and which schools will be represented at their recruiting fairs. (3) If a school wants to interview you at a particular fair, register for that fair. Once registered, you can arrange other interviews at this location.

Most successful candidates for teaching positions in private international schools register with recruitment agencies; recruitment “fairs” are set up later, usually in February or early March, that attract school administrators from all over the world. Most agencies schedule several fairs during the year at various locations in the US and abroad. Before interviews take place at the fair, registrants establish a file with the agency, which usually includes a fee, resume, letters of recommendation, and some additional forms. The agencies match the needs of the schools to the qualifications of the candidates. The candidates’ files can be forwarded to the schools with suitable openings and arrangements made for interviews at the fairs. According to TIE, the number of schools attending the fairs may run from twenty to 120.

Most candidates at these overseas teaching fairs will have opportunities to interview with several schools over the course of the two to three day fair. The personal interview is particularly important in the hiring process, more so than in most teaching openings in the US. Overseas administrators give preference to candidates who are healthy, energetic, have overseas experience (at least in travel), and can work in extra-curricular activities, especially sports. Principals try to determine how well a candidate is likely to “fit in” at their school in Japan, Thailand, or in Europe. Consequently, it is imperative for teaching prospects to convey a team-player image during the interview, which may last for an hour or more.

Below is a list of several of the largest overseas recruiting agencies, their related job fairs, organizations that recruit in the United States for English language teachers, and information sources for finding teaching jobs in Asia:

**International Schools Services (ISS).** Since 1955, this organization has placed over 15,000 teachers, administrators, and educational specialists in more than 300 schools abroad. The application/file establishment fee is \$185 and must accompany the completed application. The fee for attending a recruiting fair is \$290; attendance at the fair is not required but recommended. For more information, contact Educational Staffing at [edustaffing@iss.edu](mailto:edustaffing@iss.edu) or 609-452-0990.

## International Schools in China

By Lucia Buchanan Pierce

There is variety in international schools and the experience you have teaching at them will differ, depending on the kind of school in which you work.

In China there are five types of international schools. 1) Independent international schools that are mentioned in this article and most closely resemble American schools in terms of curriculum and contractual issues. 2) Independent international schools run by European school organizations. 3) International schools run by foreign companies or organizations in which contracts/benefits and curriculum are determined by a board which may or may not make these decisions based on American standards. 4) International schools that are affiliated with local schools and are operated under local laws (e.g., Shanghai High School is a top-ranked high school and has an affiliated international school). Only students with foreign passports or green cards may attend. These schools have a mix of foreign and Chinese teachers, usually use English as the primary teaching language, and often have a mix of IB/AP and sometimes A-levels. Teachers are hired under Chinese labor law, and benefits, salaries, and duties are specific to each school and usually negotiated on a case-by-case basis rather than on a salary/benefit scale. 5) International schools that are privately owned by Chinese companies. These schools are open to Chinese nationals as well as foreign students and often have a large percentage of Chinese students. They usually have a majority of Chinese teachers but bring in foreign teachers; classes are taught in Chinese and English. IB and/or A-levels programs are increasingly popular. Contracts, salaries/benefits are on a case-by-case basis and there is no scale.

Benefits for the latter two types of schools are limited and there is no pension. Health benefits differ but are limited and usually do not cover overseas care. Housing is sometimes included—usually free housing on campus and occasionally small stipends should a teacher choose to live off campus. Working conditions are mixed. These schools rarely, if ever, use job fairs or work with overseas recruiting agencies, but depend on contacts, walk-ins, resumes through e-mail, or through organizations such as [joyjobs.com](http://joyjobs.com) that do not have the same selective process as recruiting agencies. The salaries are considerably less than the first three types of schools. The experiences in the latter two usually involve cultural immersion and can be challenging and difficult, but also extraordinary and wonderful.

**LUCIA BUCHANAN PIERCE** is Partner in Shanghai Education Consulting Associates. She was the co-director of Fudan International School and the founding director of the Chinese Studies Program at Sidwell Friends School. She served as head of education at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution.

**Search Associates.** This agency is comprised mainly of former directors of international schools. There is a registration fee. Their recruiting fairs are held all over the world, but the next one in the US is in Bethesda, Maryland in June 2009. Visit <http://www.search-associates.com>, PO Box 636, Dallas, PA 18612, 717-696-5400.

**The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Overseas Placement Service for Educators.** This was the original international fair for educators, starting back in 1976. Their services include credential and referral services, and related publications. There is a registration fee, but there are no placement fees for candidates or recruiting schools. Contact University of Northern Iowa Career Services, 102 Gilchrist Hall, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614-0390, [overseas.placement@uni.edu](mailto:overseas.placement@uni.edu), 319-273-6998.

**The International Educator (TIE).** They offer subscription services for job postings, a resume bank for overseas job seekers, a newspaper, and an interactive Web site for job opportunities overseas. The sixty-eight-page newspaper is published five times a year with news about international education at <http://www.tieonline.com>, PO Box 513, Cummaquid, MA 02637, 508-362-1414.

**TESOL, Inc.** This is a lobbying, membership, and networking organization for Teachers of English as a Second Language. It offers a placement service and an "Employment Clearinghouse" at its annual convention. It is not necessary to be a member or to have Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) experience to attend the convention or to use their services. 1600 Cameron St., Suite 300, Alexandria, VA, 22314; phone: 703-836-0774.

**Asia System Media.** A private recruitment agency that created a helpful online database for teaching openings in China. They market candidates to schools that need teachers with particular qualifications. An intensive five day training program (\$850) is recommended for individuals who have no ESL experience. Visit their Web site at [www.cbw.com/teaching/](http://www.cbw.com/teaching/) for further information.

**China Education Exchange (CEX).** They provide paid ESL teaching assignments throughout China, working in partnership with the following organizations to identify the best English teaching positions: 1) the China State Council, 2) the China Society for Strategy and Man-

agement, and 3) the International Center for Education Research and Exchange. Their CEX Web site is for those individuals from English speaking countries who are interested in an ESL teaching position. Interested candidates should send an email, resume, and recent photo to [cex@chinaeducationexchange.org](mailto:cex@chinaeducationexchange.org).

**Japan Exchange & Teaching (JET) Program.** Mentioned earlier, this cultural exchange program is sponsored by the Japanese government. Qualified candidates work all over the country as either Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) in elementary and secondary schools or Coordinators for International Relations (CIR) in selected government offices at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/jet/>.

**AEON Intercultural Corporation.** AEON hires well-qualified teaching candidates who have excellent academic and personal qualifications. New hires should expect a thirty-six-hour workweek consisting of no more than twenty-five teaching hours, with the remaining hours spent on office responsibilities and lesson preparation. Lessons and their delivery must be well-structured. Visit <http://www.aeonet.com/aeon/>.

**CIEE: Council on International Exchange.** Teaching assignments in China and Thailand are driven by the demand for English-speaking teachers and the requirements for each host institution. A \$500 registration fee is required. The excellent CIEE Web site has the details at <http://www.ciee.org/teach.aspx>, 300 Fore Street, Portland, Maine 04101, 1-800-407-8839.

**Asia Expat** is a good expatriate site for people moving to and living in selected cities throughout Asia. They have extensive ESL job listings at <http://www.asiaxpat.com>.

**Asiapond.com** has been designed for teachers to find jobs in Asia quickly at <http://www.asiapond.com>.

**GEOS Language Corporation** is one of Japan's largest English language institutions, employing 2,000 teachers for over 500 schools. All teachers are hired outside of Japan at <http://www.geoscareer.com>.

**LanguageCorps.** This is a fee-based service that trains and places English language teachers in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Viet Nam. They offer guaranteed placement into paid teaching positions at <http://www.languagecorps.org>. ■

## Errata

Winter 2008 Issue

On page 20, in the third complete paragraph of Coonor Kripalani's article, "Indian Youth Culture, Reflections on Film, An EAA Interview with Coonor Kripalani," two Indian filmmakers, Guru Dutt and Mehboob Khan, were inadvertently indicated as film titles. Below is the corrected paragraph.

The films of the 1950s were inspired. They were the output of groups of very talented and ideologically inclined writers, directors, and actors. Encouraged by India's newly acquired independence, and with a zeal to reform society from within, people like Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor and K. A. Abbas (the script writer for some of Kapoor's films), gave audiences cinema that championed the underdog, identified the common man with Indian values, and juxtaposed the have-nots and haves in a simplistic equation of good against evil.<sup>3</sup>

The editors sincerely apologize for this mistake.

## NOTE

1. Lucia Novara, "Teaching English in Asia: First-Time Teaching is a Realistic and Rewarding Way to see the World," *Transitions Abroad Magazine*, September/October, 2005.

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