

## January 2015

Hope this finds you all well after the holiday season. Each year I get a lot of apples from my students as a Christmas gift. Giving apples is a unique Christmas custom especially popular with young people in China, and, oddly, can be traced to homophones\*. In Chinese pinyin, Christmas Eve is ping an ye (the evening of peace) which sounds like pingguo (apple). So on Christmas Eve an apple as a gift is called ping an guo (the fruit of peace). Apple giving has developed into quite an industry. The apple you receive is no ordinary apple but is often decorated and packaged as if it was a precious gem. It may even be delivered to your doorstep. Last year I got so many apples that I made a big batch of apple sauce and gave it to my Chinese friends. They loved it.



Members of the student union selling ping an guo on Christmas Eve.

I want to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year and the very best in 2015 (Year of the Sheep\*\*). May your New Year's resolutions remain intact.

Cheers, Stephen



Saxy Santa.

\*The use of puns or word play is somewhat of a national sport in China. Such language play works because the Chinese sound system uses only about 400 syllables compared to some 2000 in English. However, linguistic manipulation may soon be a thing of the past. Believe or not, recently the country's print and broadcast watchdog has banned word play on the grounds that it "breaches the law on standard spoken and written Chinese, makes promoting cultural heritage harder, and may mislead the public—especially children". Internet citizens are not amused and wonder if this is just an excuse to crack down on the cute language people use to joke about the leadership or government policies.

\*\*People born in the Year of the Sheep are thought to be charming, good with money, but somewhat indecisive.

P.S. I have also attached a photo of the "The Man with the Horn" or "Saxy Santa" as my Chinese friend refers to him. Such renditions of Father Christmas, as he is called in China, abound in the hotels.