

My Sabbatical Leave Report

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Foreign Languages, Humanities

I was granted a sabbatical leave for Fall 2017. I took this opportunity to travel to China for more than three months and visited many cities including Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Wuxi, Nanjing and Suzhou. During my visit to China, I also took a five day round trip from Shanghai to Osaka, Japan. The following are some details about my sabbatical.

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As a foreign language instructor teaching both Chinese and Japanese, I spent as much time as possible immersing myself in the languages—especially in Chinese—and acquaint myself with Chinese culture. I put myself in various situations to keep abreast of the fast-changing society of China. I was constantly looking for anything that I could use for my Chinese language and culture classes. Here are some examples:

- I attended the first day of the UBS Greater China Conference “Global Perspectives—from factory to laboratory: China’s transformation.” UBS is a Switzerland-based European investment bank with significant Chinese investments. UBS held this annual conference in Shanghai in early January and brought in many experts both from China and abroad to present in-depth analyses about China’s current economy. Former Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon came to give the keynote speech on the first day.
- I closely observed China’s reaction to President Trump’s visit to China in November in many ways—from the preparation before the Trump visit to the intense public debates after the visit.
- I attended local celebrations in several cities for the Chinese National Day of the PRC, Mid-Autumn Festival, and the New Year.

- I presented historical documents during a meeting with members from the Research Association of Shanghai Modern History for a discussion on the issues regarding the social movements of university students in Shanghai during WWII.

I took hundreds of photos in various situations in China, and many of the photos can be used as course material in both the Chinese language classes (Chinese 1, 2, 3) and the culture class (Chinese 24) at El Camino. In short, I have many stories and experiences from the trip to share with my students about current Chinese society, economy, foods, art, music and religions that goes beyond anything I could ever provide for them with a textbook.

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I had a particular plan to investigate ways to improve teaching Chinese in America by observing how the Chinese language is taught in China and Japan, in both countries as a second language or “CSL,” the counterpart of ESL to international students. I chose three universities in China to visit: Fudan University, Peking University and Beijing Language and Culture University. I was impressed with the strong number of international student enrollment in all three universities. As a Fudan University alumni, I was able to visit some CSL classrooms, observe their professor’s teaching, and discuss the teaching materials with the given professors. I exchanged teaching experience with the professors and TAs, and learned some useful ideas from them, especially in teaching Chinese characters to the non-Asian students. I was amazed with the fast growing pace of the international student enrollment in Fudan University—particularly in its International Cultural Exchange School. The school keeps adding CSL classes year after year to meet the overwhelming demand from overseas for studying Chinese. In current year, they have more than 2800 long-term and short-term students learning Chinese. This is a remarkable increase from five years ago when I last visited, and 10 times the number of students since 1998 when I took El Camino students there for the Study Abroad Program.

In the other two universities in Beijing, I had a similar finding in the enrollment and I felt the strong boom in Chinese studies by international students from more than 150 countries. I attended a research seminar held in Beijing Language and Culture University on a grammar topic and learned about the latest developments in Chinese teaching. Although the seminar topic was a bit too advanced for our community college program, the approach for the research was inspiring. I had the opportunity to examine and compare the different textbooks used in all three universities for the CSL students. I collected useful teaching materials while on their campuses. I found a new book “*A Introduction to the Chinese Language*” published by Peking University. Compared to many other books “introducing the Chinese language,” this particular one is unique and useful. I bought several copies and brought back to El Camino and gave every adjunct Chinese instructor a copy and shared my China experience with them.

I found the boom in Chinese studies not only in international student classrooms in China, but also in Japan. When I took the short trip to Osaka, I went to Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (KUFS) because I have three longtime friends there who teach Chinese and Japanese. In spite of the troubled political relations between Japan and China over the last 14 years, public interest in learning Chinese is high in Japan. This year, there are more than 300 Japanese students studying Chinese as a major, surpassing the maximum capacity of 280 set by the university for the Chinese Department. Given that the overall enrollment on the entire campus declined slightly from previous years, the enrollment in Chinese classes is quite strong. I was also told that all the graduates with a Chinese major can find decent paying jobs in fields such as import/export, tourism, retail, and government. Before I went there, I had a discussion with one of the professors on a research subject: comparative studies between Chinese characters and Japanese *Kanji*. I extended this discussion with him to how they teach Chinese characters to Japanese students and other related research topics.

In comparison to the boom in Chinese studies I witnessed in China and Japan, I clearly see a serious challenge at the colleges in Southern California including El Camino on how to improve enrollment for the Chinese program. I did a survey during my sabbatical on the enrollment in Chinese classes at other community colleges, UCs, and CSUs in the Greater Los Angeles area. I found that the enrollment in Chinese classes has dropped significantly in the last couple years. For example, UC Irvine had 38 Chinese classes in 2010, but now they only 15—the lowest number in the last 14 years (2004-2017). CSU Long Beach’s Chinese classes have been cut in half in the last five years. Pasadena City College had a 30% drop in enrollment in Chinese 1 classes from the previous year. Long Beach City College cancelled Chinese 2 class two years ago and now plans to maintain only Chinese 1 for the near future. In contrast to the overwhelming boom in Chinese studies in Asia, we are struggling in a “cold winter.” There are many reasons behind this situation and I have discussed this issue with my colleagues in my division after I came back. The sabbatical leave helped me broaden my perspectives to see Chinese learning situations not only in El Camino and Greater Los Angeles but internationally as well. (This should be a separate topic for further discussions but not in this sabbatical report.) After I came back from my trip, I started to reconsider the strategy for the development of the Chinese program as well as some necessary adjustments for the SLO assessments. I also started to remake all my supplementary teaching materials, e.g. exams, quizzes, worksheets, assignments in reading, writing, speaking and listening for all my Chinese courses.

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As I initially planned, I also went to China to continue my research on the Chinese artists in the first half of the 20th Century, especially on the calligraphy artist Wang Qiu-mei (1884-1944) and his close ties to other artists such as Zhang Da-qian (1899-1983), Huang Bin-hong (1865-1955) and Ye Gong-chuo (1881-1968). The research is for my own interests but also beneficial for my students because it helps me teach Chinese characters to students, using

different approaches in Chinese classes and Japanese classes. I have also shown some artwork from my own collection in the Chinese culture class (Chinese 24). I visited some experts and relevant organizations when I was in China. I spent several days in the Shanghai Library to look through old magazines and newspapers published in the early 20th Century to collect data for my research paper. I just made another update on the Wikipedia article about Wang Qiu-mei that I initially contributed online seven years ago. I contacted the Macau Museum of Art to discuss some mistakes I found on their official website, particularly in the translations of one of Wang's poems and a calligraphy artwork in the Museum's "Precious Collection." I visited many museums for my research, both in China and in Japan. They are listed as follows:

Shanghai Museum, Forbidden City Museum, National Art Museum of China, Poly Art Museum, the Guardian Art Center, Wuxi Museum, Hangzhou City Museum, Zhejiang Museum, Kyoto National Museum (Japan) and Osaka City Museum (Japan).

I am very grateful to the Sabbatical Leave Committee for offering me the opportunity to travel to Asia in Fall 2017.