International Faculty Development Grant – 2013

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Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad: Social Sciences in China

June 19 – July 19, 2013

Pre-Departure Orientation June 15-18, 2013

The National Committee on United States-China Relations (NCUSCR) has collaborated with Fulbright-Hays for a number of years offering a shorter seminar for K-12 instructors and a longer one for college instructors. In my seminar, there were 16 scholars from a variety of institutions (public, private, 2-year, 4-year) and disciplines. I was one of the few from the west coast and the only person from the Pacific Northwest.

While most of our briefings focused on social sciences, we also had lively discussions about film and the arts. Our Scholar Guide, Dr. Stanley Rosen, teaches Chinese film and Political Science. His course syllabus is a mini-guide to must-see films.

The seminar consisted of approximately one week in each of the following cities: Beijing, Xi’an, Chongqing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. In most cities we met with representatives from the ministry of education, visited local universities and were briefed on a wide variety of topics including Chinese politics, the Silk Road, Chinese Traditional Medicine, the China Dream, automobility and more. In addition, local guides arranged for visits to museums, cultural sites and the Port of Hong Kong, to name but a few.

As this was my first visit to China, I felt deeply connected through the cultural exposure and interactions. Even as a third-generation Americanized Chinese, I found much in common and at times, familiar. I was particularly struck by the viewpoints expressed about historical events – whether about the war and occupation by Imperial Japan or about Chinese culture (its “unifying” aspects, its continuous, long history).

I found the pace and speed of modernization fascinating and somewhat frightening. I hope that the excesses of western development (consumerism, resource exploitation, lack of sustainability) won’t be repeated or exacerbated. China is urbanizing on a scale that hasn’t been attempted before.

Teaching more about China and learning more from our international Chinese students is critical for a more complete understanding about global dynamics and directions. I recommend that in addition to curriculum units within classes, there should be general exposure to Chinese culture (e.g. films, writers, artists) and current events (e.g. community leaders, visiting scholars, international students). Global Education Design Team once served as such a forum; perhaps there will be another space in which to promote this sharing and learning.

One of the most memorable exchanges was our visit to Dandelion Middle School for migrant workers’ children. We split up into classrooms and spent several hours talking with the students and sharing their supper. Migrant workers’ children have a status not unlike undocumented children in the U.S. They are supposed to go to the school assigned to their place of birth registration. At the same time, many families are migrant workers, living on the edges of mega-cities (often industrially based).

I thoroughly enjoyed my “home-stay” with a high school student in Chongqing. I tagged along with her, running errands (buying textbooks for a cousin) and enjoying lunch with her parents in a high-rise 40 minutes out of the city center. The very real and competitive pressure on this student to score high on exams was made abundantly clear. She mentioned that her year abroad in Germany meant that she had fallen too far behind in physics and math to pursue that track for the rest of high school. I was so impressed that she went to Germany without having studied any German beforehand.

On a personal note, hiking up to and on the Great Wall and surveying the “ancient” countryside through the mist – it doesn’t get any better! I am thankful for the IFPD grant support. Although Fulbright-Hays and the local committees paid many costs, IFDP eased other financial worries.

I highly recommend that colleagues apply for this program. The application cycle is early in fall (October deadline) and the application is extensive, requiring several essays and letters of recommendation. Being able to visit and learn so much about China within this framework was a major milestone for me.