Week 5 in China

A Reflection of Another Week in Zeng Jia Yan and Continuing Adventures in Chongqing

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Monday, April 10th, 2017: Day 5 in Zeng Jia Yan Primary School

 It was hard to believe that it was six in the morning when my alarm woke me up. It seemed like it was half past midnight when I fell asleep, well, it was, so I thought there was no way it could be six in the morning already. I rolled around in bed for about ten minutes after I shut off my alarm before my good-two-shoes side of me forced me out of bed to get ready for the day. Around five to seven thirty, I was about to leave my dorm when Michael messaged Alaura and me to ask about the Zeng Jia Yan sick day protocol because he had an upset stomach. Alaura and I weren’t too sure what the school’s sick day protocol was, but we told him that he should take some medicine to settle his stomach and that we would ask the school staff about the sick day protocol if he did not feel well enough to make it through the commute to Zeng Jia Yan. He did end up taking some medicine and going with us to Zeng Jia Yan anyway. As we were riding on a shuttle bus, I thought about what could have upset Michael’s stomach. It couldn’t have been the steak dinner nor could it be the pastries that we bought from the bakery after dinner because we all bought and ate pastries from there. Given than Michael took some medicine for his upset stomach, I could only hope that the medicine and the subway ride would help to calm his stomach a bit at least.

 I had never seen the pink line so packed since I have been in Chongqing. Not only did we not have seats during the entire ride, but we were all crammed in to the point that I couldn’t even see my cell phone in my hands. At one point, the train stopped at a station and a huge crowd of people forced themselves out of it, dragging me with them due to my oversized backpack. Michael had a good laugh as I scrambled back onto the train. The blue line, as usual, was also packed, so basically we couldn’t breathe clean air until we transferred over to the green line.

 I spent my morning in the office with Alaura and Michael where I worked on finishing my weekly reflections for Dr. Xu. Eventually, Alaura left to observe a class and Michael left to teach one. While alone in the office, I tried to find a Youtube video that would help to reinforce English greetings in my Grade 2 students. After teaching a lesson to two Grade 2 classes, Miss Wang said that I needed to incorporate more activities into my lessons to reinforce the knowledge that I taught. When I first met her, she told me that Grades 1 and 2 students loved listening to and singing songs, so I decided to try and find a song that was fun to sing and reinforced the knowledge of greetings. Fortunately, I came across a good one, but I hated the video, so I downloaded the video in mp3 format and combined it with some clipart of the greetings that I taught to make a video that my students can watch and sing along to. I took a break from the task to meet up with Alaura and Michael for lunch (rice, cabbage, and all of the pork and tofu my stomach could hold!). Afterwards, I headed straight back to the office to scramble to finish the video and managed to finish it with twenty minutes to spare.

 Since Miss Wang had other duties to attend to, Michael’s associate teacher, Miss Qin, escorted me to my third Grade 2 classroom where students greeted me excitedly as I entered. As I was setting everything up, I had several students come up to give me colourful origami butterflies, which I was so touched by. That boosted my confidence going into the lesson. After Miss Qin introduced me as Miss Aline, I began my lesson. I had good participation from my students and they loved the song that I played for them, so much so that they cheered enthusiastically when I asked them if they wanted me to play it again so they could sing along to it again. I guess what they say is true: third time’s the charm. As I was leaving, more students gave me origami butterflies and I could not help but beam at them and thank them.

 After returning to the office to tell Alaura and Michael how sweet and well-behaved my third class of Grade 2s are, Alaura and I began working on lesson plans while Michael stretched out across the couch to take a nap. Not long after, Miss Song, Alaura’s associate teacher, told us that we could leave since we were done teaching for the day. We obviously didn’t argue and packed our things. Miss Song accompanied us to Zengjiayan station where we bid her farewell for the night and boarded trains going in opposite directions. On the way back to Southwest University, we discussed Minghua’s absence; she was supposed to visit Zeng Jia Yan to check up on us, but never shared. We figured something came up and we dropped the matter.

 Once we arrived back at Tiansheng station (after changing trains on the pink line for reasons unknown), we took a shuttle bus to the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (I ate some rice, green beans, fish, and more tofu). During dinner, Michael sneezed quite a bit. Turns out his upset stomach was the first symptom of his incoming allergies.

 Once we finished dinner, we returned to our dorms to retire for the night. After showering, I seated myself at my desk to finish my weekly reflections before turning in for the night.

Tuesday, April 11th, 2017: Day 6 in Zeng Jia Yan Primary School

 I rolled around in bed this morning for ten minutes after my alarm sounded because I was too tired and cold to leave the comfort of it. What motivated me to eventually get up was the excitement of teaching my Grade 5 students for the first time. After eating breakfast, getting ready, and packing everything that I needed for my Easter lesson, I left with Alaura and Michael around twenty to eight to catch a shuttle bus to Gate 2. Alaura and I were lucky to secure seats on the pink line, but Michael had to stand the entire time. I managed to close my eyes and rest them before we transferred over to the blue line. Both the blue and green lines were packed as usual, but were easier to board and exit than yesterday. We must be getting better at squeezing into tight spaces and roughly elbowing people out of the way.

 We spent the morning prepping for our lessons in the office. After the students’ morning exercises concluded, Alaura and I were called away to teach our classes. My first class of Grade 5 students remembered who I am by appearance, but I had to remind them of my name. The students were able to look at the calendar given to tell me when Easter Sunday and Easter Monday were, express their opinions on the Easter Bunny and the Easter Chick, and had a blast playing Pin the Tail on the Easter Bunny (the students finally understood why I drew a bunny with no tail on the chalkboard at the beginning of the class). In addition, they could tell me which coloured Easter eggs they liked and disliked and that Easter eggs are hidden, hunted for, and eaten. After they watched a Peppa Pig video about an egg hunt, they seemed to understand how an Easter egg hunt worked and were incredibly amazed and excited when I pulled a huge bag of Easter eggs out of my backpack and asked if they wanted to hunt for them. While Miss Wang kept them occupied in the hallway, I hid the eggs around the classroom, making sure to hide one on each of the students’ desks, so they could all find at least one. When I was finished, I had the students come back in and sit down. On the count of three, the scramble to find eggs began. Once I was sure all of the hidden eggs were found, I had the students return to their seats and I asked them how many eggs they each found and which colours they were. Although some only found one, one girl found nine. Some were smart and clever enough to point out the Easter chicks on the blue eggs. I also explained that while we hide, find, and eat Easter eggs, we also share them with others. This propelled students who found multiple eggs to share some with their peers who had only found one. I concluded the lesson by encouraging the students to eat their eggs, which they seemed to love. The second class of Grade 5 students enjoyed the lesson too. On the way to lunch (beef, potatoes, cauliflower, and rice), Miss Wang told me that both she and the students loved my lesson, which made me swell with pride. I felt so good that it felt like it was a Friday.

 After lunch, Alaura, Michael, and I returned to our office where Miss Song asked us if we wanted to teach tomorrow’s choice activity: origami. Michael, knowing my knack for origami and having sat through one of my lessons on the topic during a previous social science class, volunteered me to take the lead on it. I agreed to it and Alaura offered to learn how to fold whatever I planned to teach the students how to fold, so she could help me teach the students, which I was so grateful for.

 Soon after, Alaura, Michael, and I rejoined the choice activity session from the previous Friday to finish making our felt chickens (or, in Alaura’s case, to make a felt chicken). I managed to sew most of mine closed and stuffed it, but I hope to finish it sometime this week. Our eyes lit up when Miss Song offered to fetch us more supplies if we felt, no pun intended, like doing more crafts in our office during our spare time. Honestly, making chickens out of felt is so much fun and it’s relaxing to do. I hope to make more chicken plushies before my return to Canada. Heck, I hope to turn this into an actual hobby!

 Once Michael finished teaching his class for the day, all three of us packed up to leave as Miss Song dismissed us early again. Before we left, some of our students stopped by to give us rainbow bracelets made out of elastic bands. We were so touched by the sweet gifts and agreed to wear them for the rest of our time at Zeng Jia Yan.

 After catching the subway back to Southwest University, we took the shuttle bus to the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for an early dinner (it was half past four when we arrived there) since we knew that we would be too tired to leave our dorms if we stopped there first for a rest. I ate rice, a fried egg, tofu, and beef ribs with potatoes. Once our hunger was satisfied, we returned to our dorms for the night, our stomachs churning after hearing Michael’s story about witnessing a man’s severed finger at a hospital in Canada.

Wednesday, April 12th, 2017: Day 7 in Zeng Jia Yan Primary School

 When my alarm went off at six this morning, I closed my eyes again, planning to keep them closed for another ten minutes. I ended up falling asleep and waking up twenty minutes after my alarm had gone off. Fortunately, I was able to still eat breakfast, get ready, double check that I had everything I needed for my lesson, and still leave the dorms by quarter to eight with Alaura and Michael.

 The subway commute to Zeng Jia Yan was nothing out of the ordinary. I spent part of the commute folding origami blossom hearts and diamond stars to make sure that I would be able to teach students how to make them this afternoon. I was a little creeped out by one of the passengers, a middle-aged man, who spent the commute just watching me fold. I don’t think he blinked much. It was downright creepy. On the bright side, I knew my stuff for the origami workshop.

 We spent the morning in our office finalizing our lesson plans for the day. Eventually, I left with Miss Wang to teach the third section of my Grade 2 students. When I walked into the classroom, there was an uproar of cheers from my students who were beyond thrilled to see me again. I began the lesson by reviewing what they learning the week before. To my satisfaction, they remembered how and when to say, “Hello, my name is…”, “Good morning…”, “Good afternoon…”, and “Good night…”. Knowing that, I continued the lesson by introducing school supplies to them: pencil, sharpener, pen, eraser, book, ruler, chair, desk, bag, and scissors. I then played a video for them with a song that they could sing along to in order to practise how to pronounce the vocabulary and to see what the supplies looked like. They seemed to get a lot of enjoyment out of that, going as far as to show me their own supplies whenever I mentioned them (the one student who tried to lift his desk into the air when the word “desk” was mentioned…wow…). I concluded the lesson by having all of the students select an index card from a bag and the cards either had the name of a school supply on it or a corresponding image of it. Students then scrambled around the classroom trying to match the vocabulary on their cards with the images on someone else’s. They got so excited when they made a match and would come to show me. I even had them all sit down and called up pairs of students who volunteered to share their pairings with the class and the class would respond by saying whether or not the pairing was correct. Overall, the lesson went well and Miss Wang said that I taught them very well. However, I noted from her feedback that I need to spend more time on the pronunciation of complex school supplies (i.e. sharpener) and even take the time to spell them on the chalkboard, two practises that I will definitely implement when I teach this lesson again on Friday and next Monday.

 After the lesson concluded, I returned to the office to teach Alaura how to fold origami blossom hearts and diamond starts, so she could help me teach the afternoon workshop. Amazingly, she took to it like a duck to water and was able to replicate the origami blossom heart without my assistance. She even found a way to make them sit up and ended up video chatting her sister to show them to her and to see if she would like to make some to use as name cards for her wedding.

 Once lunch was finished (chicken, zucchini, shredded potatoes, and rice), Alaura, Michael, and I went to teach the origami workshop. We were greeted by the enthusiastic greetings of about forty students, which made me wonder if we could teach them all to make origami blossom hearts in forty minutes. Once the PowerPoint with step-by-step images was up (thank goodness I already had this made for a previous social science lesson in teacher’s college), we began. Alaura and I would alternate when it came to speaking and folding. After explaining a step, we would circulate the classroom to make sure that the students were making the correct folds. They would get so excited to show us their work at every step and would even help their peers sitting nearby. If they got stuck on a step, I would demonstrate a fold and they could repeat that for the rest of the step. If they made a squash fold from one triangle, they would know how to repeat that for the other triangles without being told to do so. Since they would work so diligently, we finished the workshop with two minutes to spare. The students thanked us in the end and some even gave us their origami hearts to show their gratitude. I was grateful to Alaura for being a great co-teacher and even grateful to Michael who initially planned to simply observe the workshop, but ended up leading by example and folding along with the students and even going as far as to help the students whenever they were stuck on a step. I certainly wouldn’t mind teaching another origami workshop. Hopefully, I will get the opportunity to.

 After the workshop, Alaura went to teach a class while Michael and I returned to the office. I was in the middle of drawing our master timetable on the chalkboard when Minghua paid us a surprise visit and revealed that Dr. Xu was considering transferring us to Bashu Primary School because of its cleaner washrooms, but Michael and I politely declined since we love being at Zeng Jia Yan, as does Alaura. Principal Deng even made arrangements with a hotel nearby, so we can use their washrooms instead. I appreciate her doing whatever she can to make sure that our experience at her school is an enjoyable one. Dr. Xu was right; she’s very motherly and obviously cares about us.

 Once Michael finished teaching his last class of the day, we left and commuted back to Southwest University. When Alaura and I expressed our desire to buy origami paper, Michael showed us to an arts and crafts supplies store just outside of Tiansheng station. I ended up buying a hundred and forty sheets for just under a dollar (4.5 yuan).

 After dinner at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (chicken, tofu, veggies, and rice), we turned in for the night. It has been a long day, but a rewarding and productive one.

Thursday, April 13th, 2017: Day 8 in Zeng Jia Yan Primary School

 Sleeping in this morning felt so heavenly. Although I did wake up every additional hour or so in case Minghua messaged Alaura, Michael, and me the meeting time, it felt good to always close my eyes again and stay underneath the covers of my bed.

 Around half past noon, I met up with Alaura and Michael and we headed downstairs to meet up with Minghua. To our surprise, Sam was with her (turns out he came to Chongqing for a visit). He took us to a little hole in the wall just across the street from the campus (I love their stir-fried rice with green peppers, zucchini, and scrambled eggs). Alaura also loved her rice and Michael loved his noodles. All five meals cost no more than fifty yuan (ten dollars) in total. Needless to say, we’re hitting up that place again soon!

 After lunch, we bid farewell to Sam and then boarded the subway at Beibei station nearby. Since Beibei station is the last station on the pink line, the compartments of the train were empty when they pulled up and we managed to secure ourselves seats. While the pink line was not busy during the middle of the day, the blue line was still jam-packed with passengers and the green line held its typical amount of passengers.

 Although we were excused from teaching classes today at Zeng Jia Yan, we stopped by the school, so Minghua could speak with Principal Deng about our stipends. Since Mitacs Globalink’s grants will be covering the costs of living in the international students’ dorms, Principal Deng and Director Yu planned to give us the money that they would have spent on hotel fees had we not received the grants to cover the costs of commuting to and from Zeng Jia Yan, dorm fees at Southwest University, dinners, and extra as pocket money. We’re not too sure exactly how much the stipends are, but are curiosities are definitely piqued. Alaura and I were able to take a brief nap in the office while Minghua and Principal Deng talked numbers.

 After a brief visit to the Chongqing Zhenggang Traditional Chinese Orthopedics Hospital to see Dr. Xu (she has gotten her voice back), we took an Uber to Bashu Primary School where we got to have dinner with some of the students and staff (chicken, peanuts, cauliflower, veggies, and rice). The students and staff spoke English very well and were eager to get to know us better.

 Once dinner was finished, we made our way to a huge conference room slash auditorium to participate in a Skype call with students from Experiential Bishan Primary School in Chongqing and Queen Victoria Public School in Windsor. During the call, students would teach each other math games and all three schools would challenge each other to several rounds of each game.

 Bashu Primary School went first, showing Bishan Primary School and Queen Victoria Public School how to play ‘24 Points’. You would take four game cards from a deck randomly, excluding jokers, and use a combination of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division to make the values of the four cards equal twenty-four. The rules of order of operations do not have to apply and each card can only be used once. For someone who hates math and sucks at it, I found myself to be pretty good at it. When the students were sharing solutions for a set of four cards, I had the chance to share a solution.

 Bishan Primary School followed with a game in which two students would perform the actions of rock-paper-scissors and would play a number from zero to five on ‘scissors’ (zero is a fist), but say a number from two to ten. If the sum of the two hand gestures do not add up to a number called by one of the players, they play another round until the sum is a number called by a player and that player wins. If the numbers called by both players is the sum of the two hand gestures, both players win. When Michael challenged Jake from Queen Victoria Public School to a round, they were ecstatic to learn that he was an English teacher from Windsor, but there was an uproar from some when he asked them prior to the round who wanted the Toronto Maple Leafs to lose in the NHL playoffs (Michael is a Detroit Red Wings fan). He ended up winning the round.

 Queen Victoria Public School students showed everyone how to make Pentomino animals out of its game pieces. As beautiful as the animals were, I enjoyed playing the game. After the students taught me how to play it, my visual and spatial skills lead me to beating the students in every round by placing my pieces in a way that would block them from placing a piece.

 Hopefully, if all pans outs, I’m in for some rematches in a month!

Friday, April 14th, 2017: Day 9 in Zeng Jia Yan Primary School

 When my alarm sounded this morning, I immediately shut it off and closed my eyes again, planning to roll around in bed for another ten minutes before getting up. I ended up falling back asleep for about twenty minutes before realizing what time it was and scrambling out of the bed to get ready and pack everything that I would need for the day. Fortunately, I was ready to go in time.

 After the usual commute to Zeng Jia Yang, Alaura, Michael, and I went to our office to finalize our lesson plans for the day. Soon after, a teacher came to show us how to get from Zeng Jia Yan to the main floor of the four-star hotel next door, so we can use the bathroom. Apparently, Dr. Xu somehow found out that we have not been using the bathrooms at Zeng Jia Yan (not that we need to anyway since I think seeing the state that the school’s bathrooms were in scared our bladders into holding it until we arrived back at Southwest University) and told Principal Deng who was appalled to have learned that. Apparently, according to Chinese belief, it is damaging to our health if we do not go to the bathroom for a whole day, so Principal Deng made arrangements with the hotel next door to Zeng Jia Yan, a hotel for government officials, for us to use their bathrooms. Not only did walking into that hotel feel like walking back into the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel in Beijing, but its bathrooms had actual toilets, doors over the stalls, and automatic warm water in the sinks. To be honest, they’re better than the ones at the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel. Principal Deng, apparently, also asked that we tell her about anything that makes us uncomfortable, so she can address them and ensure that we have a good experience at Zeng Jia Yan. It’s reassuring to know that she deeply cares about us.

 Once lunch was over (stir-fried rice with meat, veggies, and tomato sauce) and we made another trip to the hotel bathroom, Alaura, Michael, and I left to teach our classes. However, after walking into the classroom, Miss Wang told me that I would not be teaching my Grade 2s today as the mother of one of the students was going to teach them how to make balloon art. When Miss Wang asked me to join the students, I happily agreed. As I help students pump air into balloons, tie up the balloons, and twist them into the heart and stem that were trying to make, I was on edge because the sound of balloons popping suddenly make me jump. Although quite a number of balloons popped during the class, we ended up with about three dozen colourful hearts on stems by the end of the class, myself included. If this is what Miss Wang meant by ‘observing’, I can’t wait to do it again!

 After Michael finished teaching his class, we packed up and caught the subway back to Southwest University. After exiting Tiansheng station, we noted how hot it was outside today (it was predicted to be twenty-five degrees Celsius) and bought ourselves some cold treats: lemonades for Alaura and me and ice cream for Michael. We then caught a shuttle bus for dinner in the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I had chicken, tofu, broccoli, and rice), laughing about how Alaura jinxed an infant in a carriage at one of the transfer stations on the subway; she was in the middle of saying that she wished strollers were more stable in China when, all of a sudden, the carriage tipped over as the mother was pushing it and the infant ended up eating some floor. As distressing as it was to have witnessed it, at least Alaura knows now that words hurt.

 Once we had finished dinner, we returned to our dorms. Alaura shared that the Indian exchange student, whom she and I met inside one of the dormitory elevators the night before, had been messaging her all day via WeChat to ask if she was busy. From being willing to ride the elevator up with us when he needed to go down to his incessant messages to Alaura, it is evident that this guy is not only creepy, but that he is really into Alaura. However, after she took Michael’s advice and replied to his messages that she had a scheduled Skype date with her boyfriend, he seems to have backed off, well, we hope so anyway.

 After Alaura and Michael retired for the night, I messaged Lisa to come over. My blue skirt that I had left to hang on the balcony where the washing machine is disappeared with one of my hangers and may have fallen to a roof below. The manager at the front desk refused to help, but did direct us to an area where we could see if the fabric was indeed my skirt and try to get it myself. Unfortunately, it wasn’t it, so either someone stole my skirt or it did indeed fall off of the balcony and land somewhere else. I hope that it does turn up eventually, but I’m learning to accept that it may be gone for good. Maybe this is a sign that I should do some serious clothes shopping soon?

Saturday, April 15th, 2017: A Wave of Nausea

 A huge wave of nausea woke me up at three in the morning and had me hanging over the toilet every ten minutes for four hours. Although I did not have much to vomit, whatever was left in my stomach came pouring out into the porcelain bowl. By the time the sun rose, I was feeling completely drained.

 I debated over whether or not I should let my mom know that I had fallen ill five weeks after leaving for China. Although the news of my nausea would certainly stress her out, at least she would know about it and I would be able to reassure her that I could take care of myself. When she saw me hanging from my bed via Skype rather than sitting up at my desk, she knew something was wrong before I could explain. When I did explain how I was feeling, a part of her wasn’t surprised as I had the tendency to, for whatever reason, get nausea three to six weeks into a trip abroad. Thankfully, my mom made sure that our family doctor prescribed me medication to deal with nausea before I left for China, so I would have it just in case. After the call ended, I immediately started crying. I’m so used to having my mom around whenever I fall ill and she would always know what to do to help me get better. The fact that this was the first time I had fallen ill and she isn’t nearby to help me made me, for the very first time since arriving in China, miss her and home very much. It’s true what they say: you don’t know what you have until you no longer have it.

 Fortunately, one tablet of my nausea medication knocked me out cold for a few hours, so I was able to catch up on some of the sleep that I had missed without being woken by my queasy stomach. When I did wake up, I wasn’t feeling hungry and I couldn’t look at food without feeling nauseous. I did manage to, however, eat a banana and keep it down. I spent my afternoon under the covers of my bed drinking juice and water and watching reruns of Dancing with the Stars and Gabriel Iglesias comedy specials on Youtube.

 Eventually, I had to drag myself out of bed when Alaura messaged me about dinner plans. Fortunately, I had regained enough strength during my rest to go to the cafeteria to eat some rice and potatoes (I avoided anything extremely greasy because of my nausea). Although I didn’t finish dinner, at least I ate.

 Since we weren’t sure how late we would be out the next day (if I could even go at all), we decided to get grocery shopping out of the way. I bought my usual bread and bananas, more orange juice, a case of water, and a case of Sprite (to settle stomach issues). Due to my lack of strength, Alaura, bless her kind soul, carried my case of water, in addition to hers, all the way back to our dorms. The grocery trip made me reflect on how my mom could easily go out to get whatever I needed whenever I fell ill. Having to do it all on my own made me develop a real appreciation for her and I made sure to tell he that when I Skyped her again to update her on my condition. Turns out I made her day considering she had been stressing since I first called her to tell her that I had fallen ill.

 Alaura was even kind enough to do my laundry, so I could just shower and retire for the night. Although I didn’t get any work done, at least I was able to rest for today. Hopefully, I will feel a bit better by tomorrow because being nauseous all of the time sucks.

Sunday, April 16th, 2017:

 I woke up at eight this morning, feeling a bit better than yesterday and a tad hungry, both which I took as good signs. I managed to eat a piece of bread and a banana and keep both down. The rest of my uneventful morning passed with no cases of nausea, so I decided to go out after all as originally planned. Before I left, I made sure to pack some medication with me and promised myself that I would head back to Southwest University if I really started feeling ill again.

 After lunch in the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (more rice and potatoes), Alaura, Michael, and I met up with two of the Southwest University teacher candidates: Alice and Duan. Together, we made our way to Beibei station and secured seats on the pink line all the way to Xiaoshizi station, the transfer station with the red line. Once we exited the station, we took a nice walk over to Jiefangbei where we met up with Minghua, Sam, and Michael’s friend, Wenhua, inside of a mall. We stood around for a bit, talking and drinking the fruit beverages that we bought, until the English conversation corner inside of the Burger King nearby began. I was very excited about participating in this conversation corner because I would not only get to help non-native English speakers practise their English oral communication skills, but I would also get to connect with native English speakers and learn more about their journeys and how they took them to China.

 Alaura and I struck up a conversation with a native English speaker and a non-native one, both whom were around the ages of sixty and forty respectively. The former, a man named Jim, had been in Chongqing for eight years after having met his new Chinese wife online. He now works as a private English language tutor. While I did not learn much from my conversation with the latter, not even his name, I did note that he spoke English very well. Even the teacher whom we met at Bashu Primary School last Thursday brought a dozen of his students to the corner to have them practise their English with us. Although some were shy, others were very outspoken and loved asking us questions about what we liked and didn’t like and telling us what they liked and didn’t like. One was very keen to share with me his fondness for Canada and his desire to study there. When their parents arrived after two hours to pick them up, they were very pleased to meet us and some even asked me at what age could their children start studying abroad in Canada. Near the end of the group conversation, a young man named Martin introduced himself to Duan and me. Originally from the Czech Republic, Martin has been working in Chongqing for four years as an English language teacher. I was surprised at how fluent he spoke Mandarin and was even more surprised to have learned that he taught himself the language. Although the time came to return to Southwest University shortly after we met, he asked if we could exchange contact information on WeChat, which I agreed to. He even asked if I would come back to the English conversation corner the following Sunday. I told him that I would if I had no plans and we left in separate directions. On the way to the nearest subway stop, Alaura, Michael, and I agreed that we would be making the English conversation corner event a weekly thing and we hope to come back next Sunday. I, for one, would like to get to know Martin better and not just because he remembered my name as he bid us farewell.

 After arriving back outside Southwest University, Duan took Alaura, Michael, and me to another hole in the wall just outside of Tiansheng station while Alice left for the night. We trusted Duan to order dinner, but he made sure that the courses were a mix of spicy and non-spicy dishes. We spent about an hour feasting on rice, beef and potato stew, egg and tomato soup, cucumber salad, assorted veggies, and chicken and veggie stew, all which were very delicious and only cost a total of eight-seven yuan (a little over sixteen dollars).

 During the shuttle bus ride back to our dorms, I started feeling nauseous again. Although I felt my appetite coming back during dinner and was able to eat a little bit more than yesterday, my nausea apparently lingered. Fortunately, I was able to make it back to my dorm before I had a vomit episode and, fortunately, the episode wasn’t major. However, I did message Ms. Wang to inform her about my health and the slight chance that I might not be able to teach tomorrow. She was wonderfully understanding and told me to take tomorrow off if I needed to. As much as I don’t want to miss out on a day of teaching here at Zeng Jia Yan, I also know that I need to get better, so I can be the best teacher that I can be for my students.