Week 10 in China

A Reflection of My First Week at the High School Affiliated with Southwest University and Continuing Adventures in Chongqing

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Monday, May 15th, 2017: A Day of Rest

Another late night of reflection writing had me sleeping in again until about nine, which I was perfectly okay with. Since Alaura and I wanted to be very productive with our reflection work the day before, we postponed our errands to today. We figured doing them today would serve as our break from reflections and force us to go out and get some fresh air.

After a morning of reflection work, Alaura and I left our dorms a little after noon to head to the cafeteria nearby for lunch (I ate rice, four juicy meatballs, and a heaping pile of steamed veggies). We then walked over to the mega supermarket to stock up on groceries. In addition to my usual breakfast buns and bananas, I was tempted to buy four mini custard tarts for three yuan each and I ended up giving into that temptation.

Upon returning to my dorm, I put away my groceries. I then debated over whether I should take a nap or resume work on my reflections. Given how much work I put into my reflections already and how much time I spent on them, I felt like I deserved a nap. Without setting an alarm of any kind, I put the air conditioner on full blast, crawled under the covers of my bed, and closed my eyes. They did not reopen until two hours later and, by then, I felt refreshed again and ready to resume my work.

Although I managed to finish my reflections before dinner, I decided to proofread them with fresh eyes after a break. I spent that break with Alaura in the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (I enjoyed rice with baked fries and sausages and a trio of dumplings). The break continued with a trip to the crafts store where Alaura bought some more paper to fold into origami blossom hearts to be used as decorations for her sister’s wedding. I, on the other hand, stocked up on solid and patterned packs of origami paper, all for less than eight dollars, the price that one pack of origami paper would cost in Canada and I got six packs for less than that cost here in China. I even took the time to browse for clothes and while I found quite a number of tops and dresses with my favourite cut-out shoulders, they were either too tight around the bust or too pricey.

After swinging by our drink joint (iced tea for me and lemonade for Alaura), we returned to our dorms to finish up our reflections. Luckily, I managed to proofread mine and upload it to Blackboard before the Wi-Fi fizzed out again.

Tuesday, May 16th, 2017: First Day at the High School

Mr. Deng messaged Alaura, Michael, and me the day before to tell us to meet him in the lobby of our dorm building today at twenty to nine, so he could show us the walking route to the high school affiliated with Southwest University. Bearing that in mind, I did the only sensible thing that I could do that I would not be able to do if I was scheduled to be at Zeng Jia Yan today: sleep in until seven in the morning. I then ate breakfast, got ready, and dressed in business casual attire because I wanted to make a good first impression at the high school and I was not sure what the school’s dress code is.

Alaura and Michael, who also went business casual for the first day, were ready on time and we went to meet up with Mr. Deng who proceeded to walk us through the route from our dorms to the high school, accompanied by a Southwest University teacher candidate. We arrived at the high school in fifteen minutes where we were given a brief tour of the outdoor area of the school, which included underground pavement areas for basketball, volleyball, tennis, and badminton; a massive artificial field for exercises; and a gorgeous view of the mountains and the Jialing River.

When we were escorted to the Grade 10 English teachers’ office, we learned that teachers who taught the same grade shared an office. Unlike in Canadian schools, students stayed together as a class for all subjects whose lessons, for the most part, occurred in the same classroom. We also met up with another Southwest University teacher candidate, who was doing her placement in the school as an English teacher, and she hoped that we would find the time during our two weeks at the high school to observe some of her classes. We were given temporary identification tags to wear that would make passing the guarded gates of the school on the way in and out easier. Ms. Jing, whose students we would be observing, brought in three of them to be our guides during our time here. They escorted us to their class next door where we introduced ourselves, one by one, to thunderous cheers and applause. Apparently, the sister class next door was wondering what was going on and was a tad jealous when they found out that foreign teachers were observing that class of students and not theirs.

The first class that we observed was a geography one. The teacher greeted the students, all fifty-six of them who, in response, bowed and greeted him politely (the respect for teachers is evident here). He then displayed a biome-based world map via the projector and, using various bar and line graphs, explained how to identify a type of climate based on its features such as temperature and precipitation. He discussed various types of climates in general to those in specific regions, elaborating on differences between western and eastern climates (caused by land forms and mountains) and differences between northern and southern climates (caused by ocean currents such as the North Atlantic Stream). He even teachers about climates in order from tropical to subtropical to temperate. There is strong student engagement during the lesson; there were more opportunities for group discussions amongst peers. The teacher encourages such student engagement by walking around the classroom during the lecture; his passion for geography is evident by the tone in his voice when he speaks and his constant smiling. At one point, he engages in a disagreement with a student over the qualities of a subtropical climate. With regards to student behaviour, they stand to respond to teachers’ questions or to make a statement. Overall, it was an enjoyable class to observe, even though the lecture was done in Mandarin.

After the geography class concluded, Alaura, Michael, and I were invited to join the students outside for their daily morning exercises. Students formed lines on the artificial field based on their class, so we joined the class that we had been observing. The music began and the students began some light dancing that consisted of turns, steps, and flailing hand movements. Not knowing the choreography, Alaura, Michael, and I struggled a bit to keep up. However, my dance background made the task easier to do; I was able to anticipate moves and remember them better, much to the astonishment of Alaura. At one point, we heard beeping and had to do a lunge at each beep. The beeps sounded at a faster rate as time went on, reminding me of those horrendous beep tests that I had to do during Grade 9 gym class back in high school. The beep exercises repeated for a series of push-ups. By the end of the exercises, I realized that I needed to work on my upper body strength, but it could have been worse for me; the guys had to do a second series of push-ups!

Once the exercises were done, we returned to the classroom to observe a math class; however, the teacher was absent. Rather than bring in a substitute teacher, a class meeting was held instead to distribute awards to students to honour their academic achievements. Under the supervision of a Chinese teacher, two students acted as emcees for the awards show-style meeting. A variety of awards were given out to honour top-scoring students in physics and chemistry; Chinese and English; geography, history, and political science; and other clusters of subject areas. Awards also honoured students for the most improvement and for earning the high-scoring grades in all subject areas. Recipients had the opportunity to give speeches in front of their peers in which man discussed their past failures and their tips for academic success. I found this to be very commendable; I like to see students lift each other up rather than knock each other down. In addition, the students in front of the class with an air of confidence, enthusiasm, and humour, which is refreshing to see.

Afterwards, we were scheduled to observe another math class, but Ms. Jing offered to extend our lunch break by having us miss that class, so we had time to walk back to Southwest University and return in time for the next class at twenty after two. We accepted the extension and were escorted back to Southwest University by other one of its teacher candidates. We ate lunch at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I indulged in rice, fish with tofu, and green water crests mixed with scrambled eggs). Given that we had finished at quarter after noon and we did not have to start heading back until ten to two, we returned to our dorms for a good rest; Alaura and Michael enjoyed a nap while I worked on this week’s reflection.

At ten to two, we left the dorms to head back to the high school. Michael lead the way and we made it with five minutes to spare before information technology class started. Unlike the other classes, this one took place in a computer lab in the building next door. The teacher projects his computer on the board and even interrupts work on students’ computers to walk them through the Scratch 2 animation software. He lists the steps via a PowerPoint slide and walks around the lab as he lectures to engage students during the lesson. The creativity unleashed by the students brightens the learning environment of the lab and makes it an enjoyable place to be.

The chemistry class that followed back in the main classroom, however, is another story. The teacher used a teacher-centred approach during his stoichiometry lesson, which resulted in a lack of student interaction and engagement as well as note-taking on my part. The teacher pretty much stayed at the front of the classroom to lecture and write notes on the board for students to copy. It is a good thing that the lesson was only forty minutes long because I was on the verge of falling asleep. Many students crowded the teacher at the end of the class to ask questions due to the lack of opportunities for student engagement during the actual lesson. I felt bad for them.

The physics class was the last class of the day to observe. The lesson about various forces and velocities was mostly teacher-centred, but the teacher did interact with some students in an attempt to engage them in the lesson. Other than that, there was nothing remarkable to report about the class and my disdain for physics may have something to do with that.

With classes done for the day, the teacher candidate from the morning escorted us around campus to observe some after school activities. Members of the Peking opera club were warming up with singing, flexibility exercises, baton twirling, and walks around the stage area with their hands folded to resemble lotus flowers. Four members of the dance club were practising their ballet leaps, tumbles, aerials, and other tricks in preparation for an upcoming competition. Other students were playing badminton, tennis, volleyball, and basketball. It is nice to see so many of them involved in extracurricular activities and not just focused on their academics all of the time.

For dinner, several of the teacher candidates took us to a little hole in the wall known for its Chongqing-style noodles and *jiaozi* (dumplings). Michael ordered noodles with beef while Alaura and I each ordered a plate of dumplings. I honestly expected a small plate of six to eight dumplings, but the server surprised us with fifteen dumplings each, each of them filled with a mix of pork and water crests. After eating one, I thought fifteen was not going to be enough, but after finishing ten, I realized that fifteen would be more than enough. They were some of the best dumplings that I have ever eaten and the spicy chili oil dipping sauce made them taste even better. My mouth was not even on fire! The fact that Alaura, Michael, and I loved our meals made the server and the chef very happy, it seems. When we insisted that we chip in for the bill, our teacher candidate friend refused, said that were the guests, and insisted that dinner was on her. The bill was only forty-eight yuan for four dishes (about nine dollars and sixty cents), but we still thanked her for her generosity and the restaurant staff for the delicious dinner.

After dinner, we returned to the high school to watch the boys of the class we had been observing compete against the boys of their sister class in a basketball game. While the sister class played well and used a lot of strategies, our class was all over the place; they seemed more concerned with chucking the ball carelessly towards the basket than anything else. Honestly, the girls of the class, who were invited onto the court during half time for free throws, made more baskets than their fellow boys. Ultimately, our boys last by who knows how many baskets, but a few that they did make ended up being worth three points each, so we were very proud of them in that regard.

Once the game ended, Alaura, Michael, and I left and walked back to our dorms where we were more than happy to retire for the night after such a long and eventful day.

Wednesday, May 17th, 2017: Second Day at the High School

My alarm sounded at six this morning. As much as I did not want to go back to waking up at that time, I knew that I had to if I was going to be ready to leave with Alaura and Michael at twenty-five to eight, so we could arrive at the high school in time for the first class at eight. After a breakfast of buns and a banana and getting ready, I was off.

We arrived in time for the first class of the day: Chinese. The teacher began by distributing a handout of a play, which students spent about ten minutes reading silently and independently. Afterwards, students volunteer to read solo parts while the other students read simultaneously as the chorus. The emphasis and emotions poured into these readings, combined by the laughter elicited from the students themselves, tells me that the students get a lot of enjoyment from this class. The teacher circulates the classroom to ensure that students are focused and has students repeat lines as a class if pronunciation is a bit off. For a class that I thought I would be bored observing given that the class is the language that I barely understand, I enjoyed it.

English class followed and I was very excited for it because not only would it be taught in my native language, but it would provide me with some valuable insight on second language education for my research paper and for my teaching pedagogy. It was taught by a Southwest University teacher candidate who simply spent the class taking up homework. What surprised me was how much Mandarin she used when she explained things or gave out orders and, to me, that sends a message to the students that they can use Mandarin too in an English class, which defeats the purpose of learning English as an additional language. Although Mandarin should be used occasionally to clarify meaning, English should be the primary language in the classroom and the teacher should facilitate its usage by leading by example. In addition, there seems to be very few students volunteering to give answers to questions and this may be due to the lack of praise and encouragement from the teacher whenever they answer correctly; she simply tells them thanks and then orders them to sit down again. Furthermore, she would say, “Get it?”, but moves on rather than waits for the students to confirm their understanding of the material being discussed or explained and even when the students confirm their understanding with a resounding “Yes”, it is unknown whether or not they actually understand what is being taught to them. I must commend the teacher, however, for reinforcing proper pronunciation of words, differentiating between vocabulary of similar spelling and pronunciation by writing them on the board (i.e. *accompany* somebody, *company* (noun), and keep somebody *company*), and paces around the classroom as she speaks to engage students in the lesson. The learning environment felt dull though until Michael stepped forward to thunderous cheers and applause to explain the correct answer to a question that students did not quite understand and that the teacher had a difficult time explaining. The mood in the classroom immediately brightened and it stayed that way even after Michael stepped down. On a side note, students found it challenging to pronounce the word ‘professional’ and the English workbook contains errors (i.e. ‘Take it in turns…’ rather than ‘Take turns…’). Overall, I found the English class to be more grammar-based compared to a Canadian English class.

Math class followed and was taught by a teacher candidate in the absence of the math teacher, much to the excitement of the students. The lesson was about using coordinates on a grid to find the slope of the line that connects the coordinates, a topic covered in Grade 9 math in an Ontario high school in Canada. It was mostly teacher-centred; she had students solve some problems independently. When students did stand up to volunteer to give an answer to a question or to contribute to a class discussion, they would do so dramatically and enthusiastically, which tells me that they have no respect for teacher candidates or any substitute teacher.

After math class, we took our extended lunch break and returned to Southwest University for lunch in the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I ate rice, water crests with scrambled eggs, and four and a half meatballs). We then went to our dorms where we found WeChat messages from Miss Qin and Mr. Deng regarding activities this weekend. We all said yes to the Friday visit to the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School and the Sunday tour of the silkworm research laboratories of Southwest University, but only Alaura and I accepted the invitation to join the Zeng Jia Yan students and teachers at a children’s carnival on Saturday.

We woke up from nice naps around ten to two and walked back to the high school. During the walk, Michael shared with us that he had received urgent messages from his dad and sister to contact them as soon as possible; however, he decided to get through the rest of today before responding to those messages. We just shrugged and continued our walk back to the high school. The next class was art and our class of students would split up as there were a variety of art classes offered by the high school. Michael went to observe a music class while Alaura and I chose to observe a film class.

The film class was made up of about twenty students from Grade 10, but different classes. We accompanied our buddies’ group of about eight students to the Grade 10 English teachers’ office where they were to film a scene of a father crying at his desk when he finds out that his lesbian daughter, who is in love with another girl, committed suicide. It was a challenge to nail this scene because one of the group members would burst out laughing as the camera rolled. However, I admire how the students wrote a script for a story that addressed modern-day issues and took time to carefully position actors in shots and ensure that the lighting was on point. Alaura and I even got to appear in a scene as extras: two foreign teachers at work at their desks.

After returning to the main classroom, physics class began. The lesson on static electricity was taught by a different teacher from yesterday’s class. It was mostly teacher-centred, but she incorporated a lot of diagrams and images into her PowerPoint to explain theories visually and engaged students during the lesson with a structure used to conduct static electricity, which amazed the students and, for me, made the class more enjoyable than yesterday’s.

History class concluded the school day with a lesson on a Chinese-Japanese war from 1940 to 1948. The teacher used a PowerPoint to project a timeline of events, but more words are found on the slides than images. Although she speaks with emphasis, showing her passion for the subject, she more or less stayed at the front of the classroom and rambled.

The minute class ended, we left the school and stopped by the mega supermarket on the way back where I bought some more breakfast buns and a cold orange juice to beat the heat. We then headed to the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (I ate baked fries with sausages and chicken, a trio of dumplings, and rice). Afterwards, we returned to the dorms to retire for the night. I planned to type up some of my reflections before going to bed; however, Alex messaged me and we ended up chatting for two hours. It turns out that we have been missing each other fiercely.

Thursday, May 18th, 2017: Third Day at the High School

Michael messaged Alaura and me this morning to inform us that he would be taking the morning off. Turns out the urgent messages from his father and sister yesterday were in regards to his grandmother’s passing. We sent him our condolences and encouraged him to let us know if he needed anything. Once I ate breakfast and got ready, I immediately went to work in folding an origami heart with wings out of pink paper and sticking a red origami blossom heart on top. I planned for it to go on top of a sympathy card for Michael, which I had to find the time to make. Fortunately, the extended lunch break would serve as the perfect time to make it and put together a bag of comfort treats like the one Alaura and Michael made for me when Grandma passed.

The first class that Alaura and I observed today was Chinese. The students spent the first ten minutes writing down a passage from memory and then the students passed up the workbooks for the teacher to collect. I frowned at the idea of learning something through memorization; it is pointless. The rest of the class consisted of the teacher lecturing about a few poems and the background of each. Something about the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that sounded awfully familiar to something I learned about in a feminism and Francophone literature course that I took during my final year of my undergraduate studies.

A double math class followed. At first, the student teacher from the day before walked in to thunderous cheers and applause from the students; however, she soon walked back out and the actual math teacher walked in, much to the disappointment of the students. The lesson was a continuation of coordinates and slopes from yesterday’s lesson. For the first half of the lesson, I noted how exasperated the teacher was becoming due to a lack of student engagement during the lesson and he would often bark at the students. I kept thinking: “What is up with this teacher?”. During the second half of the class, however, things did a complete one eighty; the teacher smiled when he lectured and even said some things that elicited laughter from the students. By the end of the class, it appeared to me that the students really liked their math teacher after all. I came to like him myself as the class progressed.

When the students went outside for their daily exercises, Alaura and I accompanied them, but only to watch, which was good for me because my legs have been sore from all the stair and hill climbing that I have been doing at, to, and from the high school.

Once the daily exercises concluded, our buddies escorted us to their general technologies class where the students were scheduled to learn how to make things from paper and wood. The teacher projected a video onto the front screen that would show students a visual representation of the relationship between machines and its users. He also passed out iPads to groups of students so they could access the video using them; however, many iPads were unable to connect to Wi-Fi, so the video did not load on them; therefore, the students became noisy, distracted, and disruptive, and simply spent the rest of the class talking to each other and to Alaura and me. They were very keen to know about our experience in China thus far, from the food that we have eaten to the places that we have visited, and if we are open to coming back one day.

After the general technologies class, Alaura and I returned to Southwest University to have lunch at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I ate baked fries with sausages, tofu with ground pork, and rice). Once we finished, we began to put together our surprise for Michael. While Alaura returned to her dorm with my origami heart piece to work on the card, I caught a shuttle bus to Gate 2 where I bought some pastries from Qinyuan bakery: Michael’s favourite green tea chiffon cake and some sort of muffin with nuts on it. I even bought a slice of tiger cake for myself because I was tempted to. I then swung by our favourite drink joint to pick up Michael’s favourite iced tea before I caught the shuttle bus back to the dorms. By then, Alaura had finished the card and we both signed it. I then packed the pastries into a plastic bag along with a chocolate bar, attached the card to the bag, and quietly placed the bag and drink in front of Michael’s dorm door. I quickly knocked and zipped back into my dorm and locked the door. I listened quietly to hear Michael open his door, picked up his treats, and close the door. Not long after, Alaura and I received a message from him via WeChat thanking us for the gift. It feels so good to do good deeds just to see others happy. Alaura and I later learned from Michael that his mom heard about our thoughtful gesture and expressed her happiness for him having such nice friends to count on.

Michael, who was feeling much better, accompanied Alaura and me back to the high school for our afternoon observations and the students were happy to see him (we told them that he was not feeling well and was resting in his dorm when they inquired about his absence this morning). Apparently, every Thursday they get to spend ten minutes before their first afternoon class learning and singing an English song of their choice. We were treated to a performance of Lukas Graham’s ‘7 Years’, which had me applauding with pride at the end.

Politics class followed the singing performance. The lesson was lecture-based and teacher-centred for the most part; the teacher appeared to have a strict demeanor as he lectured about whatever was written on the imageless PowerPoint. The lesson gradually got engaging as the students began laughing with the teacher and images began appearing on the PowerPoint slides. Overall, the students appeared to like the lesson.

The minute the ringing bell signalled the end of politics class, there was a huge uproar and while regarding the impending English exam. Several students asked Alaura, Michael, and me to help them if they got stuck during the exam. The English teacher candidate began by taking up the homework, which covered the different uses for and tenses of the word ‘take’. When it came time for the exam to begin, the associate teacher, Ms. Jing, excused us from the classroom, much to the evident disappointment of the students. All four of us went to a classroom nearby where we spent the rest of the class talking about the similarities and differences between Chinese and Canadian education. Alaura, Michael, and I talked about the Reciprocal Learning Program and Canadian high schools while Ms. Jing talked about the high school. She told us that new teachers were assigned to teach the younger grades unless Southwest University highly recommended them and expressed confidence in their teaching abilities. She even mentioned the high school’s international education program, which we are hoping to learn more about next week. We also accepted her invitation to teach an English class or two next week and she said that she would inquire about possible interest from other English teachers within the school. When we returned to the main classroom after the English exam, I noted the strong scent of fear and perspiration in the air; however, despite this, some of the students with whom we spoke said that they felt like they did well on the exam.

The school day concluded with physics class. The boring teacher pretty much lectured and showed a video about static electricity at the end of the lesson to summarize his lecture. It was as if the video was used as a weak attempt to convince students that was how static electricity worked and they simply just had to believe it. That was about it. Personally I feel that videos should be shown to students to reinforce knowledge, not take the place of an actual teacher.

Once physics class ended, we left to return to Southwest University. We had dinner at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I ate four jumbo meatballs, zucchini, a trio of dumplings, and rice). We then returned to our dorms for the night, but I left a bit later to grab some popcorn chicken and fries from my favourite alley joint nearby because I was craving them. No regrets!

Friday, May 19th, 2017: Visit to the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School

Since we were not going to the high school affiliated with Southwest University today, I was able to sleep in for an extra hour. I had to be up at seven, so I had enough time to eat breakfast, get ready, and be ready to go by ten after eight. We were scheduled to tour the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School today and I was very excited for it, mainly because we were not expected to walk all the way there.

At ten after eight, Alaura, Michael, and I met Mr. Deng and the same Southwest University teacher candidate from Monday in the lobby of our dorm building and we drove to the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School where we were given a tour of the place. We toured some classrooms, active and mock ones, where students are specifically trained to be preschool teachers. I admired how brightly coloured and cheery the mock classrooms appeared to be. There were so many toys that I felt like being a kid again, even for just a moment.

After being shown statues outside of the founder of the school and other important figures in the school’s history, we were lead to a kitchen where about twenty students were observing a chef demonstrate how to make a tasty sauce for the chicken dish that he had prepared. He showed the culinary students how to decorate the dish with carefully-cut cucumber and carrot slices and how to artistically drizzle the sauce over the entire dish. I wish that we could have tasted the dish, but we had to continue the tour.

We passed the students’ dormitories on the way to the garden and greenhouse where we got to see some of the bonsai trees and other plants trimmed by its agriculture students. We were impressed to have learned that one of the school’s former agriculture students won a national competition for shaping plants and now works for a prestigious company in Canada.

When all of the school’s four thousand students were called onto the outdoor field for their morning exercises, we observed from above. Leaning against the barrier, we listened to a staff member warn students during today’s ‘morning exercise’ not to swim in the Jialing River, not to stay out too late, and not to ride motorbikes.

Once the lectures about the dangers of Beibei were over and the students returned to their respective learning environments, we were escorted to a nearby building in which we would be sitting in on our first vocational class: hospitality administration. Today, the students learned how to conduct a traditional Chinese tea ceremony from the teacher who used to be employed in a hotel, but was offered the opportunity to teach at the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School. The students, I noted, were all in uniform: the guys looked like waiters and the girls looked like flight attendants. There were about thirty students in the class. Once the teacher went through the procedure of the tea ceremony, step by step, the students got to practise at their own tables in groups. The teacher then proceeded to teach Alaura and me how to conduct the tea ceremony, which is a lot harder to do than it looks. Not only are there numerous steps to follow, but there are specific ways to hold the cups and tea pot, to turn the tea pot, and to position your fingers. I joked that I belong at the high school affiliated with Southwest University with the academics and Michael remarked that he would not be able to be as graceful as I was being when his turn came. I was the guinea pig and Alaura followed. Michael was the last to go and he was taught by one of the male students because males conduct the tea ceremony differently (and with slightly fewer techniques, it seems) than females do. Thankfully, the Southwest University teacher candidate filmed us, so we can watch them later on before conducting future tea ceremonies with our own tea seats.

After thanking the teacher, we were escorted to another classroom in the same building to briefly observe a technology class involving power cords. The teacher was instructing the twenty or so students how to properly insert and connect them. Not long after, we headed to the basement of the building where twenty to thirty students were creating steel and metal objects using a machine operated by hand. The environment resembled that of an actual factory. In a nearby room, automatic machines used to make the same steel and metal objects were stored. Students, I learned, are taught how to use both.

After touring a few more classrooms and snapping a group photo in front of one of the buildings, Mr. Deng drove us back to Southwest University and dropped us off outside our dorm building. We then walked over to the cafeteria nearby for lunch (I ate four jumbo meatballs, veggies with scrambled eggs, and rice). We then returned to our dorms for some rest and to work on our weekly reflections.

A few hours later, Alaura and I went to a mall outside Gate 2, but I only had time to try on and buy one dress before we decided to leave because of the lack of air conditioning. We went to get drinks at our favourite drink joint outside Gate 2 (I got iced tea and Alaura got lemonade) and then returned to the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (I ate baked fries with sausages, a trio of dumplings, and rice). Then, we went back to our dorms to retire for the night and resume our work on our reflections.

Saturday, May 20th, 2017: A Day with Zeng Jia Yan

I was out of bed the minute my alarm sounded at six. I ate breakfast, dressed, packed, and was ready to go by ten to seven. Alaura, too, was ready by that time. Michael opted to take the day off and continued to sleep in.

Alaura and I met Mr. Deng in the lobby of our dorm and he graciously drove us to Tiansheng station where we caught the pink line out by seven. Traffic between lines was not as chaotic as usual and even the blue line trains were fairly empty. We managed to make it to Zengjiayan station with twenty minutes to spare. Mr. Gao and his daughter showed up after ten minutes and we boarded the green line to Linjiangmen station where we exited and climbed a nearby hill to a gated schoolyard where the children’s carnival was taking place. There were twelve to sixteen tents present, meaning that twelve to sixteen schools within the area were hosting games for the children to play and win prizes.

As the morning went by, the number of visitors increased. Alaura and I got much enjoyment watching children stop by with their parents and grandparents to play our ring toss game. For one stamp on their ticket, they were given five rings to throw. If a ring landed over a prize, the student would win that prize. Smaller prizes like cups and water bottles were placed closer to the front while prizes like plushies and cars were placed further back. I was surprised to see a lot of parents and grandparents amusing themselves with the game as well. One mother won a large plushie and then ran around the entire schoolyard showing people her prize. I smiled at the sight of parents and grandparents spending time with their children and grandchildren and to see the children take a break from their studies to have some fun and be children. Alaura and I even got to visit some of the tents; the man at the Chinese paper cutting tent was so patient as he taught Alaura and me how to make a snowflake and a Chinese symbol displayed at weddings. As a thank you for volunteering to assist with the carnival, we were each allowed to take a mini plushie and I took a bear with the words ‘I Love You’ written in Chinese on its shirt. Our tent game was so popular that we ran out of prizes within three hours and were dismissed by eleven o’clock.

Alaura and I planned to spend the rest of the day downtown, so we grabbed some country-style lunch at a nearby CSC restaurant (I ate two pieces of fried chicken, rice, beef with mixed veggies, and zucchini, and drank a glass of Pepsi) and then boarded the red line at Jiaochangkou to Xiaoshizi where we exited. We spent the next few hours at the Chongqing Chaotianmen Garment Wholesale Market to try and finish up our souvenir shopping for our friends and family as well as to purchase carry-on luggage to carry it all. We managed to get a good deal on decent-sized luggage (a hundred and forty yuan each). I also bought a tea cup with a strainer for my faculty adviser, a cup for my tea set, and a dress for myself.

After shopping, we boarded the pink line at Xiaoshizi station and returned to Southwest University. We exited at Tiansheng station, bought our drinks (iced tea for me and lemonade for Alaura), and caught a shuttle bus to our dorms. We rested and then were joined for dinner at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms by Michael (I ate baked fries with sausages, a trio of dumplings, and rice). We then returned to our dorms for the night to finish our weekly reflections.

Sunday, May 21st, 2017: Catch-Up Day

Alaura, Michael, and I met Mr. Deng in the lobby of our dorms at twenty to nine and he drove us to the silkworm research laboratory within Southwest University for a tour. We designed empty silkworm pods to look like the minions from *Despicable Me* and were given a tour of the laboratories. It was interesting for us, but not so much for the children. Although designing empty silkworm pods was fun for them, I felt like they were too young to really understand everything that goes on behind the doors of the laboratories. One thing that I enjoyed doing was petting some of the silkworms; they were adorable!

After the tour, Mr. Deng drove us back to our dorms where we rested for a few hours and then went to the cafeteria nearby for some lunch (I ate pork with tofu, veggies, and rice). We then jetted over to the mega supermarket to stock up on groceries and then returned to the dorms to work on our reflections and take well-deserved naps. We were so focused on our reflections and the weather was so rainy that we were too lazy to go to the cafeteria for dinner, so we visited the nearby alley joint for some fried food (I ordered a crispy chicken burger, fries, popcorn chicken, and a pop) that we took back to our dorms where we stayed for the rest of the night.