Week 11 in China

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

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Monday, May 22nd, 2017: Fourth Day at the High School

We first observed Chinese class, which consisted of a strict ten-minute lecture from the teacher and then a simultaneous recitation of the content on the PowerPoint and from the textbook.

The math class that followed was a continuation of the lecture on slopes. The teacher used a strict voice to bark explanations at the students.

The English class about philosophers of ancient China seemed to be comprised of many components that I was astonished to see could be fit into a forty-minute lesson. Firstly, Ms. Jing had students define what a philosopher is (i.e. someone who is quiet, someone who is a thinker, someone who can describe how the world works, someone who is mad/crazy/insane; he always follows his own ideas without listening to others, etc.) before defining it as someone who is smart; a person who studies or writes about philosophy; a person whose ideas are very influential. Secondly, she asked students who they thought was the most influential philosopher of ancient China and most said Confucius. Thirdly, she presented statements about Confucius, which students had to indicate were true or false and to correct the false statements to make them true. Fourthly, she encouraged students to speak in English for group discussions about things related to Confucius and circulated the classroom to engage students, many of whom were very attentive during her lectures. Fifthly, Ms. Jing had students translate the teachings of various Chinese philosophers (i.e. “Man is born good”, “All human beings are equal”, “People are more important than rulers”, etc.) and then had them guess whether each teaching was associated with Mencius or Mozi. Students had to search the passage in the textbook about Mencius and Mozi to find evidence to support their guesses and were instructed to check their answers with a partner. The whole class then regrouped to revisit answers together and share evidence from the text. For the sixth component of the lesson, Ms. Jing gave students two minutes to read the second part of the textbook and use keywords to help them retell the life experiences of Mencius on paper. Afterwards, they would share their writing with partners and then some shared their writing with the class. Ms. Jing explained that keywords can help them remember the life experiences of Mencius. The last activity of the period involved the students working with a partner to retell the full story of Mencius, using his life experiences, to make him sound like a great philosopher.

After the students engaged in their daily morning exercises, the second period of English class started with the students reading the third part about Mozi of their textbook and then filling out a table in the workbook about his life experiences (i.e. “He came from a family which…”). Afterwards, Ms. Jing instructed the students to talk with their partners about how Confucius’s ideas were similar to and different from Mencius’s and Mozi’s. Following that, Ms. Jing had the students discuss various phenomena in groups of four (i.e. respecting elders, going to school without paying fees, not laughing at others, etc.), link each one to a philosopher, and then explain their answers. When very few students participated in sharing their answers, she drew popsicle sticks with names on them to select students. Then, Ms. Jing instructed students to define vocabulary within a work bank in the workbook and use some of them, altering some if necessary (i.e. changing ‘philosophy’ to ‘philosophies’), to fill in the blanks within a given passage in three minutes. As a class, they discussed the pronunciations of vocabulary words and the answers to the passage blanks. To conclude the lesson, Ms. Jing had students review the words ‘who’, ‘which’, ‘where’, ‘when’, and ‘whose’ after which the students completed seven blanks within given sentences with the correct words and then they discussed the answers as a class.

After English class ended, Alaura, Michael, and I returned to Southwest University for lunch (four meatballs with veggies and rice). Upon returning to my dorm for a brief nap, I came across messages from Ivy, a fellow Southwest University teacher candidate, who was wondering if I would be interested in teaching some English classes. I jumped at the opportunity and she passed on my contact information to a teacher named Miss Wan Pu who contacted me shortly after to ask if I would be interested in teaching her period three and five Grade 10 classes tomorrow. I agreed and she recommended that I put together a PowerPoint about me, Canadian misunderstandings of China (including my own), my experience in China thus far, and anything else that I wanted to talk about. Rather than take a nap as originally planned, I immediately got to work in putting together the PowerPoint and lesson plan, but stopped my work when the time came to return to the high school with Alaura and Michael.

The afternoon at the high school was spent observing Thomas’s middle school English classes (he is a Reciprocal Learning Program alumnus). During his first Grade 7 English class, Alaura, Michael, and I introduced ourselves to the students who seemed very excited to have us there. Then, Thomas has a student volunteer to read a passage from the textbook to practise speaking English. Afterwards, the class officially starts and students rise and bow to greet Thomas and wish him a good afternoon. The first component of the lesson involved students reciting some common phrases associated with ordering food such as ‘What would you like?’, ‘Yes, please’, and ‘No, thanks’. The second component consisted of students looking at funny animations and recalling food vocabulary as well as practising the pluralization of each food. There was an emphasis of syllables in some words (i.e. dumplings) and I noted that this component covered both Chinese and Western foods (i.e. burgers, pizza, etc.). I also noted that they call the meat of lamb ‘mutton’ rather than ‘lamb’. A fun quiz via a PowerPoint followed, which involved the students matching the words with the pictures of food; Thomas would give the Chinese word and the student would stand up to give the English equivalent. The fourth component of the lesson involved the students reading a short comic strip in their textbooks of two characters at a Chinese restaurant with pictures of food. The students had to match the letters next to the food to the word on the list given. What I was displeased to see was that Thomas showed the answers to the exercise too soon after assigning the task; ten seconds is not enough time for the students to do the exercise on their own before seeing the answers. The fifth component of the lesson featured images of specials (i.e. noodles with beef and tomatoes). Thomas made sure to differentiate between the word ‘special’ as an adjective and the word ‘special’ as a noun by using them in example sentences and gave the students time to practise the conversation, ‘What would you like?’ and ‘I’d like some…”. The lesson concluded with Thomas giving the students one minute to practise ordering noodles with two different toppings (chicken, beef, mutton, cabbage, potatoes, and tomatoes).

We stuck around to introduce ourselves to Thomas’s second English class before we were dismissed for the day. Some of the Southwest University teacher candidates also left with us to show us a different exit of the school and a different route back to Southwest University. After saying goodbye to them, Alaura, Michael, and I went to the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (baked potatoes with sausages, rice, and a trio of dumplings) and then returned to our dorms for the night. I spent the rest of my night finalizing my lesson and PowerPoint before going to bed.

Tuesday, May 23rd, 2017: Fifth Day at the High School

When my alarm sounded at six, I ate breakfast and got ready for the day. Alaura and I left at half past seven to head over to the high school. Michael had left fifteen minutes prior to arrive earlier and set up for the first period class during which he would be teaching English to the class of students that we had been observing for the past week.

Michael’s lesson began with him giving the students five minutes to read the first paragraph of a textbook passage about Western philosophers. He would then show them images of quotations from various Western philosophers via a PowerPoint slide; however, the students seem to have difficulty understanding and putting them in their own words in English. Afterwards, Michael gave the students three minutes to read the next paragraph about Socrates from the textbook and then spent five minutes explaining Socrates’ philosophy about questioning everything. Then, he had the students spend five minutes reading the next paragraph about Aristotle and then asked students if someone could tell him what Aristotle’s philosophy is: there is an explanation for everything that exists. Michael then clarified new vocabulary words that he used that students did not seem to understand (i.e. relevant). I noted that there seemed to be a lack of participation throughout Michael’s lesson, so much so that he had to draw popsicle sticks with names to choose students. Although I enjoyed the content of his lesson, it seemed that he used words in his lectures that students did not know. A student actually approached him after the lesson to tell him this, which he profusely apologized for. This reminded me to use appropriate pacing and simpler language during my lessons for day, even if the students know more English than those at Zeng Jia Yan.

I spent the second period reviewing my PowerPoint and lesson plan and making sure everything was ready to go. Near the end of the second period, I introduced myself to Miss Wan Pu in her office and smiled at how warm and welcoming she was. Once the second period ended, she escorted me to her third period class where she helped me set up my PowerPoint and distribute red, green, yellow, and white cue cards to her sixty students with each student getting one of each colour. Gradually, Southwest University teacher candidates filed in to observe the class, including Alaura and Michael, which made me nervous right off the bat; however, I reminded myself that my lesson was about me, that nobody knew more about me than me, and that I would be fine.

When the bell signalled the start of third period, I introduced myself to the students and told them to write down any questions that they had about me, Canada, or my time in China on their white cue cards and that I would be answering them at the end of the class. I then started off by showing students a map of the world and having a student volunteer to point out where Canada is. I then introduced the students to Canada’s national anthem and playing a video of the anthem with the lyrics on it, so we could sing it together as a class. Then, I showed them a map of Canada and had students volunteer to guess which area is Ontario. Once a student guessed correctly, I told them that I lived in Ontario and showed them where Windsor is. I showed them images of Windsor, the city that I lived in, and the University of Windsor where I go to school. Rather than lecture about me, I explained to the students that they would play ‘One Truth, Two Lies’ to learn more about me; I would show them three different coloured phrases about me and they would have to hold up the coloured cue card of the phrase that they believed was true about me. I started with having them guess if I studied English, French, or Spanish, which I received a mix of responses to. I then explained that I majored in French Studies and minored in Psychology and Applied Information Technology. I also added that French was Canada’s second official language and then proceeded to sing the national anthem in French, which the students seemed impressed by. I then continued with the game, having them guess more things about me such as which grades I’m qualified to teach in Canada (Grades 7 to 12), what my ethnicity is (Vietnamese, Filipino, Spanish, Canadian, not Chinese), and if I had any siblings (my brother). Many students were astonished to learn that I was not Chinese and that my brother was taller and younger than me. They applauded when they learned that I was twenty-three years old. I then talked about Canadian misunderstandings about China; the students found it funny that my aunt thought that China was dangerous, that my classmate thought Chinese people are mean, and that my friend’s father thought all Chinese people eat only grasshoppers. I showed them images and talked about using my experience in China thus far to prove all of these above people wrong (not that I believed them in the first place). I also discussed my misunderstanding about Chinese students and how I thought they all focused only on school and did not go outside to have much fun. While this is true according to the students, I showed them images of Alaura, Michael, and I having fun with Southwest University students who are dedicated to school, but are able to balance it with having fun. Since I talked about Canadian misunderstandings of China, I decided to look into Chinese misunderstandings of Canada; I had the students read statements, one by one, and indicate with green cue cards if they believe them to be true and pink cue cards if they believe them to be false. They learned that not all Canadians speak French, that Canada is very multicultural, and that it is not cold everywhere in Canada all year round. I then had them guess what I was doing in China (some responses included exchange, travelling, and looking for a boyfriend). I explained that I was in China for many reasons: to learn to be a better teacher, to travel, and to learn about the Chinese culture just to name a few. The students were astonished to learn that only four other teacher candidates came to China with me and I showed them images of our time in Beijing, Chongqing, and Chengdu. I concluded my lesson by collecting the white cue cards from students, tossing them into a bag, and answering some questions until the bell rang (questions included what my favourite food in Chongqing was, my favourite city in China, my favourite cities in Canada, and if I liked Justin Bieber). When the bell rang, some students approached me to ask more questions, which I was more than happy to stick around and answer.

I spent the fourth period of the school day resting in Miss Wan Pu’s office where I spoke with her and she helped me put together the coloured cue cards for the next lesson, which also turned out very well; the students seemed to have had a great time and some also approached me at the end of the lesson to ask me questions, which I happily took time to answer.

Miss Wan graciously offered to drive me back to Southwest University where I had lunch in the cafeteria nearest to my dorm building (I ate baked fries with sausages, rice, and veggies). I then returned to my dorm for a brief nap before I returned to the high school with Alaura and Michael. Alaura told us that she would be returning back to Southwest University later as she would be sticking around to observe a drama club. She then went to observe a different class while Michael and I went to observe our usual Grade 10 class of students in their general technologies class where they experimented more with Scratch 2. When we returned to the Wanxiang building afterwards, Michael learned that the last two classes to observe were chemistry and physics, which he did not like and took off. I was not sure where he went, but I stayed around to observe the chemistry class about stoichiometry. I found my left knee hurting badly as I sat, so much so that I decided to leave early after chemistry class ended and hobbled back to Southwest University. I ate dinner in the same cafeteria (more baked fries and sausages with rice and a trio of dumplings) and then returned to my dorm for the night to rest my knee.

Wednesday, May 24th, 2017: Day of Rest

I woke up when my alarm sounded at six to find that it was still incredibly painful to bend my left knee. Since I was not scheduled to teach today, I decided to take the day off. I hoped that staying off of my feet for a day and not climbing many hills and stairs would allow my knee to heal enough for me to go to the high school on Thursday and Friday to teach as planned. As much as I did not want to lose a day at the high school, my health was my main priority. I messaged Alaura via WeChat to tell her that I would not be leaving with her and Michael and let her be the one to tell him. I then closed my eyes and hoped to get some more sleep, but incoming WeChat messages from Ivy made that impossible. She told me that there were some teachers who were interested in having me teach their classes and was wondering if I would be free to teach them tomorrow morning during the first two periods. I agreed and she told me to teach anything that I wanted. Since yesterday’s lesson went so well, I figured I would just teach that to the two classes. That would give me more time to put together the lesson for Miss Wan Pu’s classes about the Industrial Revolution.

After a few hours of working on the lesson, I decided to grab some lunch. Given the state that my knee was in, walking to the cafeteria nearby was out of the question, so I limped over to the fast food in the alley across from the dorm building to pick up a crispy chicken sandwich, popcorn chicken, fries, and a Pepsi. Once I hobbled back to my dorm, I took a break from lesson planning to enjoy my delicious lunch and some reruns of The Berenstain Bears, one of my favourite television shows when I was a child, on YouTube. After lunch, I resumed my work on my lesson. I considered taking a nap, but the determination to finish the lesson and perfect it to my satisfaction overrode that consideration. Eventually, I took a break for dinner when Alaura and Michael messaged me to ask if I was feeling better enough to walk over to the cafeteria nearby. I ended up eating some baked potatoes with sausages, rice, and a trio of dumplings while Alaura and Michael told me about how their day went at the high school. Afterwards, we returned to our dorms to retire for the night and I managed to finalize my lesson and send the necessary worksheets to Miss Wan Pu to print for tomorrow.

Thursday, May 25th, 2017: Sixth Day at the High School

Once my alarm sounded at six, I was up to get ready for the day. I ate breakfast, got ready, packed my things, and was ready to go at ten after seven. Since I was scheduled to teach my first class of the day at eight, I wanted to be there early to set up, so I headed over to the high school on my own. Upon arriving at the office, I met up with the teacher whose class I would be teaching first and, after a bit of a rest, she escorted me to her class and helped me pass out the coloured cue cards while I set up my PowerPoint. Like the first two times I taught this lesson, everything went smoothly; the students seemed engaged and had lots of questions to ask me, so many in fact, that I had to politely draw the line or else I would be late to teaching the same lesson to another class during the second period. Fortunately, that lesson went as well as the first three, which alleviated most of my nerves about teaching the Industrial Revolution this afternoon.

I spent the third and fourth periods making sure everything for my lesson about the Industrial Revolution was ready. I accompanied Alaura and Michael back to Southwest University for lunch (four meatballs with veggies and some rice) and a brief nap before returning to the high school. I spent the first period of the afternoon double checking everything for my lesson. Alaura tagged along when I left to meet up with Miss Wan Pu who, to my astonishment, had all of my worksheets printed and distributed to all of her students. She escorted us to the same first class of hers I taught before. Alaura sat at the back of the room to observe and to finalize her lesson for the day while I set up my PowerPoint. One of the students approached me to gift me with a box of postcards that all of the students in the class wrote messages to me on, which I was so touched by.

Once the bell rang, the show began. I started my lesson by asking students what words came to their minds when they think about the Industrial Revolution and I received responses about English, machines, and factories, which told me that they knew quite a bit about the event already. After defining the Industrial Revolution, I had them take a minute to read the first paragraph of their textbook passage on the subject and to write down any words that they had trouble understanding on their vocabulary chart on their worksheets. Afterwards, I would have them share with me any words that they had trouble understanding in the first paragraph such as ‘mass production’ and I would clarify their meanings by defining them. Then, I would show them how to construct a mind map about the Industrial Revolution by having them tell me, rather than have me tell them, which information in the first paragraph was very important to put on the map. I would draw the map on the board and they would do the same on their worksheets with the given mind map template. If they were missing an important piece of information, I would kindly prompt them (i.e. “Did the Industrial Revolution happen yesterday? No? Then, when did it happen?”). After one section of the mind map was completed, I would review all of the important information with the students and even throw in some interesting facts such as an example of a population increase during the Industrial Revolution. I repeated this process for the second and third paragraphs until we had gone through the whole passage and the mind map was complete. I concluded the lesson by showing the students an example of a colourful mind map constructed using a program called ‘Cmaps’ about the Industrial Revolution and explaining to them that there are different ways of learning; some students are good at reading passages to learn the information from them while others need to visualize something else to learn it. I also explained to them that they can now make mind maps for anything topic that they learn about now that they know how to. Now, they have a mind map about the Industrial Revolution that they can picture during an exam and they have a vocabulary sheet with words that they did not know before, but now know. I made sure to thank all of the students for the wonderful postcards before I left. I also taught this lesson to Miss Wan Pu’s last class of the day and they both went well; this class also gave me a gift of postcards, which I was also incredibly touched by. Miss Wan Pu was very intrigued by my teaching methods because I had students construct a vocabulary list based on words they did not know very well whereas she prefers to give them a list of vocabulary to learn. I explained to her that by having the students make a vocabulary list, I’m letting them take responsibility for their learning and tailoring the list to meet their learning needs.

After meeting up with Alaura and Michael, we left the school and stopped by the mega supermarket to grab materials for our vocational high school lesson tomorrow: little plastic cups, several bottles of orange juice and Sprite, a bottle of fruit juice, a bottle of Gatorade, a glass, and a spoon. We then stopped by the cafeteria nearest to our dorms for dinner (baked fries with sausages, a trio of dumplings, and rice) and then returned to our dorm building where we finished our vocational high school PowerPoint, sent it off to Thomas, and then retired for the night.

Friday, May 26th, 2017: Seventh Day at the High School

Once my alarm sounded at six, I immediately got up to eat breakfast and get ready. After making sure the drinks, glasses, ribbons, and comb that I needed for today’s lesson were in my backpack, I headed over to the high school with Alaura and Michael where Ms. Jing collected our identification tags from us, but said that we were welcomed to the high school anytime. Michael and I pretty much sat in the office while Alaura went to teach a class; Michael was going over the PowerPoint for the lesson while I spotted some French language textbooks on a teacher’s desk and started flipping through them. They focused a lot on phonetics and pretty much all of the material covered from Grades 9 to 12 French courses in Ontario high schools.

Since Alaura was scheduled to teach a class during period three, Michael and I went to teach Thomas’s first class by ourselves. Once everything was set up and the bell rang, the lesson began. Michael started by talking about what the Ontario school system looked like and how we have an option of going to vocational high schools to learn trades and that they, as students, should not be afraid to consider that option when the time comes to choose a high school to go to. Michael launched into an intriguing lecture about machinery and I followed up with cooking and hairdressing. A student even volunteered to let me style her hair when I asked for a volunteer. The students, Thomas, and Michael watched as I simply did one simple braid on each side of her head and wrapped them around her head and secured them together at the back with a red ribbon. To me, it was nothing impressive; however, Michael, Thomas, and the students seemed to think otherwise, which made me smile. Michael ended the lesson with a lecture on bartending and even showed students how to make fruity drinks (none with alcohol, of course). He even mixed Sprite and orange juice together in the little plastic glasses, which I distributed to students to taste and they seemed to get a lot of enjoyment out of that.

Once Michael and I cleaned up, we rested in Thomas’s office for a bit where he gave us an option for Sunday: go to his house for dinner to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival or have his students bring dishes from home to the riverfront of the Jialing River for a barbecue and potluck lunch. We agreed on the latter and Alaura agreed as well when she arrived shortly after. We then went to another one of Thomas’s classes where we taught the same vocational high school lesson. The only differences were that Alaura discussed the benefits of cooking as a career and about eight teacher candidates were in attendance to observe. Like with the first lesson, this one also went well and everyone present seemed to have enjoyed it.

After exchanging WeChat contact information with the Southwest University teacher candidates and posing for selfies, Alaura, Michael, and I returned to Southwest University for lunch (baked potatoes with sausages, rice, and veggies) and a nice nap. I realized that a housekeeper had been in to clean and change the sheets and that my pyjama top laying on my bed was missing. I figured that it must have gotten mixed up with the bedsheets, but I decided to worry about it later.

After our naps, we made sure that we looked presentable and we had gifts packed before we left at two to catch the pink line out of Beibei. Traffic was low on all three lines and we arrived at Zeng Jia Yan with half an hour to spare. We spent that time checking out all of the students’ artwork on display outside of the school and even got to vote on which ones we thought were the best. Eventually, we left with Ms. Wang, Mr. Wong, and a student to go to the students’ home for dinner. I braced myself for another long walk like last time; however, I was surprised to learn that the students’ home was only a mere few steps away from the school. We climbed up to the ninth floor of the apartment to her home where we were greeted by her parents and grandmother. They encouraged us to take a seat. While the mother and grandmother made dinner, the student danced the rumba and played her Hulusi for us while her father made us tea and taught us how to play Chinese chess. Based on observations, a lot of the pieces were the same as those in regular chess as were some of the moves; however, it was a bit of a challenge to remember what the pieces were based on their symbols; thus, remembering how each piece moved was a challenge, but it was nice to see. At one point, we took a break, so the grandmother could show us how to properly wrap sticky rice in bamboo leaves; Alaura and Michael seemed to have nailed it in little time, but it took me a little while to master.

When it came time for dinner, Alaura, Michael, and I were encouraged to sit at a round table in the living room where dishes of pork, tofu, beef stew with bamboo shoots, cucumber slices, snow peas, fish soup, beef, and sticky rice were on display. We snapped a few photos with everyone around the table before we sat down to devour the delicious meal. The father even brought out a bottle of red wine for the occasion; Alaura and Michael each accepted a glass, but I politely declined. After the meal, we thanked the entire family for their hospitality and presented the students with some Canadian trinkets as a thank you gift. Ms. Wang then walked us to the subway where we caught the train back to Southwest University and a shuttle bus back to our dorms to retire for the night. Before I went to bed, I asked Lisa to send me a message in Mandarin about my missing pyjama top, so I could show it to the staff at the front desk tomorrow.

Saturday, May 27th, 2017: Eighth Day at the High School

Since I was not scheduled to teach until third period today, I could afford to sleep in a little longer than usual. I got up around half past seven to eat some breakfast buns and a banana. Given how hot it was going to be today, I decided to wear one of the dresses that I bought at Chongqing Chaotianmen Wholesale Garment Market; it was modest enough for me to wear to teach, yet airy enough to wear on such a hot day. Once I was ready and my backpack was packed, I took my Hello Kitty pyjama top downstairs to the lobby where I showed it and the message from Lisa to the staff member at the front desk. She, in turn, called two housekeeping staff to escort me to the laundry room in the basement where they proceeded to tear up the used bedsheets that they had collected from cleaning the dorm rooms. I finally spotted my pyjama top buried in them and snatched it, thanked the staff, and headed back upstairs to my dorm where I tossed my pyjama top onto my bed, grabbed my backpack and purse, and left to walk to the high school by myself (Michael had left at half past seven and Alaura left around eight).

Without my name tag, the guard at the front gate to the high school did not recognize me at first, but he happily let me go once I told him that I was there to teach. I made my way over to the Wanxiang building to the Grade 10 English teachers’ office where I rested for a bit. When the bell signalled the end of second period, I took my things to Ms. Jing’s classroom next door to set up. Ms. Jing passed out my handouts while I set up my laptop and organized my notes and some of the students pulled down the screen and turned on the projector for me. When I looked up from my laptop, I was surprised to see not only Alaura and Michael seated at the far back of the room, but also ten other Southwest University teacher candidates (a mix of those who did their placement in the school and those who simply tagged along for the visit). Even though I had already taught my lesson about the Industrial Revolution twice already, I still felt petrified at the realization of having to teach it under the watchful gazes of twelve teacher candidates. I did not need the extra pressure. Fortunately, the lesson panned out as well as the previous two did. I did, however, have to crack a few more jokes to keep the students’ focus on the lesson since they were a very quiet bunch.

After the lesson ended, I returned to the office for a rest. Given that I was scheduled to also teach a class during period five today, Alaura told me that everyone would wait for me to return to campus and eat lunch before we would all leave to go see *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man Tell No Tales*; however, I politely declined since I’m not a fan of the movie franchise and insisted that they go without me. I appreciated that they did not want to leave me out, but I did not want to spend money to see a movie that I would fall asleep watching. Once they left, one of the students from Ms. Jing’s class asked me if Alaura, Michael, and I would consent to being interviewed by his club of students about the similarities and differences between Chinese and Canadian education. I agreed to it, but could not speak for Alaura and Michael. In the end, I told them that I would talk to Alaura and Michael and, if they would consent to being interviewed as well, we would figure out an afternoon during which we would be free to return to the high school for it.

I passed the time working on my reflections until the bell rang to signal the end of period four. The teacher led me to his period five English class and told me that his students were less advanced in their abilities to listen and comprehend spoken English and to speak English. This told me that I needed to adjust the manner in which I delivered my Industrial Revolution lesson. For this class, I spoke at a slower pace and made the extra effort to enunciate my words and use as many hand gestures as possible. When the lesson finished, I stayed for a little while longer to answer questions that student had about Canada and my experience in China.

With my classes done for the day, I walked back to Southwest University with one of its teacher candidates. After going separate ways, I walked back in the direction of my dorm building only to realize that I would not make it to the cafeteria nearby for lunch before it closed, so I stopped by my favourite fried food joint in the nearby alley to grab a crispy chicken sandwich, popcorn chicken, fries, and a Pepsi to take back to my dorm where I feasted on it and enjoyed reruns of 90 Day Fiancé on YouTube. Given how hot it was and how tired I felt, I decided to take a nap to recharge. I ended up sleeping for a few hours before resuming my work on my weekly reflections. Since Alaura and Michael had yet to return from their afternoon adventures, I ended up going to dinner by myself at the cafeteria nearest to our dorms where I simply had some baked potatoes with sausages and a trio of dumplings because I was not very hungry. I then returned to the dorm and spent the rest of my evening working on my reflections. I was astonished and worried when Alaura and Michael did not return before the eleven o’clock curfew and hoped that they were alright. Given that they were out with some Southwest University teacher candidates, I knew that they were probably not lost. As I went to bed around half past eleven, they were still not home, but I hope that they would still be able to get into the building despite being out past curfew.

Sunday, May 28th, 2017: Day 1 of the Dragon Boat Festival

I woke up around seven to eat breakfast and get ready. Given how hot it was going to be today, I put my hair in a side braid to keep it out of way and wore a new pink sundress that I bought with a pair of shorts underneath for the sake of modesty during today’s outdoor activities. Alaura, Michael, and I met Wenhua and Longmin in the lobby of our dorm building at half past eight and then we all left to meet Thomas outside Gate 5. We were surprised, however, to see him pull up outside our building in his car. He gave Alaura, Michael, and me a ride to the Jialing River while Wenhua and Longmin agreed to walk and meet us there.

Once Thomas found a parking spot by the river, we walked along the river until we spotted several of his students had arrived and were already setting up the barbecue and the food that they had brought from home. Gradually, students began arriving with more food. While Thomas tried to get the barbecue heated and the students frolicked in the water, us teacher candidates gathered around the food and began skewering chicken, squid, mushrooms, veggies, and tofu onto sticks. Soon after, everything was ready to go, but someone forgot to bring cooking oil to put on the food for the barbecue, so Thomas sent two students to run to the nearby grocery store to get some. They returned shortly after and the barbecue began. Wenhua took the lead in barbecuing the food while Thomas encouraged Alaura, Michael, and me to sit down by the table where the homemade food was placed. One by one, Thomas had students step forward to introduce themselves in English and to present the dish that they had brought. Alaura, Michael, and I liked it all: pork, eggs, sticky rice, mushrooms, beef, Peking duck, salmon, and more. While some students were prepared with an introduction to say, others were not and many of them were hesitant to practise their English with us because they were shy; however, we simply smiled in an attempt to encourage them to try.

After we had finished eating and everything was cleaned up, we took our things to Thomas’ car and then rented some bikes to cruise along the river. Alaura shared a four-person bike with three students and I did the same with another three students. Other students rode solo while Michael paired up with Thomas. What started as a relaxing cruise along the river became a race to the dead end where we took a drink break and photos. On the way back, my group of students and I agreed not to race and just enjoy the ride and scenery. When we got back to the start, we took another rest and two students treated us all to some dancing. Thomas even busted a few moves to entertain us. We then agreed to another lap on the bikes before we called it a day. Unfortunately, two incidents happened that made us rethink that second lap: a student crashed into my group’s bike and injured his ankle and another group of students crashed into a vendor’s tent and broke it. I helped the injured student sit at the back of my group’s bike and told him not to pedal while the other two students and I would pedal back to the starting area. The owner of the broken tent demanded two hundred yuan for it, which Thomas paid. Thomas then gave the students who broke the tent the option of selling it to another vendor, who wanted to buy it for fifty yuan, or to keep it for their class to use during the next sports day. The students ended up choosing the latter. Although Thomas would have the students’ parents reimburse him for the money that he spent on the broken tent, I admired that he let the students make a decision about what to do with the tent because, in doing so, he was letting them take responsibility and make the decision on their own. Rather than treat them as children, he treated them as adults.

Once we took a few group photos by the river and Thomas dropped Alaura, Michael, and me back at our dorm building, we dropped off our things before we visited the mega supermarket to stock up on groceries. In addition to our usual breakfast food, we also bought more cases of water in preparation for the hike that we planned to go on tomorrow. We then returned to our dorms for much-needed naps. After my nap, I resumed work on my weekly reflections. I was so busy with them that I lost track of time and it was not until I stopped to look at the time when I realized that the cafeteria nearby had already closed for dinner. As much as I did not want to eat fried food two days in a row, I knew that I had to eat, so I ended up visiting the fried food joint in the alley near our dorm building for another crispy chicken sandwich, popcorn chicken, fries, and a Pepsi. The rest of my night was spent eating and working on reflections.