Week 12 in China

A Reflection of My Final Hurrah in China

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Monday, May 29th, 2017: A Day at JindaoXia

My alarm sounded at seven and I got out of bed. I was not very hungry, but I managed to eat a banana and drink some orange juice before getting ready for today. Given all the hiking that we planned on doing, I decided on an airy shirt, a pair of stretchy pants, socks, and running shoes. I also put my hair into a side braid to keep it out of the way. It was raining a bit in the morning and Ms. Jing expressed her concern about the hike during rainy weather, so she decided to wait until eight to see if the rain would stop. Once eight o’clock came and the rain seemed to have stopped, she confirmed that the hike was still on. As a result, I packed my umbrella, two pieces of bread, a banana, and three bottles of cold water into my backpack. I made sure that I had money and my Southwest University student card in my purse before I left the dorms at a quarter after eight with Alaura and Michael. We met up with Wenhua nearby and walked together to Gate 5 to meet the rest of the Southwest University teacher candidates from the high school. As a group, we caught a bus to the bus station where we boarded a bus bound for the Huayuan Mountains. During the two-hour ride, I ate a piece of bread and managed to fall asleep to the catchy tunes of my favourite band: R5.

Upon arriving at the bus station near the Huayuan Mountains, we paid a driver to drive us to the north gate at the top of the mountain where we purchased tickets at a student discount: fifty yuan a ticket. We then took a bathroom break before beginning our scenic, four-hour descent down JindaoXia (Jindao Gorge). After about fifteen minutes going down steep steps (and Michael slipping twice), we arrived at a rest stop and stopped to eat lunch. Many of us, myself included, bought small plates of the Chongqing noodles being sold there, which were very delicious and spicy. We even shared treats amongst us that we had brought for the hike such as bread, tofu, and marinated duck necks, all which were very tasty.

Once we had finished eating, we continued our descent. It was not long until we climbed what seemed like hundreds of steps to a cave and I wondered out loud if the climb would be worth my sore legs. It was as we arrived at a cave with an underwater cavern with low ceilings that, for ten yuan each, we could explore on a boat. In the cave, we came across rock carvings, including one of a colourful dragon and one of a female Buddha. It was a cool sight to see and, fortunately, nobody hit their heads.

Our descent continued into the rainforest-like environment where I admired the mountains from afar. Eventually, we approached what is called a knife-hidden cave, which turned out to have an opening that looked as though a huge knife sliced the cave open within the mountain, which was pretty amazing to see. We started coming across cascading waterfalls of various sizes that splattered over us as we walked, which felt very refreshing on such a humid day, and beautiful pools of aquamarine-coloured water, which locals were gladly splashing in to cool off.

When we reached Lion Gorge, Wenhua told us that we had made it to the halfway point and that we had another two hours to ago. We then continued our descent along a mix of caged and wooden floors along the sides of the canyon, gazing down at the water below and being sure not to hit our heads in areas with low ceilings. We crossed several rope bridges, which Michael jumped on several times to freak out the Southwest University teacher candidates. Before long, we came across the Monkey Inhabited Gorge where we saw about a dozen monkeys, young and old, climbing the walls. They looked to be of excellent health, which told me that they must be well taken care of. I managed to snap a good number of photos of them before our descent continued. A short time later, we then had the choice to either continue walking or, for a fee of ten yuan, take a boat ride across a pond and through a cave to the other side. We all agreed on the latter and enjoyed a short boat ride across the teal-coloured pond and through the cave, snapping photos and selfies along the way.

After exiting the boat, we continued our descent, snapping photos of more sparkling pools of water and cascading waterfalls. Eventually, I caught up to Michael and Ivy standing next to a heart-shaped pond and I realized that we were at True Love Pond, meaning that the end of the descent was near. I snapped a few photos of the pond before we continued our descent. Not long after, we came across what I thought was another rest stop given the snack vendors present; however, when I asked Michael why he was toasting water with Ivy, he told me that we had made it to the bottom. I turned around and saw the exit that we had just walked through and I happily toasted water with Alaura.

Once everyone regrouped and we took a bathroom break, we took a quick bus ride to the bus station where we boarded a train back to Beibei; however, it took about forty-five minutes to fill up the rest of the bus before we actually started moving. I managed to get some shut-eye while listening to my favourite R5 tunes on replay.

Upon arriving back in Beibei, we caught the subway to Tiansheng station and headed over to a music bar and restaurant where one of the Southwest University teacher candidates had ordered food for us in advance: deep fried tofu cubes, crispy pieces of pork, egg and veggie soup, stir-fried beef with green peppers and carrots, noodle soup, crispy potatoes bars, and beef with mushrooms. I enjoyed having a sit-down dinner, chatting with my friends, and listening to some pretty awesome music. At one point, a song came on that Michael was very familiar with and he began belting out the lyrics to entertain us and anyone sitting in close proximity to our table. Several of the Southwest University teacher candidates started videotaping him with their cell phones and I almost choked on my tea when Michael winked at one of the candidates filming. Overall, it was a good night out and the perfect opportunity to rest our sore legs.

Once dinner was over, we posed for some group photos outside the restaurant before catching a shuttle bus to our dorms where we retired for the night.

Tuesday, May 30th, 2017: A Day of Rest and Catching Up

I woke up around eight in the morning and tried to climb out of bed; however, my legs were incredibly sore from yesterday’s hike. Despite this, I managed to hobble over to the fridge for some breakfast buns, a banana, and some orange juice before seating myself at my desk with my legs stretched out across my bed. I was so thankful for having today off, so I could rest my body and catch up on some work.

After a morning of starting and working on my final weekly reflection, I joined Alaura for lunch in the cafeteria nearest to our dorm for lunch (I ate some beef and tofu with rice and veggies). We then returned to our dorms to continue working, but I did take another break just to do a load of laundry. The next break from work and rest came around dinner time when Alaura and I returned to the cafeteria to enjoy some dumplings among other dishes. We then returned to our dorms to continue resting for the remainder of the night. I also managed to finalize my last lesson that I would be teaching at Zeng Jia Yan tomorrow.

Wednesday, May 31st, 2017: My Final Day at Zeng Jia Yan

I was out of bed the minute my alarms sounded at six. I ate some breakfast buns, a banana, and drank some orange juice for breakfast and got ready. I packed the one hundred and eighty goodie bags for my students into a bag and made sure that my presents for Ms. Wang, Principal Deng, Director Yu, and Mr. Wong were safely packed inside my backpack. Alaura and I left the dorm building at quarter to eight and caught the pink line out of Beibei station a little after eight. We exited at Hongqihegou station and caught the blue line to Niujaotuo where I purchased a steamed bun with pork before we transferred over to the green line towards Zengjiayan station. By the time we arrived at the school, it was about nine in the morning. We rested for a bit before organizing our gifts on Michael’s empty desk.

During the ten-minute break before my period three class, Ms. Wang came to accompany me to the other two Grade 2 classes that I was done teaching, so I could give them my presents. In each class, Ms. Wang translated for them that I would be returning to Canada next week, that I enjoyed teaching them, and that I would miss them very much. After they expressed that they would miss me too, their eyes lit up when they saw the goodie bags that I had brought for them. I handed them out and then posed for a group photo with each class. Ms. Wang and I then hurried over to the period three Grade 2 class where I set up my PowerPoint and taped my animal flash cards to the chalkboard.

I began my lesson by introducing the students to eight animals, one at a time: bird, cat, cow, dog, mouse, pig, sheep, and snake. For each animal, I would focus on the pronunciation of the word as well as the sound that it made in English. Every time I introduced a new animal, I would review with them the animals and sounds that they learned up to that point by pointing to an image of an animal and asking, “What is this?” When the students tell me the correct answer, I would then cup my ear and ask, “What sound does it make?” and have them tell me the sound. Sometimes, they even acted out the animal and made its sound such as flapping their arms and tweeting like a bird. Once I felt that they had a good understanding of the animals and their sounds, I explained to them that they would have to try and find a pair of matching animals on the cards on the board. The student would turn over one card, read out the name to the class, pick up another card, and read out the name to that class. If the images and names of the animal do not match, he or she would have to put them back on the board and return to his or her seat. If the images and names of the animal do match, they must read the name of the animal to the class and say its sound and they would get a candy as a reward. Once Ms. Wang translated how the matching game worked, students raised their hands eagerly to try and match the cards. Despite allocating twenty minutes for the game, the students only managed to find two pairs of animals before I had to call off the game, so I could give out my goodie bags for them. They, too, were grateful for them and they also took a group photo with me.

After the lesson, I returned to the office to work on my weekly reflection until lunch. At one point, I spotted one of my Grade 2 classes lined up outside my office. The minute I walked out, they began to hug me one at a time and it took a lot of restraint not to burst into tears. At lunch, Alaura and I went to enjoy some beef with veggies, shredded potatoes, and rice. We then took a quick bathroom trip at the hotel next door and then returned to our office. Shortly afterwards, Ms. Wang accompanied me to both of my Grade 5 classes to distribute their goodie bags and take group photos with them.

Eventually, the school day came to an end and Alaura and I packed up our belongings and tidied up our office. We even packed Michael’s mementos from his classes that he had left on his desk to bring back to him. We caught Ms. Wang, Ms. Qin, Ms. Song, Director Yu, and Mr. Wong in the hallway outside of our office and gave them our gifts, which they appeared to be very grateful for. We then went to Principal Deng’s office where she interrupted her meeting to accept our gift to her. She then ushered us into the office next door where she opened our gift in front of everyone and posed for a photo with us with a China flag and a Canada flag. After making plans with her to have dinner with her and the Zeng Jia Yan staff next Thursday, we rushed to catch the subway back to Beibei station where we exited and speed walked over to the High School Affiliated with Southwest University for our interview with some of the students. We arrived twenty minutes after our interview was scheduled to take place. Michael, who had already been interviewed, chatted with a teacher while Alaura and I spent ten minutes answering the students’ questions about what we thought about the students here in China and whether or not we liked hot pot. We then took photos with them and they told us that the interview and photos would be published in the next issue of their club’s magazine. After promising to send us a copy of the next issue of their club’s magazine, they left. We then snapped photos with some of the Southwest University teacher candidates doing their practicum at the school before we left. Since the cafeteria nearest to our dorm building closed at seven, we stopped by the grocery store on the way back to pick up dinner (I picked up a few eggy pieces of dough bread that Michael recommended). I pointed out a nice selection of colourful cakes, which tempted Michael into buying one. Once we made our purchases, we returned to our dorms to retire for the night.

Thursday, June 1st, 2017: A Day of Rest and Catching Up

After a nice morning of sleeping in, I climbed out of bed and ate some breakfast buns, a banana, and drank some orange juice for breakfast. I then resumed my work on my weekly reflection. Around noon, Alaura and I took a break for lunch in the cafeteria nearest to our dorms (I ate a simple lunch of veggies and fish with tofu). Michael came in for lunch just as we started and he joined us. Alaura and I invited him to join us on a trip to the craft store and drink joint just outside Gate 2 after lunch, which he took us up on.

Once we finished lunch, we caught a shuttle bus to Gate 2 and dropped by the craft store where Michael bought a USB flash drive and Alaura and I bought some postcards featuring some beautiful sketches of Southwest University. I also bought another set of postcards featuring the Chongqing skyline and subway system. At our favourite drink joint, Michael bought himself an ice cream cone, I bought an iced tea, and Alaura bought a lemonade. We then caught another shuttle bus back to our dorms where I resumed my work on my weekly reflection. I took a break for dinner in the cafeteria with Alaura (I ate six dumplings and a serving of steamed veggies). Afterwards, we returned to our dorms where I continued working on my weekly reflection for as long as my eyes would stay open.

Friday, June 2nd, 2017: Visiting another High School

After getting up at six in the morning, I had eaten, gotten dressed, packed, and was ready to go by twenty to seven. Alaura and I left our dorm building, leaving Michael to sleep in before beginning his day at the High School Affiliated with Southwest University.

As planned, we caught the pink line out of Beibei by seven. Traffic was heavy on the blue line. As we transferred over to the green line at Niujaotuo station, I bought myself a steamed bun with pork inside because, despite my breakfast, I was feeling hungry. We exited at Zengjiayan station and parked ourselves by the elevator leading to Exit C. Five minutes passed before Ms. Wang met up with us and we left the station through Exit A. Originally, we planned to catch a bus over to the Chongqing Municipality Vocational High School of Yuzhong; however, Ms. Wang felt that the buses would be too crowded at the time and we ended up taking a taxi instead, which ended up being a smart idea since the taxi dropped us directly in front of the school (If we had taken the bus, we would have had to walk up a really tall hill to get to the school).

Once we arrived, the security guard at the front gate called the director of the school who met up with us. A student, who spoke pretty good English, also joined her for translation purposes. As we crossed the campus, I learned that the school trains about two thousand students, some who reside in the on-campus dorms and some who commute every day. The campus appears to be a tad small compared to the Chongqing Beibei Vocational High School; however, there still seems to be room to do things and there is even a beautiful view of the Chongqing skyline and Jialing River.

The first area of the school that we visited was a small building where mainly female students, training to be preschool teachers, were practising their piano-playing skills in various rooms individually or in pairs. We then made our way over to a larger building where we first toured a floor where students trained to work in hotels and hospitality management. We dropped by a classroom whose interior resembled that of an authentic coffee shop; half of the room looked like a coffee shop and the other half resembled a teahouse. Next door was a classroom whose interior resembled that of a kitchen. About twenty students, seated around various tables, had just finished making a stunning bird on a plate out of slices of watermelon, dragon fruit, and other fruit (The students even invited Alaura and me to taste their stylish creations and they were delicious). We then returned to the coffee house/tea house classroom where we flipped through some of the students’ textbooks that students brought in for us to look at (I admired how many creative and advanced hairstyle diagrams were in the hairdressing textbook). As we flipped through the books, a student barista made us cappuccinos with flower designs floating on the foam (my first coffee beverage in nearly three months). The student translating for us then conducted a traditional Chinese tea ceremony for us, which gave Ms. Wang, the director, and the student time to chat about whatever it is they were chatting about in Mandarin and Alaura and I to talk about our plans for the afternoon.

Once we were finished with tea, Alaura and I were escorted to the next floor above where we walked into a classroom whose interior resembled a hair salon. Hairdressing students were tidying up after their exam. I was thoroughly impressed with the various hairstyles done on the model heads sitting on the shelves, ranging from coloured hairstyles to those wrapped around perming rollers. We were presented with an offer to have our hair washed and head massaged by the students, but politely declined. Apparently, a lot of the school’s faculty would visit this classroom to have head massages done by the students and I would certainly do the same if I worked there.

On the next floor above, we briefly peeked into classrooms where computer science and networking students were engaged in exams. The final floor that we visited resembled that of a hospital. The rooms were designed for nursing students to train in treating patients of all ages, including babies. Some of the classrooms were preschool classrooms where students training to be preschool teachers would frequent. They were recently frequented during Children’s Day yesterday when parents would bring their children to play and the preschool student teachers had a chance to interact with them. A lot of the classroom toys were very hi-tech such as one that teaches students about how steam trains work.

After posing for a few photos in front of the school, Alaura and I bid farewell to the director and the student and thanked them for the tour before we followed Ms. Wang down the hill and back to the main street where we hopped on a bus bound for the area outside Zengjiayan station’s Exit A. We thanked Ms. Wang for taking us to visit the Chongqing Municipality Vocational High School and then stopped by the Walmart nearby where we found a good deal on various bags of tea and packages of White Rabbit candies. After making our purchases, we headed to the CSC restaurant next door for some lunch (I ate two pieces of country-style chicken, beef with veggies, cucumber salad, and a glass of Coca Cola).

Once lunch was finished, we caught the green line out of Zengjiayan station to Jiaochangkou where we transferred over to the red line and exited at the next station on it: Xiaoshizi. We then made our way to the Chongqing Chaotianmen Garment Market where I picked up two more porcelain tea cups, one for my neighbour and one for my math tutor from high school. We then returned to Xiaoshizi station to catch the red line back to Jiaochangkou where we transferred back over to the green line and exited at the next station on it: Linjiangmen. From there, we made our way to Hongya Cave where we bought some ice creams from the Dairy Queen on the eleventh floor (a cheesecake Blizzard for me and a vanilla ice cream with strawberry sauce on it for Alaura) and sat outside to enjoy it and the weather. Once we were fully rested, we descended the floors of the building to finish up our souvenir shopping. I managed to pick up a wooden abacus keychain with Chinese writing on it for Tim (he is a math teacher), a few more bookmarks, and two framed Chinese red paper art of zodiac animals (a rabbit for my neighbour and a goat for Alex). Alaura and I even managed to find a sale on tea pets to complete our tea sets and each bought a pig for twenty yuan each.

It was around four in the afternoon when Alaura and I made it back to the eleventh floor of Hongya Cave. I looked up online that Hongya Cave was a sight to see at night and that was the main reason why we wanted to go there one last time. To pass the time, we sat under a shady area and chatted about various topics ranging from our favourite childhood shows to our personal lives. After a few hours, we got hungry, so we walked over to an outlet mall nearby where we took a quick bathroom break and then searched for a good place for dinner. Since we were both craving pizza, we decided on Pizza Hut and ended up splitting a small Peking Duck pizza (Peking duck, sweet bean sauce, sliced cucumber, and cheese on garlic crust), which ended up being the best pizza that we had ever eaten. It only cost us sixty-eight yuan (a little under sixteen dollars)!

By the time we finished dinner, the sun had begun setting and we made our way back to Hongya Cave where the building began lighting up and so did the bridge and the city skyline across from it. We joined the crowds of people taking photos of it all. By the time we were satisfied with the photos, selfies, and video clips that we had taken, it was a quarter after eight, so we returned to Linjiangmen station to catch the green line back to Jiaochangkou station. From there, we transferred back to the red line and exited at Xiaoshizi station where we transferred over to the pink line. I noted that the first train that arrived was bound for Guandianyuan station, the station that we tend to have to exit at to switch trains on occasion, so we let the large crowd of passengers board it and we caught the next one that was bound for, I noted, Beibei. We managed to secure seats on it and I was able to close my eyes for most of the ride. As I predicted, we did not have to switch trains, but the passengers on the one that left before ours had to. I woke up by the time we were approaching Tiansheng station and the Chinese man next to me was appalled to hear me speak English to Alaura because, like many before him, he assumed that I spoke Chinese.

Once we exited Tiansheng station, Alaura and I caught the shuttle bus back to our dorm building; however, we were the two remaining passengers on our bus, so the driver opted to drop us outside of the teacher education building rather than drive us all the way to the stop at the intersection nearest to our dorms. We ended up walking the rest of the way back to our dorms, which was fine because I ended up breaking our steps record from our day spent at JindaoXia: over twenty-six thousand steps!

Saturday, June 3rd, 2017:

I slept in today until around eight o’clock before I woke up to work on my blurb for the third newsletter. I was so busy working on it that I lost track of time and missed going to the cafeteria nearest to my dorm building for lunch. However, Alaura and I did take a break from doing our assignments to run to the mega supermarket to stock up on groceries. I bought some more breakfast buns, some bananas, and a cold drink. The weather was incredibly humid and the short walk to and from our dorm building was enough to make us feel sticky.

While Alaura returned to the dorm, I went to the fried food joint in the alley nearby to order a crispy chicken sandwich, popcorn chicken, fries, and a Pepsi for a late lunch, which I took back to my dorm to enjoy while binge watching episodes of *Bringing Up Bates*. Rather than nap after lunch, I continued to work on my newsletter blurb and my weekly reflection. Due to my late lunch, I was not very hungry and opted to skip dinner in the cafeteria. Alaura and I did take another break around half past eight just to visit the fast food joint in the alley to each pick up a bag of fries (we were not very hungry). We then returned to our dorms where I managed to finalize my newsletter blurb and sent it, along with my choice of photos, to Michael, who was in charge of compiling the third and final newsletter. I then continued working on my weekly reflection and outlining the format for my Mitacs research paper until my eyes got heavy, an indication that I should probably get some sleep.

Sunday, June 4th, 2017:

Since I was up until just past midnight working on my assignments, I ended up sleeping in until nine in the morning. Afterwards, I climbed out of bed and ate some breakfast buns and drank some orange juice for breakfast. The rest of my morning was spent working on my weekly reflection. I took a break around noon to head to the cafeteria nearest to the dorm building with Alaura for lunch (I ate rice with beef and tofu and some really overcooked corn). We then returned to our dorms where I resumed my work on my weekly reflection; however, I soon felt my head throbbing from staring at my laptop screen too long. I decided to take a nap to rest my eyes and alleviate my headache. I ended up napping for two hours before getting back to work. I took another break around six to join Alaura for dinner at the same cafeteria. Since the machine to put more money onto our student cards was not working, we had to budget the money that remained on our student cards in order to have dinner (Fortunately, I was not very hungry and was happy with six dumplings and a serving of baked fries and sausages). Michael, who had returned from his day out, had just started dinner when we did and immediately came over to join us. We told him about our Friday afternoon and evening at Hongya Cave and he told us about his day out today. Once dinner was finished, we returned to our dorms for the night where I managed to finish and submit my last weekly reflection for the trip and continue working on my portfolio assignment before retiring for the night.