



CHINESE & JAPANESE STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Valparaiso University

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CHINESE & JAPANESE STUDIES PROGRAM

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In 1990 Valparaiso University established *The Fall Hangzhou Study Program*. Since then, about 100 students have lived and studied in Hangzhou. This fall, 11 students from VU, Wartburg College and Luther College participated in the program. We thank them for sharing their impressions of China and reflections of their experiences with us! For more information about the Hangzhou Program next Fall, please contact Dr. McGuigan (x5333) or Prof. Lin (x5749).

Impressions of China

Bekki Giese (Wartburg College): "China is wonderful. I love being able to experience a culture completely different than my own. You can really discover new things about yourself here amongst the beauty and the prestige. It is nice to see a different form of government in action. China is experiencing big changes right now. They are becoming a world power, changing leaders and preparing for the Olympic Games in 2008. It is a great time to be in China. It is the only place I know that you can eat a full course meal of delicacies for just a couple of dollars, take a ride on West Lake, eat moon cakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival and see fireworks all year round. It is definitely a place that everyone should experience in his/her lifetime."

Angelyn Pinter: "One of the most interesting things about being in China is the opportunity to observe all of the things that I have read about Chinese history and culture and to compare it to my own experiences. China is a country that is changing very quickly. When you walk around Hangzhou you see West Lake, which has been the subject of legends and poetry for centuries. The side streets are full of tiny restaurants with hand pulled noodles and tall stacks of bamboo steamers full of baozi. But then you see a KFC and Starbucks on the corner. Many people are eager for a chance to practice their English, but fair warning I have been asked more than once to give an impromptu rendition of a Backstreet Boys song. In my time in China, I have found that many of the old traditions are still present, but that China is also very modern."

Courtney Allensworth (Luther College): "Of the many things about China that never cease to amaze me, the interplay of urban development and scenic beauty ranks near the top. Every time I see Hangzhou's West Lake, I am awestruck by the mere fact that if I look in one direction, I see newly erected buildings amidst the bustling downtown area. When I look the other direction, it's as if time stops—lush green trees, the calming waters of the lake, the rolling hills off in the distance where a Pagoda stands as though reaching to the sky, a remnant of ancient history ever present today. The longer I

am in China, the more I realize that the Chinese do things at their own pace and in their own way, and in the end, they will have found the balance that will lead them through the 21st century. China is as much about greeting globalization as it is about remembering its roots, which is the true beauty of this grand nation."

Resident Director

Professor Robin Visser of Christ College will serve as the Resident Director for the Fall 2003 Hangzhou Program. Specializing in Chinese literature and fluent in Chinese, Dr. Visser is well prepared to help students explore China. In addition to teaching EA 395, *Chinese Culture and Civilization*, Dr. Visser will also teach EA 390/CC 325 EX, *The Urban Imagination in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* while in Hangzhou.

Jenna Fick: "It's difficult to write a simple paragraph about my China experience. So much has happened and China is such a complex place to describe. My time here has been some of the best months of my life. There is so much history to learn and culture to experience. It has been wonderful to be in a culture so entirely different from my own. I have learned much about Chinese people, as well as what it is like to be the foreigner in a strange land. I feel very much at home in China now, and it will be a sad day when we have to pack our things and go home. I love the little everyday things that we do here, such as visit the noodle shop for lunch, chat with the international students between Chinese classes, shopping downtown at the night market and walking by West Lake. The China program is a wonderful choice for anyone who wants to learn about Chinese culture, language, and who truly wants to experience something different from anything they know at home."

Joe Rodarte: "My first impression of China was just how vast it is. My first few days here are a little fuzzy. What I do remember is being amazed by the diversity of life here. It's not in the textbooks how different one person is from another. We're told that China is a homogenous society. There is also great diversity. This seems to be a contradiction, but even a minority of 10% in China comprises a huge number of people (somewhere in the millions). I'm not talking about religious or ethnic diversity. Everyone is doing his or her own thing. You see garbage men dragging hand-pulled carts along the street, beggars in revolutionary worker clothes, rich businessman in Shanghai driving Buicks and students of every variety. Young or old, rich or poor, native or foreign; life moves in China in a way that I've never seen. This is probably why Chinese roads are so interesting. Life in China is a unique experience.

People ask me how do you like China? What do you do over there anyway? And isn't it a communist country? But it's hard for me to form a good response. I can tell people what I've done, and describe the places I've been and the things I've seen, but what people do not realize is that living in China is pretty much like living anywhere else in the world. You work, learn, play, make friends, you have good days and bad days. Culture and language can be a barrier at times but only if you choose to make it so. Staying in Hangzhou is a unique experience. Everywhere I go heads turn. I'm easily recognized in the States so I can't imagine what goes through people's heads here. And when I say my Chinese name is *Wang da Li*, I can't remember the last time I had heard so much laughter just from introducing myself! How would I summarize my impression of China? I can't sum it up in one phrase. But I do know that I love it here, and I intend to come back."

Michael Foland: "In China I am always amazed, above all, by the droves of people I see on the street. Sitting in front of their stores, waiting on the bus, sweeping up debris from the sidewalk. They are simply living out their lives. Before I arrived I was aware there were over one billion people living here. And I suspect, like every other student, I could not quite comprehend that one billion represented one billion PEOPLE. To encounter a new culture face-to-face as I have been able to do (if only to a small extent) during these past months is an experience unlike any other. But specifically it is encountering the people living in their culture that is the real gift. The most important moments of my trip here have not been my stops at famous historical sites. But rather the moments when I am able, with however much stuttering and uncertainty, to speak to another human being and to learn, in whatever small a part, what that person is about. In America, we may speak about broadening the mind in glowing terms, but I think more simply it is really encountering others that causes such broadening. Being in China has taught me that wisdom is something that makes me not just a well-rounded person but also more importantly a better person."

Nate Ruhter: "China, a country that is undoubtedly misunderstood especially by the West, is in reality a much more eclectic and un-obtrusive nation than it is perceived to be. It is important to note that China is the most populous country on the planet. The West has for centuries been accustomed to differing peoples inside their borders. America is considered the crucible of the globe, an amalgamation of the cultures and ethnicities of the world. China on the other hand, has a long history of being simply Chinese, with one national language. With this in mind, it becomes a little easier to understand why the Chinese are at the same time both enthralled and appalled at the site of a foreigner. Perhaps as times move closer to a state of globalization, the Chinese will become more accustomed to foreigners."

Elizabeth Sims: "China is a very interesting place to live. Everything seems to always be moving in all directions at all

times, in a balance of chaos and organization. The coolest thing is that I came here not knowing a single word in Chinese, not being able to read a single character. But now I can get around the city, speak a little Chinese and read characters off the signs. It's very exciting to be learning about such a different culture and language. I am so glad I chose to join the Hangzhou program!"

Travis Cowan: "The China study abroad program offers students a chance to see a civilization on the rise. China is a growing economic power yet in some ways it still holds on to its' ancient traditions. A country with such a long history has something for anyone. The language is extremely satisfying to learn. To see the signs around town and slowly make sense out of them is the reward for the hours of study accumulated throughout the semester. I recommend this program to anyone who is trying to get more than average experiences out of their education."

Elizabeth Weston: "I sit in front of a laptop, my stomach warm and full with a couple of shaobing, something akin to sesame seed pancakes, that I bought down the street this morning. After attempting greater communication with the street food vendors, but realizing yet again that my Chinese remains inadequate, I walked along narrow side streets enjoying my breakfast. Although now more accustomed to direct glances and staring, I sometimes look down to escape the looks. The campus of Zhejiang University is a haven and with so many other international students, one is not particularly out of place. But venturing beyond one feels like a minority. America brims with faces of all ethnicity, nationality, and background. China is filled with Chinese and a meager spattering of others, leaving me to stick out as a tall, white, foreign female. China has given me a glimpse of what it is to be different and unable to change. It spurs me to learn the language to communicate more freely. The differences between China and home I cannot begin to describe. I have a new appreciation for my life in the United States, but also a sense of wonder and desire to know more of the unfamiliar."

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