

## Day One



*Monday, June 19, 2017 — Up the Wall and Down the Tombs*

The daunting walk up a section of the Great Wall of China at Badaling was one of our first encounters with Beijing. That day also included a walk down into the Imperial Tombs of the Ming Dynasty (Dingling), which was excavated decades ago and still holds several original pottery pieces. However, not original to the sacred burial site is the cash travelers, wishing for good fortunes from the emperor and empresses buried there, have dropped throughout the below-ground dwelling.

In touring these Chinese landmarks, a group of graduate students from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education, with SECU in tow, kicked off a week-long seminar in this most populous Asian nation.

During the course of five days the group is scheduled to visit five different Chinese universities and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. The first stop was Peking University, which likes to think of itself as the Harvard of the East, and the second was Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which fancies itself an Eastern MIT.

As is common with education abroad experiences, the seminar will include academic lectures on a variety of subjects by Chinese faculty and administrators, such as today's presentation on finance, and guided campus tours led by local students.

## Day Two



*Wednesday, June 21, 2017 — Understanding without Understanding*

There are some ceremonies and rituals that need no explanation. Today, we, along with students from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education, saw an example of this first hand while visiting Beijing Normal University on the second day of a week-long education abroad seminar in China. (As an aside, the 2017 SEC Professor of the Year, Dr. James Birchler from the University of Missouri, is an Honorary Professor at this same institution.)

Following an afternoon lecture on the administrative governance of higher education in the nation, our group attempted to tour the city campus that serves as home for more than 22,000 students and 1,700 faculty. However, it was difficult to maneuver through the grounds on this particular afternoon since it was graduation day at Beijing Normal.

Our tour guide was one of the very recent graduates and agreed to show us around before herself heading off to graduate school at Oxford. Although the young lady tried valiantly to direct our focus to important buildings and landmarks, we were all more fascinated by the new graduates, still in caps and gowns.

Several members of our group observed that the experiences for these students were quite similar to those throughout the SEC. There were photos taken at important statues, parents doting on their children and graduates sharing memories with friends.

Although none of us could understand what anyone was saying (No one in the group speaks Mandarin.), the smiles and laughter are part of a universal language that we all could understand.

## Day Three



*Friday, June 23, 2017 — Thanks to the Ministry of Education*

China's Ministry of Education is the highest governing body responsible for education — both secondary and post-secondary — in the country. It has almost unilateral authority to establish this country's education agenda. In the last several decades it has launched initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Chinese citizens with higher education degrees as well as those designed to identify and support universities aiming for global excellence.

Today, along with the group of students from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education, we had the opportunity to participate in a discussion with a director from the Ministry on the policy issues of significance to the country. We listened intently (through an interpreter) as he described several challenges facing the Chinese higher education system in the future. Access for all students and employment upon graduation are two examples that mirror challenges we face in the United States.

After the presentation, the Ministry treated us to a lunch of traditional Chinese cuisine. Although many of the dishes were unrecognizable to our American eyes and had to be described by our hosts, they were all enjoyable. After lunch, our group made its way to the Beijing train station and will continue the week-long seminar visiting universities in Shanghai.

## Day Four



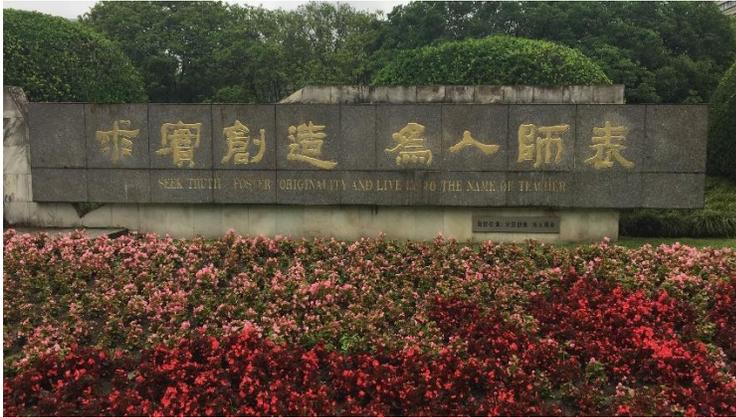
*Monday, June 26, 2017 — Make the World Your Classroom*

Internationalization was the focus of today's presentations to students from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education. Our contingent began the Shanghai portion of the week-long seminar at East China Normal University, and we participated in discussions with two administrators about the processes and approaches taking place in China relative to education beyond the nation's borders.

The presenters mentioned the myriad of ways campuses are becoming increasingly popular for non-Chinese students and faculty. They described education abroad opportunities and exchanges, but spent a significant amount of time explaining a partnership with New York University where the two institutions have formed a campus that grants dual degrees, based in China. The motto of this university implores students to make the world their classroom (as translated from Mandarin).

In addition to the NYU Shanghai campus, East China Normal also fosters internationalization efforts through a global park that provides resources and support for non-Chinese universities to establish centers and institutes in partnership with the Chinese university. According to the presenters, the aim of these and other efforts is to create students who are global citizens.

## Day Five



*Wednesday, June 28, 2017 — What Did We Learn?*

The seminar in China has ended, and we have a few observations after spending a week with students from the University of Georgia's Institute of Higher Education. Together we learned about Chinese higher education from a variety of faculty and administrators from five universities in Beijing and Shanghai.

First, we had to accept that we would probably not be able to communicate well with anyone other than the people on the trip. Although we had representatives from each university with us in both cities who were able to translate and explain what we were seeing through the bus windows, it was rare to hear English in any non-class session context. (And you may recall from an earlier post that one presentation was actually in Mandarin.)

Second, there were obvious infrastructure differences between the two cities. In Beijing there are still countless, old-world style pagodas in use (at least in the areas we visited), but in Shanghai those types of historic buildings have been replaced by high rises. (As an aside, the traffic was painful in both places — 1:30 minutes to go about 15-20 miles.)

Third, it appeared Shanghai wants foreigners to feel welcomed in a different way than Beijing. In Shanghai the street signs often had English translations and most of the buildings included Chinese characters alongside the English words or phrases. There were few similar "accommodations" in Beijing for visitors or residents who don't speak and/or cannot read Mandarin.

From an academic standpoint, it was clear the Chinese are proud of the success of their students, and they are working hard to open their doors to students and faculty from around the world. However, they are not satisfied, stating they must improve their students' critical thinking skills and increase access to higher education for poor students.

As expected, we had an informative trip and travel adventure with a group of 15 future leaders in higher education.