

URI Summer Program in China

Dr. Wen Xiong

The Chinese International Engineering Program organized its third annual summer intensive Chinese language and culture immersion course at Zhejiang University this year from May 26th to July 4th, followed by a two-week study tour to several cities.

Accompanied by Chinese faculty Dr. Wen Xiong, the 13 students first took six weeks of intensive language study in Hangzhou, which is located on the east coast of China and only about 1 hour and half by train from Shanghai, the biggest metropolitan city of China. Students took “Comprehensive Chinese” and “Conversational Chinese” classes each morning from 8:30 to 12:00 pm, Monday through Friday, taught by two professors. In the afternoon, students attended either Chinese cultural courses or visited local industrial sites, such as the Coca Cola Company, Wahaha Beverage Company and the Alibaba (known as Chinese E-bay), or local cultural sites, such as the Tea Farm and silk market. All these activities greatly enriched the students’ understanding about the country and its culture. Meanwhile, URI students were also involved in on-campus college activities by playing basket ball, football etc. with Chinese students.

After six weeks of intensive learning of Chinese, the students obtained six credits from Zhejiang University, which met all academic requirements at home and could be transferred back to URI. The host university held a graduation ceremony for URI students to receive the certificate of language learning at Zhejiang University. The Chinese IEP students hosted a thank you banquet for all professors and staff at Zhejiang University in our URI program on the same day.

After the summer language program, 9 students remained to take the study tour in China. The tour covered 2 municipalities (Beijing and Shanghai) and 4 provinces (Shangxi, Henan, Shangdong and Jiangu), altogether 9 cities.

The tour began in Beijing, the Capital city of China, which is recognised as the political, educational, and cultural center of the People's Republic of China. Beijing “remains an epicenter of tradition with the treasures of nearly 2,000 years such as as the imperial capital still on view—in the famed Forbidden City and in the city's lush pavilions and gardens... — National Geographic”. The group visited the Forbidden City, the summer palace, the Temple of Heaven and the Great Wall, which literally means “the long wall of 10,000 Li). The noticeable Great Wall is a series of stone and earthen fortifications in China, built, rebuilt, and maintained between the 6th century BC and the 16th century to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire from Xiongnu attacks during the rule of successive dynasties. It stretches over approximately 6,400 km (4,000 miles). The group also paid a visit to the head-quarters of Hanban (Chinese Language Council International) and the Confucius Institute, as well as the Chinese experience center in Hanban.

The second stop was Xi’an, which is a 1.5 hour flight from Beijing. As one of the oldest cities in Chinese history, Xi'an is one of the Four Great Ancient Capitals of China

because it has been the capital of some of the most important dynasties in Chinese history. Xi'an is also renowned for being the eastern terminus of the Silk Road and for the location of the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, made during the Qin Dynasty. The city has more than 3,100 years of history. There was a one-day excursion tour to the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, and the Wild Goose Pagoda.

After Xi'an, the group moved to Henan Province. The tour to the Long Men Grottos was amazing because of its overwhelming depiction of Buddhist subjects, densely dotted along the two mountains. From north to south, and about one kilometre long, the Long Men Grottoes are one of the three most famous ancient sculptural sites in China. Then followed by a 1.5 hour bus ride we went to Shaolin Temple, the cradle of Chinese martial arts, and enjoyed Gongfu show performed by the kids at the Martial Arts School.

Riding by coach about 4-hours, the group then moved to Shang Dong province, the home town of Confucius and also Chinese traditional Jiaozi dumplings. The students visited Confucius' Temple, Tomb and Former Residence. It helped to understand the original thoughts about Chinese philosophy. The second day began with a 1 hour coach ride to Taishan (Mount Tai), which is a mountain of historical and cultural significance. This location became the principal place where the emperor would pay homage to Heaven (on the summit) and Earth (at the foot of the mountain), and is commonly reported to be 1545 metres (5069 ft) tall. The students took a cable car up to the top of Taishan Mountain, after sightseeing, walked about 2 hours, stepping 4000 stairs down the middle part of the mountain and then took a bus to the bottom of the mountain. The third day in Shangdong involved touring the capital city Jinan, Daming Lake and Baotu Spring.

From Shangdong, we flew to Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. Nanjing has always been one of China's most important cities. Apart from having been the capital of China for six dynasties and of the Republic of China, Nanjing has also served as a national hub of education, research, transportation and tourism throughout history. We visited the Yangtze River Bridge, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum, and the Fuzi Miao (Confucius Temple) and could not wait to go to Shanghai, which was only about 2 hours by train.

The final stop of the tour was Shanghai, the biggest city of China. The city is renowned for its historical landmarks such as the Bund, the Old city Temple and Yu Garden, its modern and ever-expanding Pudong skyline and Xintiandi, and its new reputation as a center of culture and design. By the end of the trip, students were exhausted but had more free time to explore the city, day and night. The tour guide showed us the Shanghai Museum, and the Bund. The acrobatic show in the evening was wonderful.

The URI students gave this kind of feedback about the program:

“These two months of my life have been the most memorable in a long time, and the most life-changing. From the experience I take away a higher level of Chinese language, an even higher understanding of Chinese Culture, and also a new outlook on life.-----
Barry Blackinton”

“My experiences in China have profoundly changed me as a person. The experience as a whole was astounding. The classes were intensive and exploring China imbued all of us with an open mind and a spirit for discovery.----- Joseph Hackman”

“As a recent graduate from the URI International Business Program, I was nervous to go to China without any definite plans for work upon my return. Now as I am sitting at the desk of my new job, finishing up work at the end of the day with vendors from China, I could not be happier that I chose to go on the trip. My time in Hangzhou opened my eyes to a world previously unknown to me, and gave me experiences that I will never. This trip is an incredible opportunity and I recommend it to anyone who has the chance to go. China is everyday becoming a more powerful presence in this world, and the more we can communicate with one another, the better the world will be.. ----- Jennie Records”

“Now I can not wait to return to China and continue my studies and friendships. I plan to return next summer for three months and hopefully for a semester after that. I see parts of my future and my career in China, so for me this study abroad program was invaluable and was one of the most enriching times of my life.----- Ethan Ash”

_____ And more from other students.....

Four students received Freeman Foundation scholarship to attend the 2008 summer program. There are also other scholarships available in 2009, such as 2009 Critical Language Scholarship Program (NSLI, www.CLScholarship.org), the Flagship Language (Chinese) Grants of URI, The NSEP Boren program awards scholarships (http://www.borenawards.org/boren_scholarship).

For More information, please contact:

Dr. Wen Xiong, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures:
wen_xiong@mail.uri.edu

Dr. John Grandin, Executive director, International Engineer Program at URI:
grandin@uri.edu.