



Syllabus for: **In China We Say:**
A listing of sayings heard
During five weeks of lectures and in China
with Fulbright-Hayes Summer Seminars Abroad
History and Culture in China 2009
by
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- I. Description of lecture or a set of lectures**
Common Chinese expressions or proverbs have been used even in the English language to illustrate a point or explain something cultural. The expressions in this list are a combination of old and contemporary. Each adds to the understanding of the culture and history of China, especially China of the last fifteen years.
- II. The student will be expected to:**
- (a) Explain the relevance of the saying to present day culture or history
 - (b) Choose five to memorize to be able to describe present day China
 - (c) Appreciate the long history and therefore culture of China
 - (d) Research a city or town in China to tell how that place exemplifies some of the sayings.
- III. Suggested Readings:**
- (a) *China's Imperial Dynasties, 1600 BC-1912*, Fenby, Jonathan, Metro Books, New York 2007, printed and bound in China. ISBN-13-:978-0-7607-0461-6
 - (b) *Chinese Idioms volume 1*, Peng's Chinese Treasury, Marshall Cavendish Editions of Times Publishing Limited, Malaysia, 2005. ISBN 981 204 231 8
 - (c) Travel books
- IV. Suggested Activities:**
- (a) Have students research these major cities of China: Beijing, Xi'an, Chongqing, and Shanghai. Other places of interest are Kunming, Yangshuo, Guilin and Hong Kong
 - (b) Have students research cities in the western part of China or some city other than those mentioned above.
 - (c) Have students research Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism), and Buddhism

- V. After the student presents his/her research to the class, the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this presentation could be shown. Slide notes are attached as a separate document.

Background: I am pulling from my notes taken during the five weeks in China with the Fulbright-Hayes Culture & History Seminar in China, July, 2009. As we traveled in China and listened to various speakers and guides, it quickly became apparent that lectures and conversations were filled with expressions and axioms. “Social axioms are general beliefs and premises about oneself, the social and physical environment and the spiritual world. ...people use them to guide their behavior in daily living.”¹ **Peng’s Chinese Treasury** includes several books of Chinese idioms. He writes: “While having a conversation with a friend, scanning the newspapers, following the latest Chinese serials on television, or reading from a Chinese classic, in fact, in almost every situation we are likely to stumble upon a Chinese idiom.”² By listing these phrases and explaining the circumstances, I propose to show how these expressions define or relate to the culture or history of the Chinese people as learned during this seminar.

Almost every lecturer boasted proudly of the five thousand years of Chinese history, including the good and the bad. They traced their culture to the tremendous influence of three philosophies: Confucianism, Taoism (Daoism), and Buddhism, a little bit to former missionaries, and some attention is paid to the fifty-six major ethnic groups, but most of the lecturers focused on descendants of the Han dynasty. The Han trace their ancestry to the Western Han (206 BC to AD 9) and to the Eastern Han (AD 25-220). The Han are the main leaders and largest ethnic group today. There are so many cultures that merged to make China that in our first lecture, Professor Gao Yanli of Peking University said, “We have 5000 years of civilization, 100 years of humiliation, and The People’s Republic of China.” Professor Gao challenged us to consider what we want to know about China, how have we learned about China, and why we are interested in China now. She read us a poem written on the Wall of West Forest Temple by Su Shi (1031-1101). Her English translation:

“Sideways a mountain range,
Vertically a peak.
Far, near, soaring, crouching
Never, no way to know Lushan’s true face,
When you are in the middle of the mountain.”

This poem, not one slide but all the slides together, shows a picture of China or Lushan Mountain from different perspectives. Professor Gao said, “We cannot know another culture without knowing who we are and then learn about others.” This theme was developed throughout our trip as we heard from experts in various fields and as we drove

¹ **Culture & Psychology** 4th edition, Matsumoto, David and Juang Thompson, Linda 2008. p.21.

² Peng, Tan Huay. **Chinese Idioms Vol. 1**, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited. 2005

through the countryside or took the overnight train to Xi'an. To know and understand China, Professor Gao said that "we should keep in mind a continuation of history (5000 plus years) with lots of changes."³

To follow the image of standing on Lushan mountain, I would also say that to understand even a part of China it is important to stand on some piece of ground in China to see and feel a little of the mountain. If you can not stand on the soil, then read and view as much about China as you can.

As you read the sayings and axioms in this project, may you get a feel for some of what China is, and perhaps your interest will be piqued to study more about who the Chinese are and what the country is on the global scene today.

The cities we visited were Beijing, Xi'an, Chongqing and Shanghai. Some members of the group took an extension to Hong Kong. In every place, we were welcomed and hosted as if we were the cream of the crop of U.S. diplomats. The majority of the lectures were given professors who expressed their own ideas about China and its place in the world today. Some saw it as emerging too rapidly. Some saw it as moving too slowly. One lecturer, an American, was pleased at the development of the art scene in Beijing. We were allowed to ask candid questions and we received candid responses. When we asked the officials of *China Daily* how they were able to write so freely visited the English language paper, *China Daily*, one of the professors mentions an article he had read and noted how free it seemed the writers were to tell the real story. He then asked, "How can you write so freely?" The answer was "We know our limits and how to deal with them." A colleague of mine who spent approximately twenty years in and around China for the World Bank, added, "It's in English."

China, as we understood by the end of the trip, is on the move to make **MADE IN CHINA** mean something of the highest value and high status. It is not easy for us (Americans/westerners) to think of capitalism as a concept applying to China, but the young and the rich definitely fuel the role of capitalism in China. As noted by Margot Landman, "Do the young and the rich fuel capitalism or does capitalism fuel the young and the rich? I don't think that it's just a question of semantics!" The Communist Central Committee still embraces ideas of communism, but along with its leader, Hu Jintao, and the other four main leaders, is moving in a direction of seeking peace, expanding liberties, and moving the country into being a global leader. That is the Party line. While it is the Party line, it is difficult to refute that China has changed drastically in the last ten years. Those people who left China to study in another country are returning to unforeseen changes, not only in the larger and expanding cities, but in the kinds of activities in which they can participate.

In 2007 when I traveled with a group of Foreign Language professionals, we were introduced to the new standards of learning for the teaching of World Languages in

³ Lecture by Dr. Gao of Peking University, July 1, 2009. It is important to note that Dr. Gao is a young scholar and expressed her views candidly. She gave a parallel history of Christianity and other world events with what was happening in China before and after the birth of Christ.

China. Included in those standards was the standard for teaching conversational skills. We were shown universities, colleges, high schools and elementary schools that were implementing this standard. With the exception of one private school in Shanghai, we were shown only public institutions. Perhaps the nature of that first visit, like one side of LuShan, did not prepare me for what I noticed in this 2009 experience. I sensed that in just a two year period there are increasing numbers of private schools especially for teaching English. I need documents that tell me how long the private schools have been in existence. In addition, I got the impression that there is an increase in the establishment of non-governmental organizations for everything from helping children with epilepsy to lawyers helping young people who are abused and groups that help the children of migrants and the migrants themselves. I thought at first that this was something I was imagining. I asked our scholar leader, Dr. Craig Canning, and he said he was noticing the same thing. He has studied in China and about China for at least 25 years. The privatization of schools and the increase in non profit/ nongovernmental groups would be a great research project.

To write about the daily activities in which we participated would require at least a 100 page document. I invite anyone who has further questions about something I have written to contact me at tillern@brcc.edu.

My final comment is to give my sincerest thanks to the U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hayes seminars abroad program, the National Committee on U.S-China Relations and its counterpart in China, to the people of the U.S., and to the people in my delegation, all of whom provided this extraordinary experience. Truly, to understand Lushan, you have to look at it from many sides. I am so grateful for having seen five sides! I look forward to seeing more, and to encouraging others to learn about China and its people.