

## Teaching Economics at Nanjing University

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Nanjing is famous for its hot summers, but the winters are no less accommodating. I arrived at Nanjing University (Nanda) by train in the late evening on January 18, 2005, three days before my first scheduled class. Dr. Geng Qiang, an assistant professor in economics who was supposed to work with me, had been waiting in the lobby of Xiyuan hotel on campus downtown. The hotel building is Nanda's counterpart of Berkeley's "International House." With so many English-speaking students I felt as if I were back at Berkeley.

Prof. Shen Kunrong, chair of Economics Department in the School of Business, had made detailed preparations for my course. The course was one semester, but my teaching was concentrated in the first three weeks; for the remainder of the semester, students enrolled for credits completed a short research paper. The teaching was intensive: three hours per session, three times a week in the three weeks.

My course, *Institutions, Developments, and Long-term Economic Growth*, was primarily about frontier research in the field of comparative economic systems and economic growth. Prof. Shen included it as one of his *Series of Special Topics in Macroeconomics*, although the materials covered here were not necessarily confined to macroeconomics. Many ideas in this topic are theoretical, but the recent approach is empirical, which involves gathering data and running regressions to find causal relationships. I emphasize empirical studies because I am more familiar with this aspect of the topic and I feel students in China will gain more from trainings in empirics to prepare for their own research. I constructed a website (<http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~tinglu/>) last November where students could download relevant coursework. Students planning to take the course were asked to go over the required readings during their winter break.

The course was well-marketed, with an unprecedented number of enrollments in the business school for those selective courses. Nearly a hundred graduate students formally enrolled for credits; most of them from the economics department, but some from other departments inside the business school, others from outside the business school, and even a few from outside Nanda. Amongst them were part-time graduate students with full-time jobs in the government. For example, one student, an official in the government, drove almost four hours from a remote city in Jiangsu province to attend the lecture. Although Nanda is one of the top universities in China, it lags far behind other top universities like Peking (Beida), Tsinghua, and Wuhan University regarding economics education and research. The gap is getting even wider in recent years. This partially explains why I, an unknown Ph.D. student in economics from Berkeley (which seems not so well known in China), can attract so many ardent students to the class. No doubt I made the right decision when choosing Nanda as my destination, a place with smart students but in dire need of instructors who can bring fresh knowledge.

As a Chinese saying puts it, a good start means half of the success. I carefully prepared for the first class on Feb. 21 which proved a good strategy. I employed PowerPoint, with pictures, graphs, stories, and provocative questions. Thanks to the training as teaching assistant for half a dozen years both at Beida and Berkeley, I am a confident teacher. I felt that students had rarely been exposed to this way of teaching because they were used to busily taking notes of whatever the instructor read in the class. The course material is inherently interdisciplinary, as it asks questions on the relationship between economic growth and culture, geography, religions, and so

on. To encourage such interdisciplinary exchange, and to help students to search for resources on campus, I invited Prof. Zhang Yulin, a sociology professor in Nanda and a foremost expert on China's education inequality, to the class to present his research, followed by my teaching on the relationship between education inequality and growth. Never had these students experienced this type of teaching before. They expressed deep admiration as if they had found treasures which unbeknownst to them had always been lying at their feet.

Office hours were held in my hotel room just for convenience. Students waited in line to talk to me. Generally they came not for course materials, but with questions about economics study in general and economics education in the US in particular. Some expressed concerns about the backwardness of the economics education at Nanda, some solicited suggestions on textbooks for self-study, while others asked forthright questions about how to get admission from US schools. Besides office hours, I chatted with students following every lecture, sometimes even during the 10-minute breaks. Such conversations are mutually beneficial: for one thing, I contribute to the personal and professional development of my students; for the other, is that I learned a lot from them about present-day China, their thinking, and facts and problems of the education system.

Upon students' request, I changed the topic of the last lecture to an introduction of postgraduate education system in the US, especially business and economics education. I talked further about reforms in other universities such as Beida, in the hope that such a message would be useful for Nanda's own improvement. I emphasized two points. First, professional and scholastic education should be separated at the postgraduate stage, so that different types of talents can be developed without wasting time and resources. Second, scholastic training should be extended to about five years without interruption in order to ensure academic rigor and consistency. Based on my observation, the problem, which of course is not solely confined to Nanda, is the confusion about professional and academic training. Master students get only one year coursework before they begin to work on various projects with their advisors (every advisor has dozens of students to supervise). Many, perhaps most, of them do not have academic interests at all. But for those who are determined scholars, such one-year coursework is too little to prepare them to be qualified in the future. For example, I was surprised to find that students in my class lack even basic knowledge in econometrics, and I was told that they, students from the master and doctoral programs, had finished their one-semester econometrics training and no other empirical classes would be offered.

Just before leaving Nanda, I was invited by Prof. Shen to give a talk to undergraduate students majoring in economics. As in many universities in China, most undergraduate students from freshmen to juniors in Nanda live and study (and rather unfortunately in my view) on a suburb branch campus called Pukou, which is across the Yangtze River and about forty minutes drive. At the talk, I introduced the basic methodology and some frontier research topics in economics. I also introduced the American education system, largely the same as what I talked about in my lecture to graduate students on the main campus. My talk about education abroad was welcomed by those students on the isolated campus. During the questions and answers part, I was immersed in a barrage of questions. Although tired, I was delighted to bring useful messages to this younger generation (I am reluctant to mention that, but they are about ten years younger than me).

While in Nanda I also interacted with young faculty members and some heads of the business school. Young faculty members were eager to exchange research ideas. I encouraged them to form a discussion group in the form of a luncheon to increase their internal exchange, and to improve their academic environment (just as some friends and I started up Berkeley China View three years ago). One of the heads of the business school, Prof. Fan Conglai, was interested in my comments on their institution. I expressed my opinions openly and suggested they put

those academic-oriented students in a 5-year program that combines the master's and doctoral programs, with coursework increased to at least two years.

I had other academic activities while in Nanjing. For example, I was invited to give a lecture on corporate governance to graduate students in Dongnan (Southeast) University's School of Economics and Management.

I left Nanjing for Shanghai on March 11, and flew back to San Francisco the next day. The journey is over, but the task is not finished. I continue to receive all kinds of emails and questions from my students. Before the trip I persuaded myself to contribute as much as possible to Nanda, that's why I readily agreed to help upgrade their courses by recommending new textbooks to them. From the trip I received: the warm welcome and careful attention from Prof. Shen, the excellent assistantship by Dr. Geng, the encouraging feedback and nice comments from those students and audience.

From my personal experience I appreciate OYCF's efforts more and more in bringing us abroad to China in its teaching program. I hope OYCF will keep working on this, gather more funds and make more offers. I also encourage scholars abroad to apply and experience the marvels of this teaching program. I suggest they choose universities with great potential but not necessary the frontrunners so that they may make the largest contribution possible. I encourage that they not only bring knowledge of their majors, but also take with them other aspects of the outside world, such as the foreign education and academic system, cultures, and even social institutions.

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