

Report on Teaching at Nanjing University

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Nanjing is famous for its hot summer, but its winter there is no less chilling. I arrived in Nanjing University (Nanda) by train in the dark evening on January 18, 2005, three days before the scheduled first class. Dr. Geng Qiang, an assistant professor in economics who is supposed to work with me, has been waiting in the lobby of Xiyuan hotel inside the downtown campus. The hotel building is actually the “international house” of Nanda. With so many English-speaking foreign students I felt as if I were already back at Berkeley.

Prof. Shen Kunrong, chair of economics department in the School of Business, has already made detailed preparation for the course. The course will last for one semester, but the teaching is concentrated in the first three weeks; for the rest of the semester students enrolled for credits will complete a short research paper. The teaching was rather intensive: three hours each time, three times a week in the three weeks.

My course, *Institutions, Developments, and Long-term Economic Growth*, is largely about the frontier research in the field of comparative economic systems and economic growth. Prof. Shen includes it as one of his *Series of Special Topics in Macroeconomics*, although the materials covered here is not necessarily confined to macroeconomics. Many ideas in this topic are quite theoretical, but the recent approach is rather empirical, meaning 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/>) with all papers downloadable in last November. Students planning to take the course were supposed to go over the required readings during their winter holiday.

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 are from the economics department, but some from other departments inside the business school, some from outside the business school, and even a few from outside Nanda. Some are part-time graduate students with full-time jobs in the government. For example, one student, an official in government, drove almost four hours every time 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 Beida, Qinghua, 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 to choose Nanda as my destination, a place with smart students but badly in need of instructors who can bring fresh knowledge.

As a Chinese saying put it, a good start means half of the success. I carefully prepared for the first class on Feb. 21 and it proved a good strategy. Powerpoint was employed, 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 quite confident as an experienced teacher. I could feel that students have rarely exposed to this way of teaching because they have been 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 have these students experienced this type of teaching before. They expressed such a passion as if they found invaluable treasures unnoticed for a long time yet just under their own 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 their questions about economics study in general and economics education in the US in particular. Some expressed their concerns about the backwardness of the economics education in Nanda, some solicited suggestions on textbooks for self-study, and some asked forthright questions about how to get admission from US schools. Besides office hours, I also chatted with students for a while after 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 another thing, I also learned a lot from them about current China, their thinking, and facts and problems of their education system.

To satisfy their request, I changed the topic of last lecture to the introduction of postgraduate education system in the US, especially the business and economics education. I talked further about reforms in other universities such as Beida, in the hope that such message will 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 best developed without a waste of 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 not 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 devoted to be scholars, such one-year coursework is too little to prepare them to be qualified scholars in the future. For example, I was surprised to find that students in my class lack of even the most 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 their 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) in a suburb branch campus called Pukou, which is across the Yangtze River and about forty minutes drive. 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 in my lecture for graduate students in the main campus. My talk about abroad education was rather highly welcomed by those students in the isolated campus. During the Q&S part I was immersed by so many hands raised. Although tired, I felt quite 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 faculties and some heads of the business school. Young faculties were eager to exchange their research ideas, so I encouraged them to form a discussion group in the form of 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 combined by their master and doctoral programs, with coursework increased to at least two years. I have some other academic activities while in Nanjing. For example, I was invited to give a lecture on corporate governance for graduate students in Dongnan (Southeast) University's School of Economics and Management.

I left Nanjing for Shanghai on March 11, and flew back to SF the next day. The journey is over, but the task is not finished yet. Emails of all kinds of questions from my students come occasionally. Before the trip I persuaded myself to contribute as much as possible to Nanda, that's why I even happily agreed to help upgrade some of their courses by recommending new textbooks to them. From the trip I also got a lot: the warm welcome and careful arrangement by 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 wish OYCF keep working on this, gather more fund and make more offers. I also strongly encourage scholars abroad to apply to experience the marvel teaching trip. I suggest they choose universities with great potentials, but not necessary those frontrunners so that they make their 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.