

Keeping up with Change

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Abstract: A brief homage to the teacher and language partner who encouraged me to use nciku.com, Google translate, perapera-kun, and hyperlinked/color-coded Word and PPT documents to analyze, translate, and present thinktank commentary on political corruption in China.

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万口不离其宗

Johnathan Burnston

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I took Chinese with Su Taitai because my level was “different” ...the class for kids who didn't fit This made for a unique experience...

1) Abstract

- a. 1 long sentence to summarize what I'm talking about today...
- b. Illustrate what it was like being a student in Su Taitai's class, in a high-tech, globalized, 2011 world

- 2) Day 1: One of the most senior and longest tenured faculty members in the dept. tells us....
 - a. Very striking, so unlike other classes, let alone language, where these tools are suppressed to avoid “cheating”

- 3) Tools:
 - a. Both in and out of class, I was constantly logged into....
 - b. Our classes took place on a projected screen, through all types of online and downloaded digital media
 - c. Technology-centered. Emphasis on using, not suppressing, the latest tools.

- 4) Methods:
 - a. Similarly progressive
 - b. Every day had one student “guest teach”, pre-prepared materials, together analyze some specific focus material
 - c. Participative and integrative, inherently engaging
 - d. A week’s worth of homework, besides preparing for your guest teach, was oriented around journals and perhaps an individual project.
 - e. NOT STATIC. Live, interactive, “streaming”. As much feedback as you put in, plus some more. Serious time/energy commitment,
 - f. My project: Self-chosen, shows how relevant our material could be (Bo Xilai, etc.)

- 5) Content:
 - a. Self-chosen, infinitely relevant both to us as students, and the world around us which we were observing.
 - b. Integrative and Democratic

6) Outcome:

The result was an experience that was simultaneously: innovative, engaging, democratic, and inherently modern and relevant. We used cutting edge tools, with participative and integrative methods, around self-chosen topics. This made for an incredibly rewarding experience, and I can't think of a more appropriate way to study such a hot and changing topic as China and Chinese language studies.

RANT:

Our academic exercise was the perfect analogy to modern day China

- Just as we were trying to stay on top of technological change and relevant methods and content while staying to our course of effectively studying Chinese language, China, its people and its leaders are struggling to adapt to changing conditions while preserving common goods of identity, stability and well being.
- Both need to be flexible, adapt to change, adapt to technology....technology is what is pushing democracy in China. Both need leaders who can keep up with change; both need teachers who can train leaders to be adaptive and remain relevant.
- Can't get over how appropriate that while in Su Taitai's class I was analyzing political corruption— and Bo Xialai came up!— and now look what's happened.

After experiencing an era of capable and adaptive leadership, China will miss Hu and Wen... but of course their influence won't really end. Now Columbia will miss Su Taitai.... and I hope that for the school's sake, her influence will continue.

- End -

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