1. CET-Beijing

   a. Alan Chen, Summer 2018 Final Report

CET Beijing was quite honestly a blast. Like all experiences that extend over the period of two months, there were many ups and downs but on the whole, I left CET with a bunch of great memories on my mind, and of course a little sadness that I had to leave Beijing to go back to Yale. On the whole, there were many reasons why I enjoyed the summer, from exploring the Beijing with my friends to buying fake Gucci shoes from the Silk Market to just enjoying life as a student in a foreign country. In terms of the program, I think there’s a lot to recommend CET, since it’s a program that emphasizes rigorously learning Chinese as well as learning Chinese culture. I’ll go over a brief overview of the academic structure of the program, as well as the organized activities and other perks of attending the program.

I took Chinese 152/153 at Yale, and I think it prepared me quite well for the 400 curriculum at CET. The levels at CET correspond to two levels higher at Yale, so for example, the 300 level would be equivalent to L5 Chinese (150 level courses), the 400 level equivalent to the 162 course at Yale, et cetera. Although I’m a heritage learner, the program does not separate heritage from non-heritage learners. In addition, CET is very accommodating for different levels in their student body. For example, there was a 500 level class with only one student in it, as well as a 260 level class (roughly between L3 L4) that had only 3 students in it. As a result, the teachers can focus more on developing their students since they have more of the same foundation. Every day there was a new lesson teaching a varying amount of words. The average was maybe around 50 new words and a few sentence structures, and it was hard to get used to at first. I think the first week I spent maybe two to four hours on the lesson each day, all while asking my roommate for help. You’ll find that the local roommate makes CET a much more conducive environment for learning Chinese. My roommate would often take time out of his day to help me read the 课文 and explain content I simply couldn’t understand. Don’t take their help for granted, but just know that the roommates are there to help you learn Chinese and can do a wonderful job at it.

There is a 2 hour 大班课 and a 2 hour 小班课 in the morning, as well as a half an hour of one on one with the teachers in the afternoon. This 一对一课 was honestly my favorite part of classes, since it was a great time to become friends with the teachers and learn about their lives. In theory, you would talk about the material you learned that day, but they’re always open to just chat about your life and or even events in their lives so it’s a great bonding experience. The 大班课 was actually quite boring since every day we would just practice grammar and go over the vocabulary we learned the night before. Still, I think I improved my Chinese level the most
during this class. Paying attention and taking notes is crucial since it will allow you to remember what you’ve learned and apply it to your everyday life. In the 大班课 you’ll find that the students from other schools don’t have nearly as good a foundation in word pronunciation as Yale students do, but don’t get overconfident because you’ll be surprised how much they can improve by the end of CET. The 小班 class goes into detail about a specific topic we learned in class. For example, when we were learning about the US trade war with China in the large class, we watched a news segment about pig farmers in Chinese. The small class is a great way to solidify your knowledge of the sentence structures and vocabulary presented in the large class, as well as get more out of your teachers since they will give you more personalized attention during this time. Lastly, there are office hours every day from 4:30 until around 8:30. This is a good time for teachers to go over the homework as well as stuff you missed on the daily quizzes. The language pledge is the foundation of the program. People followed the language pledge pretty rigorously. In the hallways, dorms, and even dining halls, people would only speak Chinese. At the beginning, it was hard to not let English slip out, but in the end I think it really allowed students to make drastic improvements in their Chinese. I think at CET, students follow the language pledge a lot better compared to other programs.

Although a lot of time is spent on learning, there are a lot of extracurriculars that you can sign up for at CET. For example, I took calligraphy and Chinese painting classes once a week, while my friends did the wushu class. In the end, they’re all paid for by CET so I recommend exploring these classes. You never know—you might end up with a passion for one of these subjects! In addition to extracurricular classes, there are also lots of cultural activities for students. For example, we went to An’yang (former capital of China during the Shang dynasty) for a weekend, and there were also organized trips to the Great Wall, Forbidden City, and 四合院's. There were lots of opportunities to explore ancient Chinese culture, and if you don’t want to do it with CET students, there’s always time for you to explore the city by yourself.

Overall, I think that CET Beijing is a great program. I made a lot of friends there, but more importantly, I noticeably improved my Chinese speaking and listening skills, and drastically improved my Chinese reading and writing skills to the point where I’m now able to understand and communicate my viewpoints on complex topics such as trade and Chinese literature. I would especially recommend this program to those with a lower Chinese level since they would benefit more from the strictly followed language pledge. However, I think that this program would be great for anyone.