**Sustainable Urbanism in China:**

*An International Perspective*

Mary Wischmeyer

SAID 6099

05/23/13

**Prepare.**

This past spring semester rolled around, and before I knew it I was heading, along with 24 other University of Cincinnati students, to China for a two-week study abroad course focusing on **Sustainable Urbanism** in Chinese cities. I finished my final projects and crammed for exams. I neglected to pack for this lengthy trip until the night before the group’s departure, making my packing procedure a quick and efficient motion.

While preparing to pack, I broke down the trip into sections—the **13-hour plane ride** to and from, the days walking around China, the nights exploring Chinese culture, and what if the airline loses my luggage! For the travel to and from China I made sure to pack the following: passport, purse, snacks, toothbrush, contacts, headphones, reading material on China, book, and other important documents. In this list I also made sure to take an extra change of clothes, in case the airline misplaced my luggage. For the most part, the flight for me consisted of falling asleep to a movie, waking up for lunch service, peering over multiple heads to get a glimpse out a window, and sleeping again. For the days walking around China, I learned the most important things to pack were **good walking shoes**, lots of layer of clothing, a small sketchbook, a camera, and a city map. I brought a carry-on size suitcase for the two weeks, banking on doing laundry at least once. Well, I did wash a couple shirts in the hotel sink, and dried them on the bus the next day, but otherwise we could not find any laundry services. Frankly, we did not have time to either. I would say it may have been nicer to have a bigger suitcase for more clothes and souvenirs, but my little case was perfect when we had to lug our belongings around from destination to destination. Finally, I did not pack too many different things for exploring with friends at night, maybe warmer clothes, but I learned that having a small **digital camera** or camera phone to take pictures of business cards or addresses in Chinese helped our groups enormously when we had to split up and take cabs somewhere. Most taxi drivers only could read Chinese characters, so having an accurate address was sometimes hard to come by if you did not have a camera.

One issue I did not take into consideration while packing for China was the return trip. I bought many **souvenirs** for my family, even a kite, and having a small suitcase was already tight on space. Luckily, another group member was able to fit my kite into their bag, and I was able to use a free bag from Beijing’s Waste Center as a bigger carry-on. I also decided to leave some shoes at Beijing; I packed them to bring, with thoughts of leaving the worn out shoes in China.

Contact with family from home was a bit hard at times, but for the most part we had working Internet most places we stayed. I brought an **Ipod Touch**, and emailed my family a couple times while on the trip. I let me family know, however, that I was not going to be contacting them too much. I was grateful the professors sent out picture emails to family back home, this way I was free to spend less time on the internet and more time experiencing China.

Before the trip I had called the **bank** to let them know I was going to China. When we arrived at the Beijing airport, I found an ATM and retrieved money. No problem. Week two rolled around, and I needed more money. However, multiple ATMs were denying me. These ATMS were in convenience stores, grocery stores, and our Beijing hotel. At the Beijing Train Station I was able to withdraw cash, but besides the airport ATM, all other ATMs I tried rejected my request. It was a bit frustrating; at times I had no money and other times I had too much money. All in all, I was amazed at how much cheaper everything was there. Also, I learned you could **bargain** for almost anything there! I was able to bargain down a 350 Yuan scarf to 50 Yuan. I was grinning ear to ear after visiting that shop!

**Experience.**

The course for this study abroad program focused on the rapid population growth in Chinese cities, and how sustainably China is dealing with the issue. During the spring semester, I researched the concept of **vertical farming**. BJUT faculty and students, as well as BLVD architects, had some practical comments for me. BJUT was very intrigued by the idea, but had not heard too much about this new concept. They said vertical farming seems applicable for China in the future, but is only currently on a very small scale. For example, many citizens grow some vegetable in pots on their apartment balconies, but there hasn’t been a need for large-scale farming. BLVD backed up these opinions as well; their main comment was that many sustainable methods are too **expensive** for Chinese constructions. The government and developers want cheap fast construction and design. These agencies seem to be only looking at short-term issues, and not researching long-term solutions. BLVD admitted maybe in twenty years the government may see a need to construct vertical farming, but right they [BLVD architects] do not have time or resources to research new sustainable concepts.

When in China, I was drawn back by all of the **packaging** Chinese goods that I bought seemed to contain. I purchased some candy one day from the hotel’s store, opened it up, to find the candies in another package, opened that up, and found each candy wrapped individually. I thought, “How wasteful is this package?” I saw many other goods similarly packaged, and I still wonder why it was this way.

The final piece of interest I would like to share is my reaction to the amount of people in China. There were so many **people**! Everywhere! The streets were packed with cars, buses, bikes, scooters, and pedestrians. In the buses and subways, we were packed in like sardines almost every trip. Because we were packed so tightly on one of the bus rides, my friend’s hand was jammed in the door when it tried to open. Beijing is a large city, covering much land mass. In certain traffic, it could take hours to get from one side of the city to the other. It also did not seem to help that anyone driving failed to follow any sort of traffic laws. With this being said, this class and the trip posed a good question that I had never reason to think of before being introduced to China’s urban growth. With an already established city plan, and a rapid increase of urban population, how does a city change it’s public transit to best bring **comfort** to all citizens? Beijing seemed to be struggling to find the answer.

**Reflect.**

From the Sustainable Urbanism course, and study abroad trip to China, I have gained a greater understanding of the rising sustainability issues facing our world. I greatly enjoyed having the **freedom** to research any topic we wanted for the course. I believe it would be even more beneficial in the future to have students research a topic, give a **presentation** on how this topic affects China. This presentation should be given in Cincinnati to other students enrolled in the course. Likewise, a second presentation should be made, focusing on how the issue affects Cincinnati, America, and the world, and presented to students and faculty at BJUT. I think it would also help to start the topic research earlier in the semester.

Aside for the coursework, the places we were able to visit in China were great. There was a very clear **mix** of cultural heritage, architecture, planning, and environmental visits. I enjoyed learning from and interacting with other students not in my field of major. Probably my most favorite part about the trip was interacting with the **Chinese students**—hearing their stories, their thoughts about America, and comments about living in China. Those conversations were so beneficial to my understanding of China and the issues facing the country. Staying at the university in Jinan and eating in the BJUT dining hall greatly assisted this.

I am very **grateful** I was able to participate in this program, and am even more grateful to the professors and UC International for organizing the trip. I may not have the privilege to return to China, but the lessons learned are invaluable to my career. I have gained knowledge that I may apply to issues locally. The world is changing right before our eyes. Each of us have the choice; The choice to run far behind the Earth, always trying to catch up, or the choice to walk in front and deal with global issues before its too late. It’s your **choice**; I hope to achieve the latter.