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The HuSS Course: A Student's Experience

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As a freshman from Renmin University of China, I enrolled in the “Humanities, Science, Scimat” (HuSS) course taught by Professor Lui Lam in the International Summer School 2015. The course had 26 students and class time of 24 hours as a whole, run in July. Introduced from the perspective of scimat, the course opened the door of a trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural academic world for me. It also influenced me a lot on my ways towards pursuing knowledge and doing research. Here, my learning experience in the course is recounted in the form of a diary.

7.1 Introduction

The course “Humanities, Science, Scimat” (HuSS) [Lam, 2017] was conducted by Prof. Lui Lam using the “open-teaching” mode which consisted of two major parts: lectures and research projects. In addition, seminars, progress reports and English-writing training all served as important methods of instruction. Students of any major at any level could benefit from this teaching mode and participate actively in the class.

The combination between lecture and project was very educational because the instructor and the students were connected so closely that the knowledge obtained from this class were well adapted to research process. For one thing, the instructor would introduce the proper relationships between the humanities and science in his lectures. For another, we students had to form teams to work on a certain project and do research under the guidance of the instructor.

If you are a beginner in learning scimat [Lam, 2014], I wish my comments about the class could help you better understand what you could obtain from this course. Here, I must make it clear that all of my comments

are based on personal recognition on this course and it's you, the reader, who will decide whether these comments could be a useful reference or not. Another thing I have to emphasize is that my comments are determined by the learning environment that I live in. In China, we speak Chinese as our native language. Although English is a compulsory course at school, most students' English skills still stay at the medium level after graduation. As for me, English writing and speaking are all challenging tasks. Luckily, in the HuSS class, we were required to use only English when doing presentation, writing the essay and so on. Therefore, apart from learning the scimat perspective, I improved my English language skills after four-week training at the same time.

7.2 Course Dairy

The regular class sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays. For our team, three extra days (July 19, 20 and 29) relating to the writing of the team essay were added in, which resulted in a paper [Ciren et al, 2016] published after the summer school.

Day 1 (July 7, Tue)

Today is my first day at summer school. After finding myself a seat, I keep watching around like an excited rabbit until my instructor—Professor Lam—enters the classroom. I was surprised by the professor's neat and simple wearing style which gives me a deep impression.

Class starts. Professor gives us a personal introduction. He is quite an experienced scholar and his education background at Columbia University impresses me. Then, he talks about the HuSS course and the teaching plan.

From 7/7 to 7/30, lectures about HuSS, project study, English oral presentation, paper writing. What a challenging task! However, I love it and I realize that it will be a "full" summer.

To conduct the project study, all the students are required to form research teams and work together. We have 10 min to find team members. The whole class was booming during the team forming process. We talk a lot and try to know fellow students in order to seek the best match and pull together a strong research team. Luckily, I find 5 nice persons. They are Yan Xi and Liang Dan-Dan from the School of History, Xia Yu-Xuan and Ciren Cuo-Mu from the School of Business, Yang Yu-Guang from the School of

Economics.¹ Well, a combination of history, business, economy and labor science. Interesting!

All the team are formed. It's time to choose your research topic for your team! Our team brainstorms for about an hour and we think about various issues such economy, politics, culture and so on. Then Xia Yu-Xuan talks about the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in the USA which leads to our discussion about marriage. Ciren Cuo-Mu then tells us about *polyandry*, a rare form of marriage in the world, prevalent for a very long history period in her hometown—Tibet. It is very interesting for polyandry means one wife could have many husbands while there is an opposite marriage type—polygyny and it is well-known for Mormonism. We find that the topic of marriage is quite worth of our research and we could dig deep to touch the rare-touched field. Therefore, after the brainstorm we add marriage into our tentative list.

All back to the classroom. Each team announces its potential research topics and professor gives his remarks. Professor evaluates the topics we are interested in and emphasize on relevance, timeliness and forward-looking. It seems that he agrees that we might find something special in studying marriage. He speaks highly of the topic about “Uber” from another team. Uber generates a hot debate among Chinese society and its combat with Didi, a local Chinese company who also provides tailored taxi service, is causing serious concern. But professor announces that we could wait until next class to finalize the research topic.

In the first half of the class, we learn about the class, the teacher and the students. In the second half of the class, professor gives a lecture on innovation. He points out the importance of innovation at the very beginning and talks about barriers on China's way towards creative works which leads to my worry about China's future of scientific innovation. I have to admit the whole course is overwhelming and I understand that from now on, I will have a busy and booming summer!

Day 2 (July 9, Thur)

Class starts. We are shocked when professor hands out the fresh, today's *The Beijing News*. Newspaper? A pile of papers. Yes, that's the secret to topic choosing. “Find out issues you're interested in and share your ideas 15 minutes later”. Fifteen minutes later, after going through the newspaper at

¹ In this article, except that of Lui Lam, Chinese names are written with family name first.

hand, we put up what we write about the interesting issues and our remarks at the corridor for everyone to read and discuss.

Back to classroom. Our team have a thorough discussion and agree that marriage will be our team project. It marks that we now truly start a research project! Every team put forward their team project in the class. And no team wants to change their project after reading the newspaper. Oh, it's really interesting for we have a colorful bunch of projects all together, ranging from shared economy to culture differences.

Professor then gives us some basic knowledge about paper writing. What should the structure of a paper be like? Actually, I am afraid of paper writing for we will have to hand in a final paper written in English while I have never written that in English before. However, I relief myself and tell myself that you can do it!

Why should we avoid plagiarism? It shocks me when he emphasizes on the importance of *properly* quoting original works. The reason is that in China, most people are not aware of some quoting rules in their writing, and end up committing plagiarism in reality.

After that, professor leaves us enough time to do some research and choose our team's coordinator, or the "contact" person. We make full use of the time and talk about what we should do next. We reach an agreement that since we are at the beginning, we have to do enough reading to find information and get inspired. And we elect Cuo-Mu as our coordinator. Cuo-Mu is a nice girl from Tibet and is willing to be our coordinator.

Day 3 (July 14, Tue)

It's the second week and today each team should give an oral presentation. Yu-Guang is going to present our progress. Before that, our team met on July 12 and had a job division. Since we want to have a broad view of marriage internationally, our team is divided into 5 sub-teams studying four different regions. Yu-Guang will focus on marriage system in India. Yu-Xuan will pay attention to marriage in Ancient Rome. Dan-Dan and Xi work on that in China. Cuo-Mu does research mainly about Tibet. I will focus on that in England.

Yu-Guang does a presentation about our work and introduces this division of labor. I think he is a good presenter. Every time someone finishes his or her presentation we have a chance to challenge this person and have a

discussion in the class. After all the teams finish the presentation, I am impressed by all of them and I can tell that some teams are really strong.

At the second half of the class, professor gives us a meaningful lecture which changes my recognition on science. Before attending this course, I regarded science as natural science, and it should include math, physics and some other disciplines studying nature. Professor changes my opinion and helps me realize that I was wrong. By starting with misunderstandings on the humanities and science, he points out a proper definition of science is needed. Then he looks back to the birth of disciplines and birth of science and finally, he puts forward the definition of science—science is humans' pursuit of knowledge about things in nature without bringing in God or any supernatural. In the world of scimat, we study the humanities, social science and medical science.

Also, professor introduces his scimat program. This is really a thought-provoking lesson.

Day 4 (July 16, Thur)

Continue researching! The topic marriage is too broad for us to study so the next step is to narrow down the subject and make our research down to earth. In order to fulfil this goal, our team begins to do literature review and want to go further after collecting enough information. We hope to find something worthy researching when going through the history of marriage systems.

Well, still, oral presentation. We have Cuo-Mu to introduce her part of research. She is expert at marriage system in Tibet for she is from Tibet and she shows some first-hand information. All the teams seem working well. One team even shows us the statistics they collected. We have to speed up.

And, today, the lecture is about history. I love this part. History is my favorite subject in school and I love reading history books in my spare time. Again, professor changes my view of history. History research can be done very scientifically! In the lecture, professor shows how physics can help history research. For example, we can make use of random work and active work. Then he gives us cases of three research levels: empirical level, phenomenological level and bottom-up level. Just as he says, there is much more in history than pure narratives.

Day 5 (July 19, Sun)

We meet with professor at a café on July 19. We talk about our progress face to face; professor gives us some advice. He mentions that we can see

marriage from the view of biology. There could be some biological reason behind marriage—the intimate bond between a couple. After that, he invites us to have a ride in his car touring Beijing city. That is really a wonderful experience. We enjoy the beautiful city light, music of Hou Hai and deep, profound talk.

Day 6 (July 20, Mon)

Our team meets again. And at this meeting, I put forward my new findings. When I was reading papers and surfing online, arranged marriage appealed to me. Arranged marriage means a type of marital union where the bride and groom are selected by a third party rather than by each other [O'Brien, 2008, pp. 40-42]. It first came to me when I was reading something about the marriage system in British history. That reminded me of the arranged marriage in ancient China. Arranged marriage had a long history in Chinese feudal history and marriage was not liberalized until the Opium War. Years of war introduced new production modes and Western ideas, especially individualism, which crushed the traditional big family of patriarchy, and arranged marriage began to collapse [Xu, 1961].

Similarly, arranged marriage was once a common thing in the whole British society. During the 16th century to 19th century, British society had an obvious stratification phenomenon. In the upper class, if one wanted to inherit his or her parents' wealth and status, then this individual must obey them in choosing a spouse [Stone, 1977]. It stroked me when I found that such two different countries, China and England, both playing an important role in the world history, could have similarities in the marriage system.

Why do these two countries once have arranged marriage? Do other countries in the world have arranged marriage in their history, too? Why does arranged marriage collapse and autonomous marriage emerge? I put forward all of these questions and propose further studying marriage liberalization to my fellow team members. It turns out that all of us were interested in this subject so we decide to focus on analyzing marriage liberalization, the development from arranged marriage to autonomous marriage.

Day 7 (July 21, Tue)

It's my turn to do oral presentation. I present my part of research on England and cite some important facts from the book *The Family, Sex and Marriage*

In *Interdisciplinarity and General Education in the 21st Century*, eds. Maria Burguete & Jean-Patrick Connerade (Science Matters Press, Cascais, Portugal, 2017) pp 115-124.

in England. I am glad that I overcome my nervousness in front of the whole class and trying to inform and persuade my fellow students really gives me a feeling of achievement.

Professor Lam is an expert at using power point and teaches us how to make our ppt concise and informative. For example, he insists on format unification and likes to make his ppt look normative and impressive. It matters that you are a good speaker. It also matters that you have a good ppt to make your audience follow what you are talking about.

Today, the lecture is about arts. Art has a long history and appeared one million years ago. Professor divides arts into applied arts and pure arts. Pure arts is to kill time gently and passively [Lam, 2011]. He points out that like science, art production is also a creative process and can reflect nature. Some great art work is shown in the class and now we can see arts from a different view.

Day 8 (July 23, Thur)

Things go on well. According to our research till now, Ancient Rome, China, England and India all have arranged marriage in the early age of history and autonomous marriage comes into being in later times. But we can see differences in the speed of change: for example, that of China lasts a long time while arranged marriage quickly changes into autonomous marriage so we want to find out the reason for this phenomenon. And today, it's Yu-Xuan who gives oral presentation. He is really a reliable teammate and is an expert of history in Ancient Rome and also good at English language. The presentation is excellent and the speaker is excellent too.

The lecture is about philosophy today. Professor points out that philosophical concept is built upon the best available scientific knowledge and contemporary philosophers have to be aware of the current scientific results. He also compares Philosophy in the Western world and Philosophy in China. Especially, he shares his opinion on Laozi with us. From his view, ancient Chinese philosophies concentrate in maintaining societal harmony and stability which, with help from the authority, has been kept alive for thousands of year.

Day 9 (July 28, Tue)

It's the written exam day. We have an examination on Chapter 2-7 of the text. The examination includes multiple choice and gap filling. I think it's a good way to check what we have commanded after 3 weeks' learning and

most of the questions are about some important points the professor mentioned before which reflect the idea of scimat.

The oral presentation have a different rule today. Each team gives oral presentation of their draft of paper and the presentation is finished by 5 persons of the team which means everyone should know every part very well.

I think our presentation is done smoothly and fluently. We work together for 3 weeks and we now show our results in front of the whole class. This is a fantastic experience. As for me, I enjoy presenting what we have done and I have a sense of achievement. Also, our team is competitive and I love everyone's performance. By the way, all of the 5 teams in the class do a good job. And I am impressed with some particular teams for their presentation.

Day 10 (July 29, Wed)

It's the jam session. All teams try to have their papers perfected within these 24 hours. Tomorrow, we will hand in our final edition to the professor. Today, bonded to each other, we must make full use of the time left to revise it, reflect upon it and rectify it.

We have a meeting room used as our studio and everyone along with the air conditioner is running so fast to ensure the efficiency and the productivity. Yan Xi, the editor of our team during the jam session, takes up the responsibility of having everything in the orbit. The rest of us carefully check the whole paper again and again and correct the mistakes we find. Every team works so hard and I witness some students staying in front of the laptop and their eyes focusing on the screen for a quite long time. I believe that everyone has tried his or her best to make the contribution worthwhile. It's really an unforgettable jam session.

Day 11 (July 30, Thur)

It's the last day. Yesterday, we have a tough time revising our research paper. Today, we present orally our final paper and submit the written version. And what I want to mention, is the party time. What we have at the party? Cakes and music! Professor prepares the party for us. At the party, we enjoy the cake and cheer for our achievement.

We have a happy time at the party but we also have sadness for saying goodbye. To be honest, I have never imagined that we can do so well in the

end. I am glad that I make full use of my summer time and meet such a great teacher, great classmates and great teammates. So when it's time to say goodbye, I am so enchanted to this class and I linger on without any thought of leaving. We have the scimat and our work. We have science and humanity. Paraphrasing Paul Cézanne, we have an apple and we want to astonish the world.

7.3 Conclusion

Here are what I have learned or improved after attending the HuSS course: the perspective of scimat; the relationships between the humanities and science; new developments in history, arts, philosophy; team spirits especially for a research team; critical thinking; power-point presentation ability; academic research skills; English writing skills; English speaking skills.

As a female Chinese, the HuSS course introduces me to a new world of doing research and advancing knowledge. One month, six team members and one project, I get through it and I gain a lot. Apart from the scimat perspective of viewing the world, the professor also teaches us the importance of respecting science and respecting reality. And I'm proud of my team for having our essay published after the summer school. The professor helps us a lot in improving the manuscript and we polish up the essay under his advice. We are grateful to our university for financial support by paying up the page charge. It's a summer I will never forget.

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In *Interdisciplinarity and General Education in the 21st Century*, eds. Maria Burguete & Jean-Patrick Connerade (Science Matters Press, Cascais, Portugal, 2017) pp 115-124.