

The China Program

AN INSIDE LOOK AT BLUE MARBLE
UNIVERSITY'S BAMS IN CHINESE LANGUAGE

Alan W Abrams

THE CHINA PROGRAM MASTER'S PRESENTATION | 05/2019

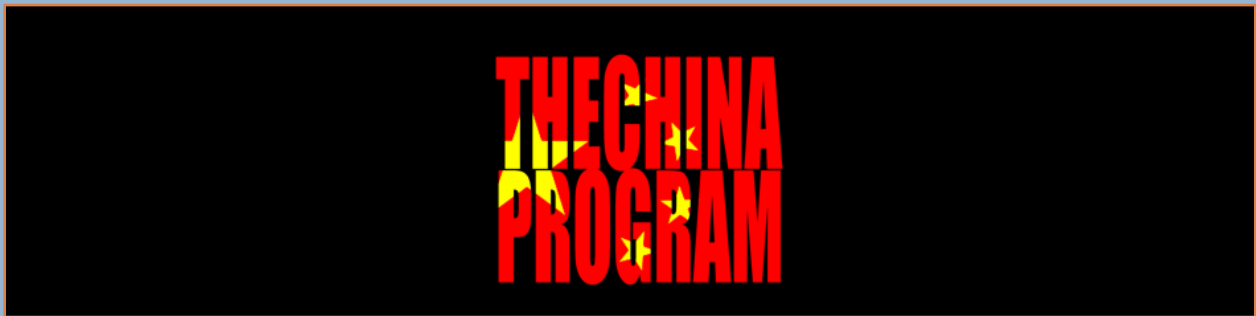
The Program

THE CHINA PROGRAM IS BLUE MARBLE UNIVERSITY'S
BA/MS CHINESE LANGUAGE DEGREE PROGRAM.



In tandem with China increasing its global influence and language standards for foreign work permits, Blue Marble University has created a 2-4-year virtual learning program for this ancient and increasingly relevant global language.

A DEGREE AWARDED FOR PROFICIENCY AND TAILORED
FOR THE PROFICIENT.



Refreshingly, proficiency is the program's focus, rather than seat time and class hours. It is completely suitable for beginners who will be taken through the degree program to adequate proficiency for professional use. Students who are already proficient to some degree can begin customized curriculums tailored by Blue Marble University's vastly experienced, professional and capable faculty.

Being in China since 2002, proficiency in Chinese was not the focus of my degree program. Instead, after assessing my language skill level as sufficiently proficient, the university crafted a student-directed curriculum. The result was a personally meaningful, valuable and dynamic foray into China's language and culture through the study of China's philosophy, medicine, education and herbal extract industry.



Respect and Inspiration

MY ENJOYMENT OF BLUE MARBLE UNIVERSITY'S CHINA PROGRAM WAS BASED ON A RESPECT FOR THE UNIVERSITY THAT UNCEASINGLY GREW AND BROUGHT REPEATED INSPIRATION.

Not only does quality take time to create, but it can also take time to know. There are numerous reasons for the quality of Blue Marble University, but the two that stood out specifically for the China Program were that it was realistic and lean.

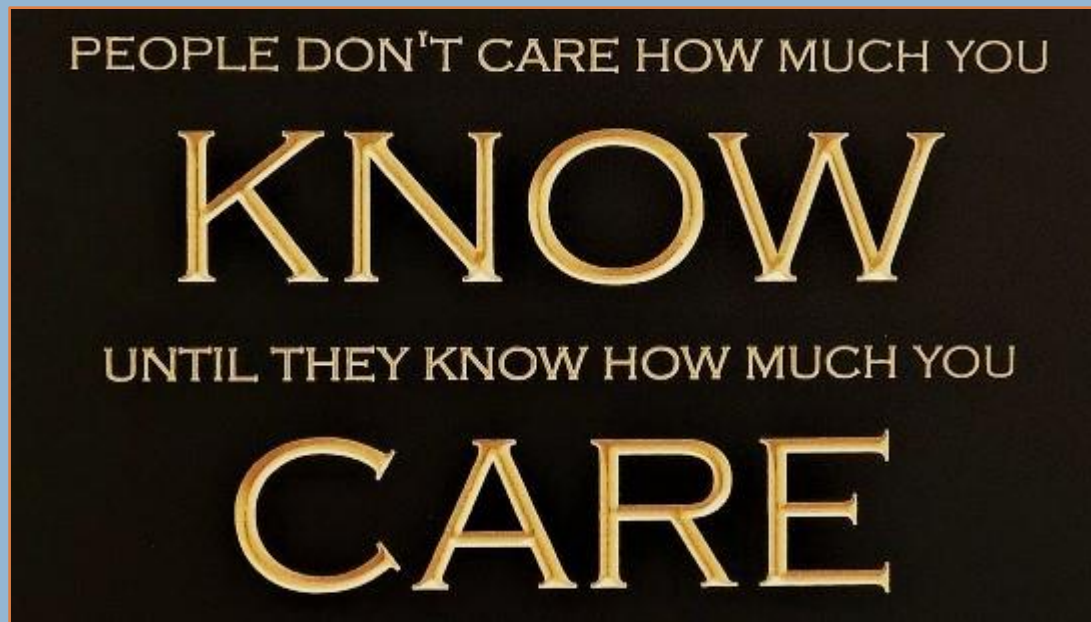
The program's goal is proficiency in Chinese, which is what is needed in a professional capacity. How that is achieved is understood by the school to be a product of hard studious work rather than a product of seat time in a classroom. Therefore, unrelated and unnecessary course work was eliminated from my curriculum, cutting study time and cost dramatically.

This is a lean and exceptionally realistic approach to education. For learners with family and professional lives looking for options in further education where time and money are in short supply, like myself, this is a great choice. Really, it was a joy for me to serendipitously find a school looking at education in such a fashion, and as I worked my way through the program, my respect for the school's approach to further education only deepened.

My enjoyment of the program was also based on the inspiration that continuously arose as I experienced the school's innovation, care and resourcefulness.

Innovation

Jumping on board and learning with an education institution that was thinking outside of the "higher-education" box was a continuous inspiration for me. Gradually, I came to learn the school had put natural and necessary education reform and innovation into action by trimming off the excess of bloated and expensive brick and mortar universities focused on seat time and class hours. This innovation was not only enjoyable for myself but also a continuous inspiration that gave me an extra boost many times throughout the learning process.



Care

Though there were always prompt and helpful replies to all of my emails to instructors and staff, unavoidably it was a lone ride through the virtual learning landscape. With only virtual presence and support of faculty; with the onus of learning placed solely on myself to plod on amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday family and professional life—it was daunting at times. I never did feel lost though, and knew clearly my purpose and path for each course, which gave me confidence and urged me forward. This was due to the promptness, clarity and thoughtfulness of instructor guidance and administrative staff communications. These expressed the high-degree of professional care infused within the school. This care was inspiring and it greatly took the edge off of solo virtual self-learning!

Resourcefulness

It seems natural, really a no-brainer, that the internet would become a treasure-trove of resources for the field of education. Blue Marble University dips liberally into that treasure to create its programs, and for the China Program it harnesses a variety of media resources to allow students to learn and practice all that they need to be proficient. Due to being proficient in Chinese already, the university tapped one more of its resources, their student. Based on my feedback they created a self-directed degree program that allowed me to develop as a philosopher, an educator, a speaker of Chinese and as a traditional Chinese culture enthusiast. Being able to meld my Chinese proficiency development with study of other China-centric subjects of interest naturally elevated the meaningfulness and thus my enjoyment of the program.

I have been able to experience Blue Marble's innovative resourcefulness in another capacity, as an instructor/mentor of one of their other China Program students. Since teaching is a powerful way to learn, being tapped again as a resource for teaching in turn encouraged and deepened my own learning—and for a student, where does joy come from? Learning—and there has been a lot of that happening over the last two years!

Valuable Take-A-Ways

FROM THE CLEARLY SEEN TO THE LESS TANGIBLE, A LARGE NUMBER OF VALUABLE THINGS WERE LEARNED AND ACQUIRED, REACHING FAR BEYOND EXPECTATIONS.

On the tangible level I have come away with two videos showcasing my high-level of Chinese speaking and reading proficiency, a burgeoning online portfolio containing numerous Chinese language and culture related academic papers, a field study on the domestic Chinese herbal extract industry and two works of translation poised for publishing. Though not required by the degree program I was greatly encouraged by the university to publish one of my papers, and did so on Amazon. Finally, I have expanded my network of connections with fantastic professionals from the university. On the less tangible level, I increased acquisition of Chinese language and culture while the development of my writing, editing and translation skills took huge strides alongside greatly increased skill in the use of Microsoft Word.

Alan Abrams China

Extracting and Executing the Wisdom of China

About Me ▾

My Works

Language Showcase

古典翻译

Edu+

Contact

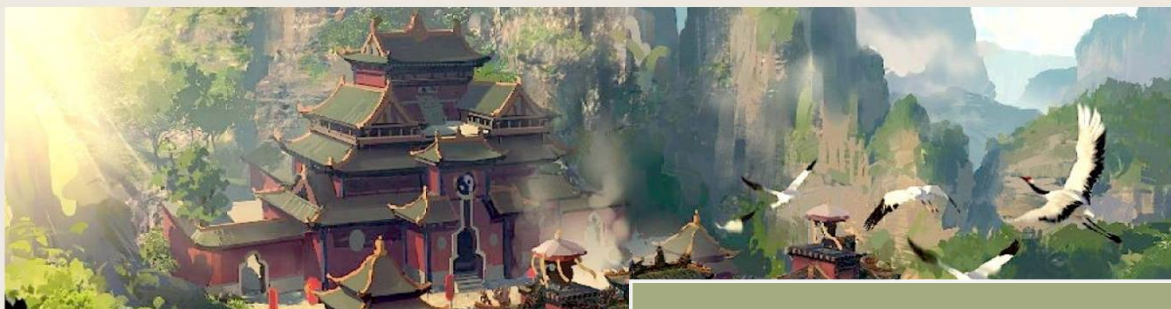


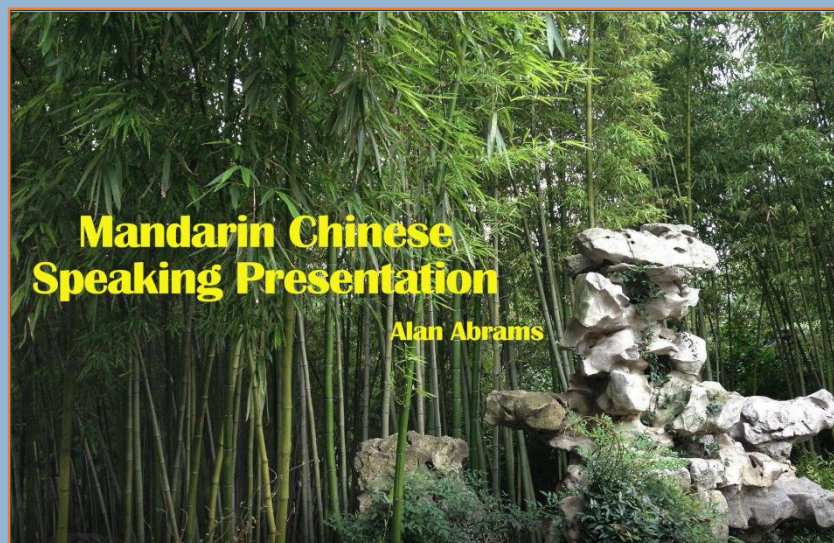
Image from my WordPress online portfolio.

**BLUE MARBLE UNIVERSITY
REQUIRES EACH STUDENT TO
CREATE AN ONLINE PORTFOLIO BY
LEARNING AND USING
WORDPRESS, BECOMING A MAJOR
TAKE-A-WAY FOR ALL OF ITS
STUDENTS.**

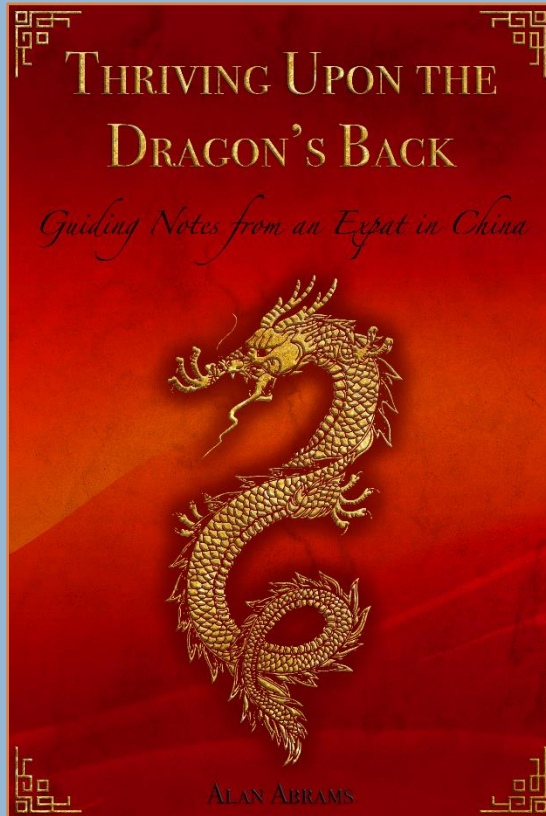
To be used much like a resume for job hunting after graduating, the online portfolio is a showcase of learning done and academic work produced as well as of the academic record and certificate of degree. Guided by an instructor, students learn to use WordPress, which eventually leads to enough proficiency with the website creation platform that each student can make their own website from scratch. A huge take-a-way to say the least.

Guided by the university, my self-directed degree program led to the creation of an eclectic body of academic work in writing and on video.

Core insights into the vastness of traditional Chinese culture were made in my works of writing on the three major schools of Chinese philosophical thought: Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Buddhism. TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) was explored through a field study on the state of China's domestic herbal extract industry in which a reliable herbal extract supplier was searched for and found. Tapping my nearly two decades of China experience, a guidebook to living in China was written. Two translations were produced from an obscure Chinese philosophical text on the fundamental reformation of Confucian thought and practice. Two videos displaying my Chinese speaking and reading skills were made and, along with all of the above work, put up on my online portfolio.



Wonderfully, I published my guidebook to living in China, expanded my network of professional companions and received a tidal boost in proficiency of Chinese language and culture. My skill with writing, editing, Chinese translation and Microsoft Word jumped up to the level of craftsmanship throughout the degree program as well.



Thriving Upon the Dragon's Back— Guiding Notes from an Expat in China

Upon university administration and instructor advice and encouragement my paper on living in China was turned into a guidebook and published on Amazon. Unlike most guidebooks, it introduces and advises use of Chinese philosophy to holistically live healthily, happily and harmoniously in China.

Professional Companions

The wonder and joy of life so often lie in the unexpected. The creation of meaningful relationships with members of Blue Marble University's administration and faculty were such unexpected wonders.

Proficiency in Chinese Language and Culture

Showcased in my videos, my Chinese speaking and reading level rose considerably. This was also true of my Chinese writing skills. Background and understanding of traditional and modern Chinese

culture exponentially expanded as well. Along with insight into the culture as my knowledge increased, the subject matter of academic work allotted the chance to make continuous progress in my personal development as a great deal of ancient Chinese wisdom was unveiled.

A Jump Up in Writing, Editing, Translation and Microsoft Word Skill Level

The amount of writing and editing done, along with feedback and encouragement from the university's administrative staff and instructors, including the director of the university, naturally bettered my writing and editing skills. The fruits of these efforts came through in my published book, my translation work and increased writing craftsmanship using Microsoft Word.

Insights for Chinese Learners

LEARNING IS A HOLISTIC AFFAIR IN WHICH ALL PARTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR LIVES AFFECTS THE PROCESS. MY INSIGHTS RANGE FROM LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LIFESTYLE HABITS TO PSYCHOSOMATIC HEALTH AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.



For learning Chinese, I discovered that purpose, simplicity and creativity were three traits crucial for efficient and sustainable learning needed for the lengthy process of learning a language. This process was greatly aided by the time of day study and practice was done which supported physical and emotional health. The parts of life that disturb us emotionally vary yet my insight is that virtuous living and maintaining harmonious relationships mitigated overly-disturbing emotions allowing me to attain more of two vital ingredients for learning: calmness and focus.

PURPOSE, SIMPLICITY, EFFICIENCY AND CREATIVITY

These four direct, focus, refresh and provide a foundation for long-term language learning.

Purpose



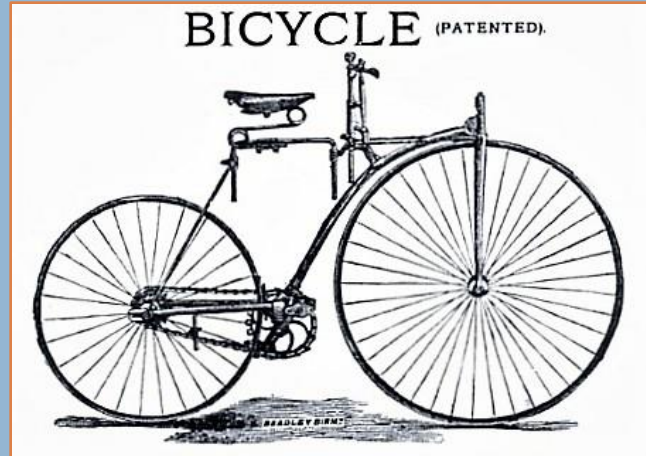
Direction and focus in learning come from having a clear and meaningful purpose for learning.

I know this not only as a student but as an educator who has seen countless students with either no, or no clarity, of purpose. Some may have had purpose but it was not whole-hearted, often borrowed from family. Others were torn, studying subjects that were not in line with what they wanted to do. These examples all negatively affect the quality of learning and the focus needed for it. For myself, continuing to learn the Chinese language and culture is aligned with my personal overarching purpose to educate about traditional Chinese culture and its timeless and relevant wisdom for humanity today.

Simplicity and Efficiency

The lengthy process of language learning cannot be avoided, therefore it's wise to use simple and efficient methodologies.

During my China Program study, I explored the methodology of recitation and discovered its simple efficiency for language acquisition. Having heard of it initially as an ancient Chinese education methodology, then as a common method used by Confucian, Daoist and Chinese Buddhist practitioners, I felt compelled to do a short five-week language study of recitation for my Independent Studies course. In my paper on the process and findings of the study I show how the simplicity of recitation for language acquisition allows it to be an effective and sustainable primary language practice. The study also showed how recitation is a very efficient learning methodology as its use exercises numerous language skills all at once.



Creativity

The long-haul of learning language requires perseverance. Being creative with the learning process brings vital refreshment that supports perseverance.



I found it important to take care not to put myself in a box with regards to time, location and methodology of learning. As long as I wasn't harming my own health, finances and relationships, I tried to be liberal with where, when and how I learned content and completed tasks. I did no small amount of research and writing on the subway on the way to a coffee shop; took a trip across the

Taiwan strait to Taiwan to learn about Chinese philosophy; learned new Chinese characters and memorized passages by writing calligraphic Chinese characters with a brush-tip green marker; sat, stood and kneeled at the computer; climbed the apartment building's flight of stairs or did flexibility exercises to freshen up learning sessions. The ways to approach learning are as countless as creativity is endless. I've learned that if I feel tired, bored or stuck, get creative with learning.

Near and long-term focus is more valuable than gold for a language learner. Study timing, health, virtue and relationships are all cogs in the wheel of generating and sustaining focus.

Study Timing

Mornings are precious and powerful times for study that are not only quiet, but good for learners' holistic health.

Study time is a matter of personal preference and/or necessity, yet rarely is the issue considered through the lens of holistic long-term health. So often health is compromised for the sake of near-term efficiency, creativity and productivity. One glaring problem from this approach is that common outcomes of the income earned from these efforts are large payouts for healthcare services, and days, weeks, months or years of discomforting illness. Many people like the late-night hours for the quiet it offers their study. Yet that same quiet can be accessed by waking early in the morning. This not only benefits body, mind and lifestyle, as natural bio-rhythms are aligned with, but the morning is a great time for impressing content on the memory.

Health and Virtue

Technically, health is not a virtue, but ancient Chinese wisdom and my own empirical evidence points to virtue being a basic cause of health.

Filial piety, is the Chinese principle and action of respect for one's parents. In this vein, it is an act of filial piety to protect and take care of the body given by parents. When that is done, energy and focus are strong and sustainable, allowing the student, through diligent learning, to express gratitude for the opportunity of life given by their parents. This also increases quality of sleep!

Harmonious Relationships

Creating and maintaining harmonious human relations decreases distractions.

For my experience, the crux for the health and harmony of all situations lies in the health and harmony of each individuals' thoughts, words and actions. Ancient Chinese wisdom prevails again here, via Confucianism. It holds that when each individual can accomplish this along with the fulfillment of their roles as child, significant other, parent, friend, leader, employee etc. the ground is set for harmonious relations with others. Inflaming others' emotions, by keeping the onus for healthy change on oneself rather than uselessly forcing change upon others, can be reduced. In turn, there is a reduction in complicated interpersonal dramas, which keep emotions calmer and allows the mind to be more focused on the task at hand. This is an obvious boon for learning. Though easier said than done, it is simple and well worth the effort.

Benefits for the Field of Second-Language Education

THESE TWO YEARS OF STUDY HAVE LED TO A VALUABLE METHODOLOGY DISCOVERY, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT.

Recitation for language acquisition was a personal new discovery of an old methodology. Seemingly antiquated, its relevance and effectiveness today lie in its efficient simplicity for both educator and student alike. Naturally, it is well suited for myself as instructor and learner alike, especially so during big-data's age of distraction.





Recitation for Language Instructors

Focus, Retention and Efficiency

Focus is priceless, and getting students to do so in class, and throughout their courses and degrees, is difficult at best. I have seen many times recitation increases individual and collective focus. When used as a methodology in class it can bring student attention back into the moment in the classroom, raise the collective focus and energy in the room

and, if desired by the instructor, can open a precious space of a minute or two where student minds' are more open whereby important content can be transmitted and impressed.

Recitation engages audio, visual and kinesthetic learners simultaneously. With the subsequent increased focus of ear, eye, mouth and body, retention increases as well. Retention is amplified when memorization of the recited content is added. When foundational and core content is written into the text and memorized, retention of vital course content can be supported as it is explored throughout the course.

Specifically, for language instruction, I have discovered that recitation is an extremely efficient method of language skill practice. Due to its simultaneous engagement of multiple skills, the spectrum of said skills are exercised simply and effectively. With the addition of imitation of authentic native speaking, recitation molds non-native learners into authentic sounding speakers.

Recitation for Language Learners

Simplicity, Sustainability and Efficiency

Language learning is a long-term affair and requires multiple methods working together sustainably for a long period of time. When recitation acts as a primary practice method it exercises most language skills while sustaining practice in the long-term. This sustainability is due to its simplicity which, like the steady constancy of rhythm in music, is sustained while the melody flashes, comes and goes. With recitation underlying the other myriad methods of practice that come and go, it maintains consistent practice with ease all the while simultaneously exercising pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, speaking and fluency. Simple and sustainable, efficient and powerful, yet low-key...it is easily overlooked.

My professional development as an educationist and language instructor has come atop personal cultivation. This has coincided with the study, and application, of Chinese philosophy and the insights derived into the connection of virtue to impressionable educating. Personal cultivation has helped me become better at undertaking my roles as son, husband, and father. With this personal foundation better laid, I have become a better educator in theory and in practice in the classroom. Outside of the classroom, I have also increasingly entered into the role of mentoring.

Educator as Virtuoso

Something that I have discovered to be empirically true, is that education is as much about the personal practice, development and maintenance of moral excellence as it is about the science and art of education. In this light, and that of the Latin origins of the word *virtuous*, practicing virtue puts an educator on the path of the *virtuoso*.

virtuous (adj.)

c. 1300, "characterized by vigor or strength; having qualities befitting a knight; valiant, hardy, courageous;" from Old French *vertuos* "righteous; potent; of good quality; mighty, valiant, brave" (12c.), from Late Latin *virtuosus* "good, virtuous," from Latin *virtus* "moral strength, high character, goodness; manliness; valor, bravery, courage (in war); excellence, worth," from *vir* "man" (from PIE root ***wi-ro-** "man").

It was during my study of Confucianism over these two years that led me to discover the etymological roots of the word virtuoso. The sage Confucius, and other teachers of this solely-Chinese philosophy, taught of the ideal virtuous human. Looking to translate the Chinese for this ideal, I came across a jewel—the etymology of virtuoso points back to virtue.

I felt this fundamental nuance resound deeply with the field of education, and the profession of educator. Confucian adepts' skill in their large and intricate science of propriety, and its familial, social and professional roles, took said skill into a masterful art form. Yet, since their science and art were set upon a foundation of, and laced with, virtue, they were taken into the realm of the virtuoso, in the original and complete sense of the word.



The virtuoso in this sense creates a form of charisma, which I now see as important for an educator. It is a natural magnetism, which is an invaluable aid to whatever content is being transmitted. The dynamic behind this phenomenon is often attributed to the mastery of content and its transmission. In the *Analects* though, Confucius describes this charisma in terms of virtue. Despite the analogy used for the description being specifically for a statesman, my

insight is that it is true for every person, and definitely for the educator. Confucius said:

“If you govern with the power of your virtue, you will be like the North Star. It just stays in its place while all the other stars position themselves around it.”

This charisma is not striven for per se, but by virtue of cultivating a virtuous character, a person, and specifically an educator, naturally attracts learners as educators “walk the walk” of virtuous human being.

Meaningful. Valuable. Rewarding.

BLUE MARBLE UNIVERSITY'S THE CHINA PROGRAM BROUGHT EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED MEANING, VALUE AND REWARD INTO MY CAREER AND LIFE.

From increased Chinese language and cultural proficiency to educational career development; from the creation of an online portfolio and a body of academic work to proficiency in the WordPress and Microsoft Word platforms; from publishing a book to expanding my network of professionals; from growing as a teacher to personal growth as a human—the China Program brought meaning, value and reward into my career and life up to and beyond expectation.



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Page 4. Online Portfolio. Cropped image from writer's own website.

Page 5. Image/still from writer's own Chinese speaking video.

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