



EDUCATION ABROAD CENTER
SUMMER ABROAD
TEL: (530) 757-8308
FAX: (530) 297-7142
EMAIL: summer-abroad@ucdavis.edu

ONE SHIELDS AVENUE
DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616

Dear Parents,

Thank you for considering sending your child to study in China with me this coming summer. I have traveled to China many times for research purposes, and this has allowed me to travel extensively and get to know the country. I love being in China. The people are always so nice and generous to me, and my experiences are always so transformative that I am happy to share the opportunity with college students.

This will be the second time for me to lead a class in China. Last time, all but 3 students were from UCD. I welcome students from other campuses. As it turned out, about half of our students could speak Chinese (at varying levels of fluency). For room assignments, I paired the Chinese language speakers with those who did not know the language, so that everyone could know someone who could be helpful. I intend do the same this time.

I was really impressed with our students last time. They were extremely resourceful and happy to explore whatever city we visited on fieldtrips. They even discovered restaurants and activities and told me about them! They looked after each other in the nicest possible way, and I never saw any evidence of exclusionary cliques. They were so nice that my husband and I hosted a reunion party for them after we had returned in the fall so we could see them again! Many of the students keep in touch with me, and it is a delight to learn what they are up to. One has even started a business in China that came about because of the trip!

Will the students be as nice this time? Of course I cannot say now, but I can say that it has been my privilege to work with UC Davis students over the last 11 years. Moreover, I am very proud to be able to say that generally, my students thoroughly engage with the material and work hard. The opportunity to learn the material on site makes the learning ever so much more meaningful. It will be a thrill to share the experience with them.

The topic of the course has been my research and passion for about 20 years. The art (painting, calligraphy, ceramics, etc.) produced is extraordinarily interesting and different in extremely intriguing ways from anything that came before or since. It is equal parts wacky, quirky, playful, elegant, bold, and challenging. Equally important, however, is that the art and criticism of this period puts pressure on notions that Chinese culture is monolithic and unchanging, and that China produces only copycats, those who can follow instructions but cannot develop independent and important ideas. (A chapter of my forthcoming book investigates how these Orientalist notions came about! I have done some thinking about it.) Because the 17th century attitudes and expectations of life in many ways presage the 20th and 21st centuries, because one can argue that the 17th century was the first “modern” period (though I have a friend in Song history who wants to convince me that China’s first modern period was in the 12th century!), and because of the remarkable and dynamic art and intellectual discourse of the period, studying the material in my course will not only change expectations about Chinese art, but also about the very definition of Chinese culture and society.

What about the student without any art history or China background? Last time, only 3 of 26 students had any Art History background; about the same number had East Asian Studies backgrounds; most were science majors. This was not surprising: in my undergraduate courses, the bulk of my students come from majors outside of art history. The reading assignments will make it possible for the students to understand the material, and we will meet regularly to discuss the readings and the site visits. I have worked hard to develop a syllabus and assignments so that all students can succeed in my course.

You may have concerns about safety, health, and costs. We're doing our best to keep costs down. We'll put particulars about that on the budget page. Health – None of my students got sick last time. Regular hygienic practices such as hand washing are helpful, as is eating in clean shops. Safety – China is extremely safe. Of course, being “street smart” is always imperative, but I feel completely safe when I am there. In addition, the Summer Abroad office prepares me well with emergency contact information should problems arise.

Should you or your student have any questions, please contact the Study Abroad office or me.

All the very best,

Katharine Burnett

Associate Professor of Chinese Art History