



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Teaching sabbatical at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary Care

Faculty of Medicine

FALL SEMSETER 2018



Monir Mazaheri

BScN, MScN, PhD, Senior Lecturer

The Swedish Red Cross University College



INTRODUCTION

An early Christmas present was sent to me on a late afternoon, December 22, 2017. As many things which has transformed in a digital world which we live in, it came by an email instead of reindeers!

'Stiftelsen för internationalisering av högre utbildning och forskning, STINT, har glädjen att erbjuda dig ett stipendium inom ramen för Teaching Sabbatical programmet. Du erbjuds en plats vid The Chinese University of Hong Kong under höstterminen 2018 och vi ber dig vänligen bekräfta snarast, dock senast den 14 januari, om du fortfarande vill medverka i detta utbyte.'

The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education - STINT- had sent me above message together with some information regarding my academic and administrative hosts at The Chinese University. When I saw the announcement for teaching sabbatical grant in Aug, which I applied for it in September, I have been told that I shouldn't hope much since it's highly competitive and the chances might be slim when many universities and university colleges compete for it. 'I ate my spinach and hoped for the best'! The selection process went quite fast. I was contacted in the beginning of November to get to know that I am among those who were selected by the partner universities and was invited to an interview with the STINT programme manager together with my boss. The final results were announced in December. It was a great joy to hear that I had been granted a STINT teaching sabbatical grant and were places at The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary care, Faculty of Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. My few days holiday around New Year 2018 was partly spent reading about Hong Kong, where I spent five months later in autumn.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

The very first preparation step was to join the STINT seminar in February 2018, where the previous year STINT teaching fellows presented their experiences together with an overview of their teaching sabbatical. It was a great opportunity to hear their first-hand narratives of their stay in Hong Kong (HK). Before the seminar, I had managed to read a lot about HK and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) but it was very informative and insightful to talk with the two colleagues who were there, the previous year. However, none of them had young children with themselves during their stay in HK, so they were not able to provide any advice regarding the kindergarten and day care system in HK, which I hoped to learn more before we travelled to HK. It was also great to meet other fellows who were planned to go to HK, even though in other departments but we managed to exchange contact details and meet before and during our stays in HK.

The second preparation step was to contact my host university (CUHK). I had received contact details of a professor as the contact person at The Jockey Club School of Public Health & Primary care (SPHPC), an administrative staff at the department level and an officer of Office of Academic Links (OAL). They helped me to plan my initial trip and arrange meetings to discuss my teaching and research engagement at CUHK in the fall semester. They provided all practical hints I needed to plan my one-week preparation trip, which happened later in spring.

My initial visit to my host university, spring 2018

I travelled together with my family between 20 to 27th March to get to know the city and possibly find accommodation and kindergarten as well as planning my schedule for the next semester. Considering having family along during the teaching sabbatical period, it was good to travel together to be able to plan for a family life adjusted to having being on site. It was also very good opportunity to meet my future colleagues and discuss the detailed plan for the autumn educational semester. We stayed at Regal Riverside Hotel, which was within walking distance to the Prince of Wales Hospital, where SPHPC located. That was a very good choice to save time considering having an infant at home.

During my short stay in CUHK, I managed to participate as observer in some courses at undergraduate as well as master programme. I also had a meeting with head of The Jockey Club School of Public Health & Primary care (SPHPC), some meetings with the researchers and professors at SPHPC and have two research meetings. I presented my research and myself in a lunch seminar (see the poster 1). The seminar entitled 'Bridging cultural borders: Conducting research and teaching in diverse contexts' and a mixture of the students and staff together with the head of school joined the seminar. Later in autumn, I understood better the importance of having an early presentation for the department since it facilitated and accelerated the later collaborations and communications. It let all the participants to know the guest scholar better and reflect about the potential ways to collaborate.



Poster 1- Lunchtime seminar

Swedish passport holder are visa-free to enter HK for 90 days, so we did not need a visa for our short visit in spring. I applied for a working visa for myself and a dependent visa for my family, while we were in HK by help of SPHPC administration and CUHK personnel office. It might be good to know that the dependent visas must be applied together with the main applicant's working visa in one go, as I understood.

CUHK staff in general were very helpful and ready to arrange some site visits on the accommodation options. However, it was quite easy to contact some service apartments and visit them by ourselves. Service apartments seems to be not only the most convenience options but also more likely available for staying shorter than six months. It is very difficult to find accommodation for less than a year in Hong Kong, if one does not aim for the service apartments. However, the prices were very high. We visited some service apartments in Sha Tin, Mongkok and Kowloon. It was hard to find any place that accommodate our few criteria

together, regardless of the total costs. I liked the Harbourview Horizon and Harbourfront Horizon Suites but the problem was that it was possible to book it one month ahead of the staying and it was not possible to rent it for less than six months. We visited one more service apartment in Kowloon during our one-week stay but we did not manage to get any contact. The coming months were well spent in searching for accommodation, contacting many, getting few responses. In the end, we decided to aim for the Harbourview Horizon suits and kept the regular contacts with one of their sale executive that we met in our spring visit. He offered us some suits, which we chose one. We signed the contact in July for six months, between Aug to February even though we aimed to stay five months. We enjoyed our stay at Horizon Harbour View in Kowloon, which offered a child-friendly environment, a calm neighbourhood and good access to the public transport system.



My daughter appreciated having a pool in courtyard of the building.

An introduction to Hong Kong

Hong Kong SAR, short for Special Administrative Region, is since 1997 part of the People's Republic of China after the transfer from British rule. Hong Kong has its own laws, currency and has self-governance to an extent but is not a country (like Singapore) nor a de facto country (like Taiwan), but Hong Kong is a full member of the World Trade Organization. The set up is referred to as “one country, two systems” and is to be in place for 50 years from 1997. Back then Hong Kong had a population of 6.5 million. Today it is 7.5 million residents. The population has grown rapidly from 7.5 thousand in 1840's and 750 thousand in the 1920's. To house this rapidly growing population in a hilly small plot of land Hong Kong has reclaimed land from the sea, built densely and in many places built high-rise buildings.

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and at the same time, much of this hilly peninsula and islands is nature reserves and parks. The city centre is on the Hong Kong Island northern shore towards Victoria harbour and the Kowloon peninsula southern shore towards the same harbour (my family and I lived in Kowloon with a view of the harbour).

The British colonial history of Hong Kong starts at the First Opium War with Imperial China (1839-1842). Back then, the colony was made up of Hong Kong Island. In the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the Kowloon peninsula was added to the colony. Then in 1898, the largest piece of land, the New Territories, was added to the colony on a 99-year lease from Imperial China. Hence 1997 as the year when Hong Kong was handed back to mainland China, because a large part of the colony would then no longer have been British.

The main ethnic group is Chinese speaking Cantonese who have immigrated during the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century. They often refer to themselves as Hongkongers, as do other ethnic groups who live in Hong Kong, and when talking about residents many make a distinct difference between themselves and the Chinese Mainlanders who are the newer residents or visitors from the People's Republic of China. The Mainlanders may also be speaking Cantonese or the Beijing standard dialect Putonghua or other Chinese dialects or languages, but are seen as culturally different by persons who

grew up in a British Hong Kong. The official languages of Hong Kong are Cantonese and English, but Putonghua (Standard Chinese/Mandarin) is taught in schools and is the language of the People's Republic of China.

The birth rate is low so the population is ageing and immigration is what increases the population size of Hong Kong. Another large group in the city are the foreign domestic helpers. Low payed, mostly women, living with families caring for the children, cooking etc. The income inequality of Hong Kong is considered to be high with a Gini coefficient slightly above 0.5. Economy in Hong Kong is based on trade, the financial sector and services. The port of Hong Kong is one of the largest in the world and the Hong Kong Stock Exchange and bank offices are one of the financial hubs of the world due to its low taxes, regulations, low corruption and closeness to Mainland China. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Hong Kong is between that of Denmark and Norway. The GDP per capita of Hong Kong is higher than that of the USA or of Sweden.

Hong Kong has several universities, the Chinese University of Hong Kong being the second oldest. Education is taken very seriously from an early age, all the way to university. Even small children are expected to participate in extracurricular activities. My daughter who turned two years old, while we were in Hong Kong got a certificate from her music class. Parents in Hong Kong collect such certificates for their children's CV to be accepted in to the best kindergartens and schools. A parent told me that those certificates show that they have been responsible parents and have taken the expected steps to develop their child's skills. My first visit to one of the nearest mall to our home was a bit frightening for me. There were many teaching centres aiming to teach languages, mathematics, music, etc. to the very young children with a wide range of extracurricular activities. It gave the impression of a very competitive tough educational system. The impression was later confirmed by my observations, readings and hearing stories of my colleagues and other parents. The pressure on better scores does not come only from the parents but also from the school. Schools would like to promote their status by their students' performances, so they put pressures on the students and their parents. The highly competitive education does not end up by

successful entrance to the university. The university students study hard to get the highest grades to help them in getting good jobs especially governmental jobs.

One of the interesting aspects of living in HK was practices regarding 'cleanness and hygiene'. Sanitizers' pumps are places in many public areas. The elevators' buttons are sanitized every 1-2 hours. In the beginning, it was surprising to see that they stop providing the service in playgrounds and amusement centres twice per day to clean and sanitize and reopen again.



It is quite easy to accommodate some behaviours that you have to practice for a while. I still avoid drinking and eating in public transport system. In HK, it is strictly forbidden to drink or eat inside the paid zones of the public transports like train platforms, inside taxis.

Among many other things that are strictly forbidden, I can mention talking to the drivers regardless of the bus or taxi! A very challenging experience in HK is to communicate with the taxi drivers. Many of them



cannot talk or understand English. Surprisingly, some of them even do not know the name of main streets in English. Therefore, it is always a good idea to have the Chinese name of the destinations and the addresses with yourself, if you travel with the taxis. Sometimes, the taxi driver do not want to take you to destinations that are very short in sunny days or to the far destinations in rainy days. Many believe that some taxi drive pretend they do not understand even a word of what the passenger says in order to not go to a destination. Even

though, the taxi drivers are not allowed to reject any customers just because of their choice of destination, but it happens very often. It might be usual as well that they drop/insist to drop the passenger before your final destination (close enough to walk the last part). One reason might be that they see the taxi station and prefer to get rid of their passenger earlier to get a new customer or not to end up in streets that makes them driver longer to go back to where they would like to go. If the taxi driver says 'it's just around here'

Most people in Hong Kong (except taxi drivers!) communicate well in English, which makes it easy to navigate in city. People in general are helpful and kind. Even though the city seems to be in a constant rush but people take their time to help out others if needed.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)



香港中文大學
The Chinese University of Hong Kong



CUHK, which was established in 1963, is a comprehensive research university with a motto as 'Through learning and temperance to virtue'. The university aim to combine the tradition and modernity and to bring the west China together. The education is Bilingual (Chinese and English languages). The university has more than 3200 teaching and research Staff, 17000 undergraduate students, 12600 postgraduate students and 7400 international students from 60 countries and regions.

CUHK has eight faculties including faculties of Arts, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Law, *Medicine*, Science and Social Science.

Faculty of Medicine has 19 departments which The Jockey Club School of Public Health and Primary Care (JCSPHPC) is among them. I have spent my teaching sabbatical at JCSPHPC. The main building of the department is located in Prince of Wales Hospital in Sha tin. However, many courses are presented in university campus.

JCSPHPC has seven divisions and eleven centers including Division of Family Medicine and Primary Care; Division of Behavioral Health and Health Promotion Biostatistics; Division of Epidemiology; Division of Global Health and Humanitarian Medicine, Division of Health

System, Policy and Management; Division of Infectious Diseases; Division of Occupational and Environmental Health, Centre for Clinical Research and Biostatistics (CCRB), Centre for Global Health (CGH), Centre for Health Behaviours Research (CHBR), Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion (CHEHP), Centre for Research and Promotion of Women's Health (CRPWH), Centre for Nutritional Studies (CNS), Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health Studies (COEHS), Collaborating Centre for Oxford University & CUHK for Disaster and Medical Humanitarian Response (CCOUC), Hong Kong Branch of The Chinese Cochrane Centre (CCC), SH Ho Centre for Gerontology and Geriatrics (SHHCGG), and Stanley Ho Centre for Emerging Infectious Disease (CEID). Those educational activities that I was involved with belonged to different divisions.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE SEMESTER

During the autumn semester, I enjoyed being involved in education, participating in research seminars and workshops, holding some research meetings, socializing with colleagues and PhD students, and classroom observations.

My office was at fifth floor, SPHPC that was located in Prince of Wales Hospital. Some of the courses were presented in the university campus and some at the department building in Prince of Wales Hospital. I



was involved in six courses. Four of these courses were within postgraduate programmes including Global Health (Co-teaching), Introduction to Qualitative Research: Theories Research Design (lecture and Q & A), Introduction to Health & Social Behaviour (as an assessor) and Foundations of public health (as an assessor).

The two undergraduate courses were Global Health and Qualitative Research. The lectures were between 1 to 2.5 hours. The online platform of the courses was blackboard.



The examinations included weekly quizzes or midterm exam, written proposals, oral presentations, class

participation/attendance, in-class exercises. I participated in examination of three courses, which included oral group presentations and poster presentations.



Grading was varied from A to F including A, A-, B, C, D, F. Descriptor of Grades were as follow: A: 'outstanding performance on all learning outcome, A-: Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes, B: Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, or high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance. C: Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses, D: Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. F: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Grading scale varied slightly in different courses for example from grade A to U (A: excellent, A+: very good, B+,B,B-: good, C+,C,C-: Fair, D+,D: Pass, F: failure, P: ungraded pass and U: failure). In some courses, peer evaluation was used to weight the group presentation. In most courses, the students were expected to attend at least 80% of the lectures to be eligible for the final examination. Some courses had traditional lecturing, while were mainly interactive through discussion groups which was based on cases or the literature.

Collaboration between CUHK/JCSPHPC and RKH

Quite early, we realized that we would like to start a collaboration between the two universities to exchange students, teachers, PhD candidates and provide opportunity for the researchers from both sides to collaborate. We worked on initial drafts of a MOU

(memorandum of understanding) during my stay and we continue to work on it to finalize it during the spring semester. We would like to promote and encourage participation in joint research collaboration between researchers at the institutions, facilitate opportunities for reciprocal faculty exchange between the two institutions that promotes advancement of academic matters and facilitate opportunities for teachers/researchers and Ph.D. students to serve in positions as visiting scholars within respective partner as host institution. In connection to establishing a collaboration, I presented my home university and myself during a seminar in December (poster 2).



Poster 2- presenting my home university at CUHK

COMPARE AND REFLECT ON THE TEACHING EXPERIENCE, IMPORTANT LESSONS

Effective administrative

The speed, quality and manner of administrative jobs at all levels of the university, to my experience was outstanding. From administrating visa applications, to arranging seminars and daily communication, the administrators and support team were well informed, well prepared, impressively quick and helpful.

Tough study climate

Studying at university is very competitive and demands hard working. The students believe excellent grades helps them in job market particularly if they aim for governmental job positions. Therefore, many of students study very hard and limit their social life to library

and dormitories. It is very common for PhD students to eat, drink and even take a short nap by their computer desk.

One of the courses that I taught at JCSPHPC had the lecture time on Friday evenings between 1830 to 2100. If we consider the students' usual behaviour in waiting for some of their questions after the class ended, the session may practically end by 2130. Regardless of the timing, almost all students were present at the sessions which was very interesting for me.

If a student is unable to attend any of the courses' examinations, s/he must submit documentary evidence at the earliest possible instance to register for permission for absence. In case of sickness, a certificate that is signed by the director of the university health service should follow the application.

There is clear efforts to make the students aware of plagiarism and dishonesty in doing their assignments. At time of submission of the assignments regardless of digital or paper works, the students are asked to submit a signed declaration that they are informed of the university's policies regarding honesty in academic work.

The students are encouraged to develop not only critical thinking but creative thinking. Self-managed learning is very well promoted and practices.

Teaching assistant (TA)

Teaching assistants fulfil a vital role in management of courses at CUHK. In all sessions of the courses that I have been involved, the TAs were presented as they usually do. They were responsible to update students and the online platform of Blackboard with the course information and handle all practicalities. Most of the TAs are PhD students that join the courses that their dissertation's supervisors have as assistants. They are the main contact person of the course for the students and take care of attendance, planning and sometimes correcting the written exams. In Sweden, our PhD students also participate in education but mainly through sharing their findings through seminars and lectures or supervising undergraduate students in writing their thesis as well as other educational activities. At my home university, all practical matters around the course like setting up the online platform and updating that during the semester, matters regarding the classrooms, etc. are managed

mainly by the course leaders. TAs like lectures, researches and students are encourage to compete for the title of best TA.

Other aspects

The teaching methods and approaches were similar to our practice in my home university. However, digital examinations were quite common at JCSPHPC. Something that we need to get better in Sweden. Teachers are helped by the centre for learning enhancement and research. The novice teachers are required to pass professional development courses. A difference between JCSPHPC and RKH or other Swedish universities is that we meet each other quite often at coffee pauses or lunch time at the staff halls, which provides a wonderful platform for informal learning, communication, and support. JCSPHPC does not have a common space for regular informal meeting for example lunch or rest pauses. Therefore, it is less likely to meet if the meeting is not planned. However, staff in general communicate with each other through less formal channels like whatsapp messengers, etc. which sometimes is very useful in accelerating work process. I had the opportunity to meet some of my colleagues in a welcome dinner, which was hosted by the school director, Professor Eng-kiong YEOH and also in my presentation seminar. Otherwise, it was not easy to meet them unplanned in school's building or university.

Insurance

During the nomination process, we were informed that our insurances while abroad will be covered by Kammarkollegiet. However, I faced some difficulties since my home university was not a governmental university to be able to use Kammarkollegiet services.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Being a STINT teaching fellow at CUHK was a rewarding experience, both as a teacher and as a person. Experiencing a different academic atmosphere in itself is inspiring and educational. Observing the dynamic of education, teachers/school-students communications ways, getting involved in learning new educational methods as a teacher and challenge of daring to place yourself and your family in a new environment as a person, contributed to my personal development. Some of learnings and experiences could not be transferred and

applied to our educational system in Sweden due to cultural differences in education and other context-based factors. We also need to make our education more attractive to a diverse and wider range of international students and expand its reach beyond its present borders. Soon, we will finalize a MOU to stat a joyful and fruitful collaboration between CUHK and RKH thanks to STINT grant for my teaching sabbatical in Hong Kong.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Professor Eng-kiong Yeoh for a wonderful welcome and great hospitality. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Eliza Wong for all great planning of my short and long stays at CUHK and for always being helpful. My appreciations and gratefulness to my colleagues, Prof. Janice, Lau, Prof. Dong Dong, Prof. Roger Chung, Prof. Samuel YS Wong and wonderful Ying Crystal CHAN as well as the amazing administrative staff Yannie Ho, Annie Szeto, Sarah OY Chan, Kelly Chan, Sasha WS Ng at JCSPHPC and Programme Officer Olivia Kwok at Office of Academic Links. I would also like to express my appreciation and gratitude to STINT for providing this great opportunity as teaching sabbatical.



Windows View, New Year 2019, Kowloon, Hong Kong