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24th August, 2018

Reflection: Asia TEFL Annual Conference at UM, Macau, 2018

As my first Asia TEFL conference ended in Macau, I expanded my social network and learned a lot from other Asian researchers. Meanwhile, it was a pleasure to reunite with my previous teachers who left Edinburgh at the same time with me and became the TESOL program director at Hong Kong University.

This conference meant a lot to me not just because it was a great chance to present my study, but also because it provided a great platform for me to exchange research interest and experience with other scholars who are researching in similar contexts. I went to attend many plenary talks and parallel sections and found it was very interesting that this conference included such a great variety of research fields. Researchers from HKU especially presented a high quality of research and established a good standard for me to look to. It was amazing that they blended the insights of participants and developed their contribution to theory with explicit suggestions for language teaching. This is something that ELF studies have not been able to do. My impression of my own field is that, on the one hand we do suggest valid results for language teaching, especially for what the learning needs are and what might be a better direction for education reform. However, it was never such a clear path for teachers who are actually working at the front line to take. This inspires me to revisit the future of ELF studies and think deeply for the implications that I will draw in the future.

Again, as someone who works in mainland China and must settle in Macau in the future, I believe that this conference provided me with some inside views that I could not gain when I was teaching solely in the classroom here at STU. It was the interaction with other Asian researchers that I found international collaboration is such a big deal. Researchers tend to restrict themselves to their comfort zones, whereas as nonnative speakers, we were not given the gifts to stand out in hiring process and classroom teaching. It was always the native speakers who have the privilege which happens to be true in Macau as well. Rather than being demotivated, I become certain about my PhD study and hopefully I will become more qualified in the future to teach in Asia. More importantly, international research collaboration will enable me to step into a bigger environment to develop my research skills and understand the research gaps and teaching barriers that people around this area all face. Hence, I will look forward to future research collaboration with researchers who I met at this conference and see if there is something I can contribute to, not just Shantou or Macau, but the language teaching in a bigger area. Only in this way, research can be more valuable to as many people as possible.

In addition, it was surprising to meet my previous teacher who is the director of TESOL program at HKU and her current master student. The conversation between us made me become more certain about my career plan and further study. Thus, this trip was both academic and surprisingly personal, which gave me more perspectives to reflect on my own development.