



A Farewell Message to My Colleagues

Robert Sanders

Growing up I never imagined that someday in the very distant future I would be sitting in a chair in Komatsu, Japan composing a message of farewell to my many wonderful colleagues in the Faculty of Intercultural Communication at Komatsu University. Back then in North America, an “international” experience meant eating at a horrifically localized Chinese restaurant or visiting the neighbouring state or province, while “international” news stories reported events that occurred on the other side of the continent. Who would have thought that this many years later I would be living in Japan and being paid to use English to teach the Chinese language to Japanese students? And who would have thought that I would be embraced by my colleagues despite my attainment of just a caveman level of Japanese at best, and therefore completely incapable of carrying out my own fair share of our collective administrative responsibilities? The world can radically change in just a few decades and despite what we know at any point in time we can never confidently know what the future holds. Very fortunately for me, the sweeping changes that took place in my world were all for the better.

As I look back on my four years at Komatsu University I take the greatest satisfaction in the very evident success of Iwata sensei’s bold vision for how Chinese might be taught here. Success can be measured in many ways, some quantitative, others qualitative. The quantitative success of the Komatsu University Chinese program includes the very large number of students who have gone on to achieve HSK Chinese language proficiency levels 4 and 5. It also includes the large number of students who choose every year to continue their classroom study of Chinese beyond the obligatory first year. The qualitative markers of the program’s success include the dominance our students have achieved in the annual Jiangsu Cup Speech Competition against competitors from universities more prestigious than ours, with Chinese programs of a much longer history than ours. It is also reflected in how motivated many of our students are to actively speak with their Chinese teachers in Chinese, even outside of class, and how hard they study Chinese on their own. As a result, several of our top fourth year students this year

quickly received good job offers, in part, at least, because of their level of Chinese language ability. My relationship with so many of these kind and hard-working students will be a very happy memory for years to come.

As I prepare to graduate from Komatsu University together with its inaugural class of students I wish to thank all of my colleagues for the kind patience and support that you have shown me over these four years. It has meant a lot and I wish each of you all the very best in the future. Should your plans ever see you travelling to Canada, either for professional reasons or for pleasure, please plan to make a stop over in Vancouver. I would be so happy to see you and show you around.