

GSA's Distinguished International Lecture Series: Global Impact



Marjorie Chan stands where two oceans converge at Cape Leeuwin, the southwestern-most point of Australia. Photo by John W. Middleton.

As the 2014 GSA Distinguished International Lecturer, this has been the travel year of my life! It has been a privilege to represent the International Section (a regional organization within GSA) and be an ambassador for GSA to promote global interactions. I was graciously and warmly welcomed everywhere I visited. I found many enriching experiences, had the opportunity to taste and see different cultures, heard what others are doing, shared my own research, and developed potential collaborations for the future.

I saw the iconic sights of each city, and I was also able to experience the countries in a way that many tourists don't. There are so many highlights, including the Deccan Traps, Fort Golconda, and Taj Mahal of India; varied geology and Christchurch earthquake devastation in New Zealand; spectacular seaside cities of Australia; Mount Fuji (at a distance) and many shrines and temples of Japan; and the Three Gorges Dam, Great Wall, and the Terracotta Warriors of China. The short, partial-day field trips were especially fun. It was go, go, go—moving every two days or so—always an adventure, with something new to look forward to each day.

The GSA Distinguished International Lecturer program is only two years old, initiated through a generous endowment to the GSA Foundation from a geologic pioneer and role model to many women in our profession: Robbie Gries. Last year, Vic Baker from the University of Arizona was the inaugural Distinguished International Lecture speaker and traveled primarily to Europe. Thus, GSA requested that I go to Asia to cover another part of the

globe. That was a perfect fit for me. As a third-generation Chinese American, I had never been to the country of my ancestors, and I was excited to see parts of Asia, with a few countries “down under” en route. I also anticipate a short trip to Korea this fall.

The University of Utah gave me a release from teaching for one semester so I could focus my travel during the spring 2014 semester. My husband accompanied me, and that was well worth us paying his expenses to make the travel a lot easier. We completed two separate trips that covered three months of international travel. On the first trip, I gave 27 lectures: six in India, six in New Zealand and 15 in Australia. On the second trip, I gave 24 lectures: three in Japan and 21 in China. My two lecture selections were “Mars for Earthlings: Using Earth Analogs to Decode the Sedimentary History of Mars,” and “Eolian Explorations: “Dunes, Diagenesis, and Deformation.” However, I also spoke about other hot topics in sedimentary geology, as well as graduate programs in the U.S. and the application process. In total, the lectures reached about 2,500 scientists, students, and public citizens.

Many partnering groups provided travel support and lodging, along with all of the individual host institutions. The major partner groups providing financial support were the University of Utah, the Geological Society of Australia, the Geoscience Society of New Zealand, the Sedimentological Society of Japan, the Geological Society of Japan, and the Exploration Technology Committee of the Japanese Association for Petroleum Technology.

The GSA lecture program (www.geosociety.org/Sections/International/LectureTour/) describes the tour talks and has links to my travel blog of short text and mainly pictures from every city



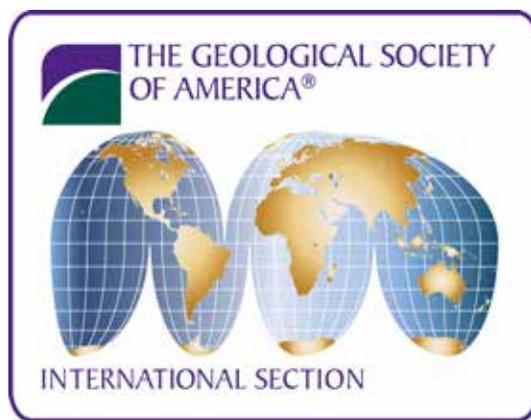
I enjoyed talking with many students at University of Delhi and especially encouraging some of the women geology students. Photo by John W. Middleton.

that I visited. If you missed it and/or want to see city and geologic scenes from the tour, they are in a continuous format (most recent to oldest) at <http://geosociety.wordpress.com/category/international/>.

The geology departments I visited were diverse and different in many ways. Some were doing so much with few resources, and others had booming programs with world-class facilities. An important point I saw clearly on my tours is the globalization of science. Certainly, international collaboration is an important part of how our discipline can move forward faster. Remarkable studies are being conducted all over the world, and I learned about many exciting research results from colleagues—ranging from sedimentary problems of dolomitization and opals to geophysical problems of earthquake liquefaction and reservoir



This large red banner across the entrance of Yangtze University greeted me, announcing the “Plan of World Famous Scientist Lecture: Marjorie A. Chan” (approximate translation of Chinese). Photo by John W. Middleton.



induced seismicity. China in particular has made science a priority, and the government is heavily investing in science programs as well as instrumentation. One example is SinoProbe, a major earth-science effort to conduct deep exploration to understand the structure and evolution of China’s continental lithosphere using multiple techniques. Some of their laboratories and equipment are truly impressive, the kind that many of us might only dream of. I wish the U.S. had a similar vision of investment in our sciences that have strong applications to societal needs and sustainable resources.

To me, one of the greatest successes of this tour was to be able to excite students and fuel their interest in geoscience while expanding their perspective to new ideas. I was particularly moved by the strong dreams of students in India. They had far-ranging interests and asked many questions on topics like Earth processes, unconventional resources, and extraterrestrial life. In every country I visited, I met bright and engaging young people who will be tomorrow’s leaders.

I am a different person because of this GSA tour. Without doubt, meeting the many folks on this tour gave me a new perspective both personally and professionally. The field of geoscience is a “small world” where it often seems that there are much fewer than six degrees of separation. I know I will cross paths again with many of the individuals I interacted with on the trip. There were so many great people and experiences that all happened so quickly, and I am still trying to absorb all of it. Through this lecture program, GSA has made a difference, engaging and connecting across cultures and international boundaries. Most of all, it has been great to share and exchange ideas and enthusiasm for geoscience around the world.

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