

Completion report, sabbatical leave 1 September 2025 – 28 February 2026Fulfillment of planned activities during the sabbatical leave, and their results

My 6-month sabbatical leave was dedicated fully to ‘[i] academic research, [ii] scholarly pursuits and [iii] professional development’—the purpose of sabbatical leave as specified in the HKUST sabbatical leave rules.

Regarding [i] ‘academic research,’ In alignment with the objectives specified in section 10 of my Application for Sabbatical Leave (“Details of the activities”), my primary research focused on the ongoing project *The Process of Economic Development in West Sichuan, China*. Expanding upon a previously published journal article focused on Daocheng County, this book project offers a comparative analysis of three distinct counties within a comprehensive development framework.

Key milestones achieved during the sabbatical leave include:

- **Field Research:** Conducted a targeted two-week field study in West Sichuan (September 2025) to evaluate recent economic developments across the three case studies: Ganzi/Garze, Daocheng, and Xiangcheng counties.
- **Data Integration & Analysis:** Updated quantitative datasets with contemporary observations and extracted relevant analytical data from the latest local municipal statistical yearbooks.
- **Literature:** Conducted further literature research and made ample use of Stanford University’s East Asia library.
- **Manuscript Drafting:** Authored a comprehensive draft of a lengthy introductory chapter, including the literature review and theoretical framework. I successfully structured the remainder of the monograph—comprising three county-specific chapters, a comparative analysis chapter, and a conclusion—generating approximately 120 pages of preliminary passages / chapter fragments and notes on how to proceed further.
- **Database Management:** Basic organization of my extensive qualitative database (software: Scrivener), consisting of approximately 500,000 words of field notes, with an eye to matching notes by location and theme into the manuscript.

The sorting and sifting through literature, notes, and the manuscript eventually grew rather tedious, which, in my case, significantly lowers productivity. I had been working on the project overtime. Towards the end of my sabbatical leave period I pursued a different research interest of mine and have since completed a short monograph manuscript on academia in Hong Kong and at HKUST that is under submission with a publisher.

Regarding [ii] and [iii] ‘scholarly pursuits and professional development’ (“Particulars of institution/location” in the sabbatical leave application form), I have affiliated with and pursued full-time academia at the world’s foremost center for the study of the Chinese economy, the Stanford Center for China’s Economy and Institutions (SCCEI), at one of the world’s top-ranked universities (Stanford University). For most of my sabbatical leave period, a Stanford University faculty member generously granted me use of their stately office (located in the same building as the SCCEI) and I made intensive use of this office. I typically attended two seminars a week in the different institutions at Stanford University that cover China topics of interest: SCCEI; Asia-Pacific Research Center; Freeman Spogli Institute; Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law; Hoover Institute. I regularly met with China scholars located at Stanford University and with visitors, developed a collegial lunch routine, and attended conferences at Stanford.

Income and expenses

The approval letter of my sabbatical leave application requires me to specify income and expenses. My HKUST salary was my sole source of income. Expenses included monthly rent of USD 6,000 in Palo Alto, total moving costs of USD 20,000; plus: car, plane tickets/hotel, additional plane ticket from the U.S. to go to West Sichuan, major dental expenses, a HKUST management-imposed reduction in my standard HKUST annual remuneration.