

2007-08 Wang Family Scholarship Essays - China

David Kuo
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

My first semester at Peking University in Beijing is drawing to an end and it has been a very exciting five months. I am quite grateful for the opportunity to come to Peking University, one of China's most prestigious colleges, and extremely grateful for the financial support that the Wang Family Scholarship has provided. The scholarship has provided me with comfortable living conditions and an environment in which I can focus on my studies and not on working. I have gradually grown quite accustomed to the student lifestyle here and have had very pleasant experiences in the classroom with enthusiastic teachers, modern and useful textbooks, intriguing international students, and a modest but not overly demanding homework load. Despite these, I am still eagerly looking forward to a long winter break to South China and South Asia, away from the biting cold and cutting dryness of Beijing's winter.

The first two months away from home were the most challenging, not because of missing friends, family, or my dog, but because it took much time to get accustomed and acclimated to the food, water, air, and Chinese lifestyle and methods of handling things. The air and water quality unfortunately leaves much to be desired and was terribly hard on my system upon first arrival. An example of an obstacle that I had some trouble overcoming was paying my bills. Every month I have to pay my telephone and internet bills, something that no one looks forward to, but until recently I had despised this because I was under the impression that this bill could only be paid at the bank of China which meant that I would have to wait an hour in line to finally pay. One day, I waited an hour and a half to pay and then was told I was to come back the next day for some reason or other, and left in a silent rage. Upon asking my friends about how to handle this problem, I was told that the phone and internet bills can also be paid at the post office conveniently located on campus. I cite this example because many of the students, including myself, were initially unaware of how to handle some the bureaucratic paperwork and other necessities that China requires, but we have now become experts on the matter.

It is most certainly an exciting time to be here in China, especially in the capital Beijing due to the upcoming Olympics. One can not escape the buzz and fever that everyone displays. Construction on a massive scale has drastically reshaped the skyline. Many Chinese silently oppose this because of the loss of the *hutong*, which was the traditional city layout, being replaced with more functional and practical large scale housing complexes. At the same time, the upcoming Olympics have prodded the Chinese government to modernize many aspects of the city. For example, new subway lines, subway stops, more hospitals, road repairs, and many other infrastructures. The news contains reports everyday regarding the governments' efforts to ensure food quality and safety, which has been a sensitive issue globally. The government has also sponsored a television program dedicated to teaching viewers the history of the Olympics as well as English phrases regarding the Olympics to help prepare the population for the swell of foreigners expected to descend on Beijing.

I have to say that I have loved my time in Beijing thus far. Aside from some of minor inconveniences such as my bike and cell phone being stolen and compromised immune system, I really feel comfortable living and going to school in what many Chinese consider not only the political but cultural capital. I have worked hard on discarding the ethnocentric point of view and adopting a culturally respectful one, which at times is hard to maintain, but is important when one is a guest in another country. While this is not the first time that I have lived away from home or outside of the country, this is the longest time I have been away from home. Studying and living abroad has provided me with a great chance to learn and rediscover myself and everyday I have the chance to indulge in a passion of mine, studying Mandarin Chinese.

Joon Hee Cho
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

My high school English Literature teacher once related her previous study abroad experience in a country unfamiliar to most Americans. She described her experience there as having a substantial influence on her outlook on society and life, realizing till then how uninformed and ignorant she - the average American teenager - had been to the lives of others. Her time spent studying abroad

was, unequivocally, a defining moment in her life. Now, I find myself in a similar situation, studying here in China. With every passing day - through the many encounters with the locals and through the many places visited - I begin to fathom how my teacher must have felt. In what has truly felt like a dream, one in which I desire to prolong, my experience in China has left me with invaluable impressions, allowing me to mature into a more cultivated individual and humbling me to have a more balanced view of my worth in relation to that of others.

From Xian's remarkable Terra Cotta Warriors and Beijing's Forbidden Palace to the narrow streets that comprise old China's hutongs, China's places of interest have impressed me with an interest to learn about the Chinese people and their history. To visit sites hundreds and thousands of years old and to learn about their stories and the individuals involved helped me to appreciate traveling much more. To see, in person, a genuine Terra Cotta warrior - the details of his facial expression, his armor, his equipment - and to understand his history fascinated me. The narrow, old neighborhoods, known as hutongs, are also a place of interest for foreigners. Compared to Western standards, the hutongs are not, to say the least, fancy. Nevertheless, there is so much more to the hutongs than what meets the eyes. By observing the designs of the small houses, the items that lie around the courtyard, and the activities that take place in the hutongs, one can learn not a little regarding the values and lifestyles of the locals.

Of course, upon talking with the Chinese people and by enjoying a friendly relationship with them, I, not only, learned much more about them, but I also began to appreciate the environment in which I live much more. For American teenagers, including myself, the 20's is a period of time to play, to be free from a waiting life of work and family responsibilities. For Chinese teenagers, this is not so. For example, upon settling down in Beijing, I often eat at a nearby restaurant that serves sheep meat. Every time I have gone, the same teenage girl opens the door, the same girl offers me the menu, and the same boy brings out the food. From 9 AM to 12 AM, seven days a week, they work. On Christmas day, I went to the restaurant and, yet, it was just like any other day of the year. They worked. Even more surprising is how they always work with a positive attitude. They are always smiling. The situation here is so unlike somewhere else where workers are either peering at the clock or on strike.

China has indeed left me with countless invaluable experiences and impressions. Thus far, my stay here in China has been very much enjoyed. With every passing day, I become fond of China more and more so. From mild arguing and haggling in stores to eating at restaurants that appear to be unsanitary and drinking under-age legally, I have definitely changed the past few months. But just as my teacher felt that her study abroad experience was a defining moment in her life, I feel that the person I change into here in China will positively influence the kind of person I will be in the future.

Camilla Teng
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

Looking back at the times gone through, I realized that time has truly past by in a blink of an eye. From the moment of arrival to the days of house hunting, everything seems to have happened just yesterday. I still recall the moment I stepped off the plane, a gust of humid air blew against my face. I quickly looked around and luckily found a familiar face, a girl I had met at our school orientation, also my current roommate. After entering the airport, we bumped into more and more fellow CSU study abroad members. The process of going through customs, retrieving our luggage, and finding our program director, Dr. Qiu, went smoothly. The following days were spent walking under the scorching sun house hunting.

Before coming to Beijing, I had planned to stay in the dorms if possible. Being the first time I leave home and is on my own, I had wanted to stay in the school where I would know where to go to seek help. After seeing apartments and the dorms, I realized I would rather live in an apartment. The dorms have all the necessities ? a bed, desk, closet, common living room, and bathroom. What I personally think the dorms lack is a homey feeling, a feeling I found in the apartments. Finding roommates was an interesting process; somehow, everyone just naturally split off into groups. Three other girls and I were trying to find a three bedroom, where two of the girls would be sharing a room, but there are not many three bedroom apartments here. Gradually when everyone else found apartments and the four of us still had nothing, we began to worry. Fellow program participants had checked out of the hotel, but we still needed to stay there. Soon after, our agent informed us that a couple of the apartments we saw the first day

were still available, despite telling us before that they were all taken. I consider it truly a blessing that we found apartments so close to each other ? our two apartments are in buildings next to each other. From then, the four of us grew closer and became more like a family.

The next thing on the agenda was school. Soon after we moved in and settled down, we went through registration and took the placement exam. With the guidance of Dr. Qiu, registration was smooth, besides the fact that we all needed to get health exams because the health report we had filled out for the program was not sufficient. The placement exam held early in the morning was not such a challenge to me, but I was surprised that results show that I was placed in the highest levels for both required courses. For my two elective courses, I chose Business Chinese and Advanced Chinese Vocabulary. In the beginning of the semester, I noticed I see the same few people around and in my classes. Then later on as I got to know them better, these common classes allowed us to see each other everyday and develop even closer relationships. The bond we have and the way we joke makes me feel that I have known a couple of them for ten years already.

Apart from studies, I also joined the Peking University International Volleyball Team. I had originally wanted to play volleyball competitively, but I realized that the skill level of the girls' team was not too high. What kept me going to the practices were the wonderful teammates I had. We were not the best team, but we always fought hard until the end. The laughter we shared on and off the court made me look forward to practices every Saturday. We have become a close knit group, going out to dinners together for birthdays or just for the sake of being together.

These few short months has given me many opportunities to meet such great friends. Many of them will be leaving soon back to their home country, but I will treasure the times we spent together. When one of my teammates returned to Indonesia, we told her to get married soon. That way, we would all be able to get together once again when we attend the wedding. Hopefully that will be the case with all the new friends I have made.

Emerald Wong

Wang Family Scholarship Recipient

China 2007-08

After being in Beijing for about four months, I am feeling more comfortable living here and utilizing the Chinese I learned in class. Learning Chinese in China is beneficial for me because I am thrown in an environment that constantly forces me to practice my speaking skills as well as character reading. Since everything is written in Chinese, the characters will slowly become familiar to me due to the constant exposure to them. Also when trying to communicate with salespeople, I am also improving my oral speech. Though I may not know the exact words, I must gather the vocabulary I do know and try to describe the item to the salesperson as if I were playing a game with them. It is quite relieving when they finally figure out what I want, and then tell me the actual word. Therefore, I end up learning even more useful and practical words and phrases I can utilize again later on.

Looking back, however, I feel that it would have been wiser for me to learn more Mandarin in the States prior to coming to Beijing. I understand that the purpose of studying abroad is to learn Chinese, but I believe that I should have had a better grasp of beginner's Chinese. Though I did take a year of Chinese at San Francisco State University, I felt that because I am not frequently exposed to the Chinese language, I practically forgot everything I learned. Thus, I am reviewing it again in my classes at Peking University. Furthermore, my first month in Beijing was quite an intense experience. I was so frightened and could not utter an ounce of Chinese. Also because of my lack of Chinese experience, I tend to frequent around Western styled facilities and eateries due to its convenience and picture menus.

Personally, I do not think that I am experiencing the full experience of being an international student here in China. I feel that I have not made as many friends as I had hoped and be in a more diverse class. Since I am placed in a lower class, many of my classmates are also Americans so there are times I feel like I am still taking a language course in the States. Also, I was slightly disappointed at not being able to live in the dorms. I am a commuter student at San Francisco State University and now I am currently living in an apartment that is a 20-minute bus

ride from Peking University. Therefore, I feel as though I am living a similar lifestyle that I did in the States. I take note of that because I wanted to live in the dorms due to its close proximity to other students, making it easier to meet and make more friends. Though we were offered dorms, out of twenty plus people in our CSU program, only four rooms were available for us, so the majority of us had to rent off campus. Furthermore, when looking for apartments, we were looking at rooms as a group, so I felt as if we were fighting against each other to rent those places. My roommates and I actually sought out an outside real estate agent to look for an apartment. Getting settled in Beijing was a very stressful time. However, I am settled now and my roommates and I even celebrated Christmas in Beijing by decorating a Christmas tree and exchanging gifts. We also invited our fellow CSU-IP students, our Resident Director, and his wife to our apartment for a Christmas hotpot potluck dinner.

Taking classes at Peking University is an interesting experience. I do feel as though I am learning more here, mostly because we learn so many new characters daily and learn one chapter a week. Classes are four days a week, two hours a day. In addition, since our program is designed for us to strictly learn Chinese, I can devote my time to study the material and characters I have learned in class without having to worry about work for other classes. Unfortunately, I was not able to test into the intermediate level of Chinese courses, so I was unable to enroll in various elective courses that were offered. Therefore, I am only enrolled in a speech class, a characters class, and a listening comprehension class. I am excited for the upcoming semester and I hope that I will continue to improve my Chinese so that I will be able to show my friends and family the skills I have acquired during my year abroad.

Lisa Ly
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-09

I would like to begin by thanking Trustee Emeritus Stanley Wang, for the fact that if it was not for the possibility of the Wang Family Scholarship, I would not be studying abroad here in China at this very moment. The opportunity to be, live, and learn in an unfamiliar country is such a wonderful experience to be and take part in. Having stayed in China for the past few months has

been one of the greatest decisions I have made in my life. The experiences that I have partaken in has allowed me learn and grow so much, yet within such a short period of time.

Upon arrival, not being able to communicate with the locals was a challenge that I had tremendously struggled with. Not only was being illiterate in Mandarin making it utterly difficult to get around, but my thoughts, ideas, and expressions were never clear and often times incomplete. It was the most frustrating ordeal when I couldn't even buy something as simple as a bottle of shampoo, or the fact that I never really knew exactly what food it was that I had just ordered. After having struggled with being illiterate in Mandarin for only two weeks, it made me realize how hard it must be for the immigrants that immigrated to the United States. I can't but imagine the struggles they must have endured trying to make a living and providing for their family with their lack of English. It never crossed my mind how being short-handed in one's communication skills could add such hardship to one's life. Through my own experiences, I have come to acknowledge the struggles that one goes through with improper communication proficiency, leading me to become more sympathetic and compassionate on the matter.

In addition to this experience, I got a feel of why the country runs the way that it does. Before I have even arrived in China, I already had some background information about the country. I knew that the city was heavily polluted with smog and trash, people didn't pay much attention to hurting the environment, and that there were no animal rights among other things. I couldn't understand how a country that was growing and expanding so tremendously could be lacking in compassion for other living creatures or the earth in which they all lived on. But, I have come to an understanding over the course of these past few months, having had the chance to interact with some of the local Chinese and other outside sources for the Chinese way of life. It's not that these people don't care about their environment or about animal rights and such; it's because they have to first be able to take care of their own self. Some people don't even make enough to get by adequately, not to mention the pressure lingering over them to also provide for the rest of their family. They just don't have the time or energy to focus elsewhere other than their own individual health. Not everyone has the luxury of a comfortable life that we all wish for. The reason why the States have organizations to fight for the rights of anything is because our country is developed enough to do so.

Another significant part of my learning experience involves learning and understanding more about the person I am and the type of person I am about. Through all the hardships that I have endured thus far, coming to an unknown country not knowing how to adequately speak, read or write the country's language, not knowing anyone while half way across the world, having no friends or family to help or support me through my tough journey, I finally came to the conclusion that I am a very self reliant, strong, and motivated person. There has been many times where I wanted to just give up because things had gotten too difficult and I was away from everything that I was used to. At times I had unsupportive members believing that I would shorten my trip because things would be too hard to handle. However, despite these hardships, I have learned how to overcome my problems. With time, I discovered that through persistence and determination, little, if any, obstacle could stand in my way.

My time abroad has already taught me so much about myself, and about others as well. I have learned that I am a strong individual who is willing to make an effort to work things through, as challenging as those things may be. I can and have withstood living and adjusting to the unfamiliar, all while simultaneously learning about and developing a deeper understanding of the differences of others. Once again, I must thank you for awarding me the Wang Family Scholarship. I feel greatly honored and privileged because it has allowed me to finalize my decision to study in China. It has turned this possibility into a reality, making it an unforgettable experience and the best decision that I have made in life thus far. Of all that I have already experienced, there is so much more to be seen, gained, and understood. I know that this is just the beginning of it all and that there is still more to come.

Jennifer Ng
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

Studying abroad is truly an amazing experience. The time I've had in Beijing so far has been incomparable to anything I've ever experienced before. The excitement of being a foreigner, the stress of being a student of the prestigious Peking University, and the occasionally loneliness of

being homesick can only describe a fraction of my life in Beijing. Every day is a day of new encounters and lessons.

As a Chinese-American growing up in San Francisco, I am familiar to many aspects of the Chinese culture. Because it is imperative to my family that I am in touch with my roots and culture, we celebrate Chinese holidays and still practice many Chinese customs. Therefore, while I was preparing to study abroad, I assumed that my transition from the U.S. to China would not be as big of a culture shock as what teachers and advisors were describing. However, I couldn't have been more wrong. What I had imagined and thought true were not true at all. Such as, what I had thought were the "correct" ways of addressing others, or the way festivals were celebrated were all completely different. I suddenly realized that I knew completely nothing at all and that I was completely in the midst of the culture shock my advisors described about.

One of the first things I noticed was how rare I heard "thank you" being used in China. My first impression was that Chinese people must be rude and ungrateful because in American culture we are taught that "thank you" is a way to show appreciation. We can use this phrase everywhere and with everyone to show politeness and hospitality. So whenever I saw my tutor, I always automatically said "thank you," but he would always reply hesitantly, "You don't have to be so polite. We're good friends." I could not understand why he didn't appreciate it when I said "thank you." It wasn't until in class one day when we were discussing about Chinese customs and human interpersonal relationships that I learned about the way "thank you" is used among the Chinese. In Chinese culture, "thank you" is often used towards strangers, like waitresses, and people whom you are not close with. "Thank you" is not used among family members and close friends because the Chinese believe that family relationships and close friendships are so intimate that "thank you" is not needed or sufficient to show appreciation and politeness. If "thank you" is used, it can be interpreted as an offense because it is a way of telling the other person that you do not think we are family or good friends. I then realized that during this entire time my tutor was trying to build a friendship with me, but I was pushing him away every time. From then on, rather than saying "thank you," I showed my appreciation through other ways, such as, inviting him to dinner or offering help with English.

Another common Chinese behavior is interacting with indirect speech because Chinese value human relationships and would rather maintain harmonious relationships than to fight for one's desires or opinions. Indirect speech is a type of polite mannerism used to maintain good relationships. Being straightforward and blunt on the other hand, is only used among family and close friends as a way of showing the intimacy of the relationship. However, sometimes the Chinese way of being blunt can be too blunt and their words can be hurtful, but this is because they see it as helping you. For example, pointing out your flaws is a way to help you improve yourself. The Chinese do not see that this as offensive if you were told by a close friend or family member. This aspect of Chinese culture was a bit difficult for me to accustom to because I am used to the American way of being straight-forward and eloquent to express oneself. So when interacting with Chinese friends, I always expressed my opinions freely. However, one day one of my Chinese friends pulled me aside and said, "Because we're good friends, I'll just be straight-forward with you." I of course said yes and felt surprised because it's the first time she's truly expressing herself. My friend expressed that I sounded arrogant sometimes when describing about my home and that it made her feel uncomfortable. I was baffled not because she was she was telling me I was offensive, rather it was her tone that made me felt hurt. Sharing with them about home is to give them an idea of what San Francisco is like since few of them get the opportunity to travel. I was hoping that they would gain a better understanding of me so that we can become better friends. I was not trying to sound arrogant or say how great America was, but from her perspective, I was insulting her and her country. Although I was hurt by what my friend said to me and thought she was too blunt, which in American culture would have been very rude, I was grateful because I now know how to properly express myself without offending anyone and our friendship has gotten closer.

Being in China has definitely been eye-opening. I came holding many presumptions about my culture, only to find that I was completely wrong and ignorant. Studying abroad in China has not only broken through my ignorance, but has also taught me new things about the people of China and about myself. Outwardly I was saying I am an open-minded person, but inside I was still holding onto what I was accustomed to and what I thought was better, which made me seem arrogant to other students. It wasn't until I finally opened myself up to other foreign and native students that I realized my flaw and was able to change. My time in Beijing thus far has been

rewarding beyond measure. Not only am I advancing in my language studies, my interpersonal communication skills are also improving. It's truly taught me how to be open-minded and sensitive to other cultures.

Adam Hittinger
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

If there is one thing that can be said about living in China, it is for the most part as comfortable, materially at least, as it is to how you would live in the states. Almost anything one would like while living in Beijing can be attained, usually at prices cheaper than can be found in the United States. One can find almost anything, including American brands, with things like deodorant, mouthwash, toothpaste, clothes, electronics, music, movies, and shoes among other things. However, as one goes outside the Haidian District (The area where Beijing University is located) and outside the city, many 'Western' goods become harder to come by, as many products and foreign brands are simply not bought by Chinese consumers. However, one thing to note about buying goods in China is that you never know if you are buying the real thing, as counterfeiting goods is a big problem. Even in large stores and shopping malls you will generally find that movies and other products are generally counterfeits or knockoffs of the real thing. One thing that you should have special concerns about is toilet paper, as many toilets in public places generally do not provide toilet paper in their restrooms, though establishments that are more catered to a foreign clientele will generally provide it. In general, Chinese style toilets involve some experimentation in discovering how to use them, so if you are not sure, ask someone how.

Another thing that some American students may find inconvenient will be the process of signing up for classes, as the Chinese way of getting students to different classes seems to have as much standing as is humanely possible. After testing, one first has to find his or her Chinese name on a grid-like class schedules with hundreds of other people's names on them, and then, in a crowd of about fifty or so people, depending on the time you are checking, you have to decipher when and where your classes will be meeting for the weeks to come. Making things more difficult is

the fact that your classes will never be on the same time. For example, one of my classes would start at 2:30 P.M. on Monday, but on Wednesday it would start at 10:00, and the day after that it would start at 12:30. After that you will be asked to see the professors of the classes that you have been placed in, and they will ask you, in Chinese, if you feel that the class is suitable for you. I would suggest being honest about your opinion on whether you feel that the class would be too easy or too hard as changing classes after they have already started will be very difficult, and as you will be in the classes you are placed in for an entire semester.

As for the classes themselves, the vast majority of the teachers will not be able to converse in English, which naturally means that all of your classes will be in Chinese, with the teacher often insisting that you speak as much in the language as possible. If your Chinese is not at a high level, it is best not to stress out the first weeks of school when you realize that you cannot understand the teacher's instructions, for as the weeks go by, your listening comprehension will gradually improve over time as you are constantly being barraged by the language. Just think of all of your classes as testing your listening comprehension. Also, your classes will be composed of students from all over the world, from France to Africa, from Mexico to Thailand and Russia, which makes classes much more interesting besides the Chinese you will be learning.

Being in China, most likely you will be using a bike to get to school, and if you are like most people, there is a good chance your bike will either have to be replaced for some reason or another, usually because they break down faster than they do in the states, or for the simple fact that there are people in Beijing who just like stealing other people's bikes. As for keeping your bike safe from thieves, a general rule of thumb is that three locks in China equals about one lock in America, which means if you would use one lock on your bike in America, you should consider using two or three on your bike in China. Also, if you can, try attaching your bike to something stationary, like a tree, gate, or bike rack if you can, as this will greatly decrease your chances of having your bike stolen. If you do buy a bike, my suggestion is to buy one of the better and more expensive models, like the "Forever" brands instead of the cheaper or reused bikes that you may be tempted to get, because as I stated before, bikes in China often end up breaking down, and as time goes on, rust and time will take their toll on your bike, and it will get harder and harder to pedal.

Sandy Thong
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

Coming to Beijing to study abroad makes me realize how big the world really is. There is no doubt that San Francisco is extremely ethnically diverse, but Beijing gives it a whole new meaning to me. People from all over the world are here, and many of them do not speak English, or at least they prefer not to. That is a good thing, because it allows me to practice my Mandarin. If I have to choose all over again about coming to China, I wouldn't have to think twice, because I am enjoying every moment here thus far.

I have heard a lot of bad stuff about China before coming to Beijing, but after seeing this place for myself, I can say that it is not as bad as what others make it out to be. I have been extremely cautious about everything, from my surroundings to the food I eat during the very beginning of my stay here, but after settling in and getting myself familiar with the area, I have noticed that it is not that bad. The local people here are not always out to cheat foreigners, and the area I live in seems quite safe; safer than a lot of cities I have seen outside of Beijing. Like being anywhere else, such as back in the United States, we just have to use our common sense and discretion to judge what is safe or not.

Although most of my experiences here in Beijing have been great, one thing that I thought could have been better was our living arrangements. Before finding my current apartment, I had to stay at a hotel near PKU for almost an entire week. It would have been nice if we were better informed of what our housing options were. Basically, a dorm room is out of the question, because space is very limited. Only 4 students from the CSU program this year were able to get a dorm room, while the rest of us had to find our own places. Luckily we have an extremely helpful director, who worked day and night to help us.

After the first stressful week of finding a permanent place to stay at , the next step was the paperwork, such as registering with the local police and getting ready for school. Although it was a very hectic week, I didn't think it was hard to deal with, because a procedure list was

given to us by PKU, telling us what needs to be done and by when. After settling all the official stuff and paperwork, school started, and that was a whole new chapter. It was fun meeting other students from around the world. I have noticed that most students enrolled in the language program in PKU are from the United States, and it was always interesting in learning and hearing about where the other Americans came from.

I didn't hear too much about other students having stomach problems when we first arrived, at least my stomach was fine. My body reacted to the environment change by having hives, but it went away in two days. I do not have a problem with Chinese food, because I love it, and there is a wide variety of Chinese food. Even if I get tired of Chinese food, there are many other choices around the area, such as Italian, Korean, Japanese cuisines, and pizzas.

If I get repack my luggage, I would pack less toiletry items and more school supplies. There are huge supermarkets here that sell all kinds of American brand toiletry items. There is no point in lugging them half way around the world. I have tried using Chinese brand shampoo and body wash, and it is okay. I thought that school supplies would cost less here than the United States, but it's not. I really regret not bringing my own line paper, notebooks, stapler, scissor, etc., because I have all those stuff lying around at home, and believe it or not, it costs less for those items back in the United States.

I am really enjoying my study here in Beijing, because I have learned and done so much more than I would have done back in the States. It is hard to describe my stay here, because it is something that needs to be experienced personally, and is hard to put into words. Although I have only been here for four months, I must say that it is something that each person should experience, to go outside of our comfort zones and see what is out there in the real world.

Linh Phu
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

My time in China thus far has been, as one would expect, filled with new experiences, new friends, new ways of thinking, new ways of understanding relationships but perhaps most

importantly new ways of understanding the human condition. My first and foremost impression when the plane landed in Beijing after a fifteen hour flight from San Francisco was the heat and humidity. It hit me as soon as I deplaned. My face immediately started to perspire and the clothes I wore became heavy in the sultry heat. The weather became the backdrop of a hazy reality as the words that hung in the air made itself clear that it was no longer English. The familiar and intimate was replaced with the foreign and unknown as my skin tingled with sweat, excitement and anxiousness. I took a deep breath and with my first step greeted this expansive metropolis that is to become my home for the next year.

Prior to leaving for Beijing, I had but just a few notions in my head that have been shattered since arriving here. Growing up in a bilingual household that spoke Cantonese and English, I was fairly confident in my ability to speak more than one language. I thought I had a leg up on being able to easily slip into the Mandarin vernacular as one would slip on a pair of sandals. I underestimated the myriad of subtle and not so subtle nuances of culture that is inextricably tied to a country's language. I didn't think that the Mandarin spoken in the United States is vastly different to the Mandarin spoken in China. Superficially, one can say that it is the same but underneath that thin layer of strokes, tones, syntax and semantics lays a world steeped with tradition, history and culture that I am slowly digesting. I have made many a faux pas that is part of the learning experience and learning I am. Every day, every simple act such as greeting a stranger or ordering at a restaurant stretches the bounds of my reality just a little more.

In a language where tones are of utmost importance, not only to indicate attitude but specifically to indicate meaning, I have become acutely aware of how I communicate. A slip in tone can change the meaning of a word and turn a benign sentence into one that would make anyone's cheeks burn with embarrassment. I have also become intimately familiar with the frustrations of not being able to correctly, effectively and eloquently transfer thoughts to sentences. I constantly trip, stumble and falter in my speech as my mind goes through a process of internal retrieval and translation. As equal a frustration is the inability to understand when spoken to though I have noticed a drastic improvement in my listening comprehension in the four months that I have been here. As if magically, the veil of language has slowly become translucent and I can only hope that one day that veil will cease to exist.

In a city with a population count that hovers around the seventeen million mark, there is literally and figuratively little room for personal space. Public areas are almost always filled with people and every hour is rush hour for the transportation system. Riding the subway and buses in Beijing is not for the weak of heart nor is riding a bicycle where lawlessness is law and where “right of way” does not seem to exist in the Chinese psyche. But like the climate, food and squat toilets in Beijing, it all takes time to get acclimated to and once that point has been breached it all becomes second nature.

Relationships are what bind us in this fabric that we call life but how we approach relationships, for obvious reasons, has its own regional differences. I was taken aback at how easily it is to strike up a conversation with a stranger in China and how quickly people in China will consider you a friend. With that being said, there is a kind of bluntness, straight-forwardness that takes some getting used to. I have come to understand that it is not out maliciousness that someone will tell you that you’ve recently put on some weight or inform you that you’ve overpaid for a particular purchase rather it’s because they consider you a close friend therefore as such will confide in you their opinions.

Not only have I befriended locals of this city but I have become close and fast friends with many other foreign students. Never in my life have I met, in such a short period of time, so many people from so many different areas of the world that have all congregated in Beijing to study Chinese. It truly reinforces the fact that we are all inter-connected by small details in our lives but also when we cast away the labels, turn a blind eye to the color of our skin, the lilt of our accents, to the country in which we hold a passport, will we then realize that we are citizens of the world.

One of the many idiosyncrasies of this city that I absolutely relish is the street vendors. Night or day, sweltering hot or numbingly cold, without fail they will be there to sell you tangerines the size of a walnut or the addictively delicious jian bing (the Chinese counterpart to the French crepe) or yams coal-roasted to the point of perfection and this list goes on. This is a phenomenon that I never see in the western part of the world. Certainly for good reasons street

vendors don't exist in the United States, however, to me there is a beautiful sense of immediacy and randomness about it. Perhaps what I enjoy most is starting up conversations with the vendors themselves. A simple "Are you from Beijing?" will always elicit an answer full of emotion as I have come to understand that the Chinese people generally have very strong ties to the provinces they hail from. In these short conversations, the spirit and nature of the common people have peeked at me through the dark, almond shaped eyes full of history, wisdom and unwavering intensity.

The weather in Beijing has now changed from hot and humid to frigid and icy. The trees that were once green and lush when I first arrived have turned yellow to orange to red and are now barren and empty. Shorts, skirts and sandals have been replaced with thick wool jackets, scarves, hats and long-johns. I have already experienced life in Beijing for only two seasons but somehow it feels like a lifetime – a life filled with laughter, struggles, achievements, progress, revelations, great food and great friends.

Tammy Lam
Wang Family Scholarship Recipient
China 2007-08

"Culture shock" were two words that I kept hearing about while preparing for my trip to China. I was warned that people would be pushy, the crowds would be suffocating, and the food would give me stomach problems for days. Armed with my bottle of Pepto-Bismol and words of advice from my Chinese mother ("If they push you, push back") I boarded the plane on my 12-hour flight to Beijing.

Upon coming to Beijing, I discovered that it was not much different from the United States. The streets were paved, many people spoke English, and there were no farm animals wandering vast plains of rice paddies like I had imagined China would be like. There was no culture shock to speak of. Having already traveled to Vietnam many times, I felt like Beijing was just a cleaner version of Vietnam. Because I am Chinese, there was no real culture shock to speak of, except in the food. My family is Cantonese, from Southern China, and the food of Northern and

Southern China are as different as night and day. Southern Chinese like their food light, Northerners like it oily. Where Southerners love sweet food, Northerners like salt. Getting used to the food—especially the amount of oil in the food—was nauseating at first, but after finding several cafeterias on campus that serve fairly light and tasty Southern style food, I have happily adjusted to life in Beijing. Furthermore, cafeteria food is delicious and cheap—only about 7 RMB for a bowl of rice and two entrees—perfect for the student on a budget.

After several weeks of being in Beijing, I realized that I could understand quite a bit of Mandarin because I already speak Cantonese. Though the two dialects are very different and are not interchangeable, I discovered that the grammar structure, colloquialisms and everyday usage of the words were the same—only the sound of the words are different. Though I found I could understand about 40 percent of what was being said to me, I still could not read characters.

. The teachers at Peking University conduct all classes in Mandarin. Very little English is spoken, so my listening and speaking skills have improved greatly. My knowledge of Chinese characters has also improved immensely. This Christmas I was able to write my mom a Christmas card and a full-page letter—all in Chinese. She was amazed at how quickly my Chinese was improving and even showed the letter to her colleagues, who all commented on the correctness of my grammar and word usage.

Every day after school, I take the bus home. Riding a bike has gotten to be too tiring and the weather is usually at freezing temperatures. The public transportation system in Beijing is convenient, but often crowded. However, it is extremely cheap, only 0.40 RMB to take the bus each time. Students only pay 0.20 RMB.

One thing that I do not like about living in Beijing is the bureaucratic red tape and how inefficient the system can be. Even something as simple as buying a CD at a CD store requires two stops, at opposite ends of the store. One stop is to obtain a written receipt of the item you are buying, then onto the next stop to pay for the item, then back to the first stop to pick up the item. Returning a phone means bussing across town to the repair center, waiting 3 hours to have

the phone checked out by a technician, then bussing back to the store to physically return the phone and get a new one.

Despite all the hassles and inconvenience of living in such a crowded city, I am enjoying my year abroad and learning more than I thought I would--at times, learning more about my own culture too. This year abroad has opened me up to the possibility of working and living abroad. I am no longer afraid to take chances and explore new places.