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Globalization in China Reflection

Earlier this summer I was able to experience a country and culture that not many can say they have seen. I was fortunate enough to travel to China for a three week Faculty-Led Study Abroad Program. Although I have traveled a lot in my life the culture of China was a completely new experience for me. The program began with some cultural classes prior to our departure. We learned about China's culture, people, etiquette, and political issues. After these classes I thought I was well prepared to travel to China and had a pretty good understanding of the culture. When I arrived in China I realized I was wrong. Although the pre-departure classes did help me understand the culture better, I believe that I learned the most when I was actually able to experience the culture first-hand in my time in China. All the aspects of the culture that we had studied in the pre-departure classes were unfolding under my eyes during my time there. After spending those three weeks there I now truly understand that there are some aspects of culture that you must live through and see first-hand to accurately understand them.

We began our trip to China by flying into Hong Kong. We spent some time there but also traveled to mainland China, visiting the cities of Zhuhai, Macau, Guangzhou, and Beijing. While in Zhuhai, we attended classes at Jinan University. At the University we were paired up with our "Chinese buddies". These were students from the University who volunteered their time to show us around during our stay. Having the Chinese buddies was one of my favorite aspects of the study abroad trip. I was able to learn much more about the culture seeing it from the perspective of students who had lived there their whole life. Through the whole experience I gained an understanding of the differences in cultures, global institutions, and was able to integrate everything I learned into my life back in the United States.

Traveling to China instilled in me an appreciation and understanding of the world's diverse cultures. While abroad I was really able to get a first-hand look at all the differences in cultures between China and the United States. Even though we had learned about these differences prior to arriving in China, experiencing everything for myself gave me a deeper understanding of the complexity and meaning of differences between cultures.

One cultural difference that I noticed in my time there was the extent to which the Chinese value hospitality. This value stuck out to me from the moment I met my Chinese buddies. When we arrived in Zhuhai many of them were waiting for us at the ferry station. Even though they had never met us they were all so enthusiastic to have us there. Some students even skipped their classes in order to be able to greet us when we arrived. They did everything possible to make us feel welcomed as their guests in their country. Although here in the Midwest we have the "Minnesota nice" sense of hospitality, I felt an overwhelming sense of hospitality from our Chinese buddies. One example of their value of hospitality was with one of my Chinese buddies, Matthew. One day during our stay, I mentioned to Matthew that I missed coffee because I drank it almost every day back at home and in China we mostly drank tea. It was just a quick comment and we quickly moved onto different topics. The next day I found a big cup of coffee waiting for me at breakfast. Even though coffee is not a very common drink in China, Matthew had gone out of his way to get me a cup of coffee. Although it was just a small gesture I believe it really exemplifies how much they truly value hospitality. Matthew had remembered that small comment I had made and made sure he accommodated me to feel comfortable in his country. I was so grateful this act and the many other acts of hospitality that I experienced while in China.

Another area where I noticed the overwhelming sense of hospitality during the trip was in Beijing. Originally, Beijing was not in our itinerary for the trip but the students in our group

decided to extend our stay in order to visit Beijing and the Great Wall of China. We would not be traveling with our Professor there so our Chinese buddies suggested that they contact some of their friends in Beijing to help us get around. We had some problems with our flights leaving for Beijing, so the students ended up waiting three hours at the airport for us to arrive. They then took us to our hotel and out to eat that night in Beijing. We only had one day in Beijing and we wanted to see the Great Wall and also the Forbidden City. The Chinese students in Beijing planned our whole day out for us so that we would be able to see both of these sights. They met up with us at 5:00 AM in the Subway in order to start our very packed day. They took us to all of the sights we wanted to see that day and also back to our hotel that night. I was astounded that these students who didn't know us and weren't even associated with our study abroad program took so much time to make sure we had a pleasant stay in Beijing. This value of hospitality is something I will always remember from the trip. As much as I try to fully explain how welcomed and comfortable the Chinese people made me feel I do not think words do it justice. It is something you must experience first-hand to truly appreciate and understand what hospitality means in the Chinese culture.

While in China we also visited some different businesses and got an authentic view of how businesses operate in China. Seeing these different businesses also helped me understand the broader subject of global institutions and how companies operate in such a fast pace changing global environment. The two companies where I especially witnessed this were Gree Electric and Multek.

Gree Electric in Zhuhai was a company we visited that specializes in air conditioners. We visited Gree toward the middle of our trip and prior to visiting the company I had already started to notice that many of the air conditioners in the buildings we were in were Gree products. This

is where I began to notice how big of an impact the company of Gree has. When we were at the Gree factory the first thing that we were shown was a model of the factory that we were in. Although we only got to see one building of the factory, it stretched out for at least a mile. I was astounded by the size of the factory. Another factor that surprised me was that many of the workers also live on-site. The factory has some apartment buildings on-site so their factory employees can live close to where they work. This was very surprising to me because I had never seen anything like this before. Although it was a hard concept for me to understand, I did understand that these were the kinds of measures that they took in order to meet the demands of the public with their production.

Another company where I saw similar aspects was Multek, a printing company that we visited in Zhuhai. During this company visit we were able to actually go into the production line and see how the printers are made. Seeing the actual production of the printers was another area that made me realize how China keeps up with the changing global business environment. There were different production lines for each of the different products that Multek produces. In each line there were rows of workers doing their specific task and then passing the piece to the next worker to continue with the production. The whole production from the beginning of the line to the end of the line where they have the finished product took an average of 2 minutes. This is where I truly saw and experienced first-hand what my perception of China was as a production machine. Visiting these companies gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to be a global company. I understand now all the implications that are associated with these companies.

Visiting the different companies while we were there also made me more aware of how the implications of production and manufacturing in China affect our own country of the United States. I was always aware that China was where many of the products we use today are made,

but actually seeing the factories made me more aware of this. I believe that our society is fueling some of the factories practices since we have become so focused on material products. There is a very high demand for some of these products and for this reason companies need to take certain measures to stay ahead with production.

One company where I noticed this especially was when we visited Flextronics. This was a company in Zhuhai that specializes in making chips that go in smart phones and computers. We were able to see many of the production lines and ask questions through our tour of the factory. I was surprised at the fact that many of the questions we asked were not answered by our tour guide. Some of these questions included: How much are workers paid? How many hours do workers work on a typical work day? What does the company do with chips that defective? Our guide simply answered these questions with “it’s a secret”. He was not at liberty to answer these questions because some of the answers would not be considered ethical for us coming from the United States. We later learned from a different source that workers are usually paid less than \$2 hour and many times have to work in conditions with radiation and chemical without protective gear. Although for us these practices seem unethical, we also have to look at the bigger picture. As I stated before, many of the products that companies like Flextronics make are made for consumers like us in the United States. Since the demand is so high for these products the companies have to take measures like those in order to provide us with the products we want. I am not saying that those business practices are ethical, but now understand that the demand for products coming from us fuels these practices. I believe my trip abroad really helped me fully understand how connected the world is.

One aspect of the Chinese culture that I was worried about prior to arriving in China was the language barrier. I would be arriving in Hong Kong by myself and I was worried that I would

not be able to navigate through the airport or be able to ask for assistance. When I arrived in Hong Kong I was pleasantly surprised. Hong Kong is a very international city and many people spoke English. I was able to navigate through the airport with ease. For the time that our group spent in Hong Kong it was also easy to get around because there were many English speaking people. I didn't notice the language barrier until I arrived in mainland China. I was surprised at how different Hong Kong and mainland China were. Mainland China was more what I had expected prior to going on the trip.

I began to notice the language barrier and difficulties with cross-cultural communication when we interacted with our Chinese buddies. Although most of our buddies spoke English very well, there were times where we had trouble communicating with them. One specific instance of this was one night when all of us wanted to order pizza to our hotel with our Chinese buddies. We spent over 40 minutes discussing how many pizzas to get and what to get on the pizzas. When we were ready to order we realized that all the Wisconsin students thought that we were ordering the pizzas to the hotel and the Chinese buddies thought that we were going to pick them up. None of the Wisconsin students knew that in China they do not have pizza delivery services and although the Chinese buddies had attempted to communicate that with us we hadn't understood. Next we spent another hour trying to decide how many people should go pick up the pizzas. In the end we ended up splitting up into smaller groups and we all went to eat dinner at different places separately. Although we spent over 2 hours deciding where to go eat, this situation taught me a lot about cross cultural communications.

From this point on, I realized that I really had to choose my words wisely so that the message I wanted to convey was actually understood. Sometimes even when I thought I was explaining something clearly our Chinese buddies would interpret it in a different way. This

made me realize how easy a message can be misunderstood when you are communicating between different cultures. Being a native Spanish and English speaker, I have visited many Spanish speaking countries. Although I have seen different cultures, I had never had the experience of having a language barrier. By the end of the China trip I had become much more aware of some of the cross-cultural communication barriers. I limited my language to use words that would convey the message I wanted to portray. I think this is something that I could've only learned with this experience. Although I had heard about the difficulties of cross-cultural communications, I didn't understand the whole complexity of these difficulties until I was able to experience them. Now that I understand these language barriers a little better, I will be able to communicate more effectively with people from other cultures.

I believe that there is a lot that I can incorporate into my life from all the experiences I had while in China. First, going to China and encountering the culture strengthened my goal to work for an international company. One of the reasons I am studying International Business is because I want to eventually work for an international company and get the chance to travel for work. Actually going to China and seeing a culture that is so different than my own enhanced my desire to travel. There is a lot that you can learn from traveling that you can't learn for just reading a book. One example of this is that before I left for China I always considered Minneapolis and St. Paul to be big cities. When I came back from China I was surprised that the Twin Cities did not look big to me at all. After visiting Hong Kong, the city with the most skyscrapers in the world, the Twin Cities didn't even compare. I believe that traveling and seeing different countries makes you look at the world differently. For me traveling to China and making friends and connections there made the world seem a lot smaller.

Second, I believe that my study abroad trip to China has also made me more open-minded about different cultures. Coming from a multicultural background, being born in Colombia and growing up in the United States, I already had some experience with this but my trip also helped strengthen it. Since we have some Chinese students on campus I always noticed that some of them were hesitant to ask questions or participate in class even when it was required. I didn't quite understand why and always assumed it was because they didn't speak English very well. After going to China, I learned that asking questions especially in a classroom setting is considered rude in their culture. This helped me understand why some Chinese students in the U.S. were hesitant about speaking in class. Seeing these kinds of situations from the perspective of students in China made me be more open-minded and accepting of different cultures. I am now very careful not to judge if they do something differently than me, because that might be a common behavior in their culture.

I chose to study abroad in China because I wanted to experience a culture that was completely different than my own. What I didn't realize was that by doing this I would also learn a lot about myself and my own values and assumptions. I would recommend this program to any student looking at going abroad for a few weeks. Being in China for those three weeks I learned so much more than I would have in a typical classroom. I made lifelong friends, both with the students from UWEC and the Chinese buddies that we met. My study abroad trip was a truly enriching experience.



Having the Chinese buddies was one of my favorite and most meaningful aspects of the study abroad experience. I truly got to see the culture from the perspective of students who have lived there their whole life. Here is a picture of me with my buddies Angel (left) and Matthew (right).



Getting first-hand experience with all aspects of the Chinese culture, such as the food and people, gave me a deeper understanding as the culture as a whole. This is a picture of some of our group with our Chinese buddies making dumplings, a popular Chinese dish.

