

Transformative Learning Across China and the US: Learning Without Borders

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the transformative experience of cross-cultural learning through the perspective of a Chinese exchange student who studied for one academic year at Kean University in the United States. The chapter examines how academic engagement, cultural immersion, and daily challenges across two educational environments, Wenzhou-Kean University and Kean University, shaped the author's intellectual and emotional development. It highlights the gradual process of adaptation, identity negotiation, and intercultural understanding that emerged through classroom participation, community involvement, and independent living. The narrative illustrates how experiences of fear, loneliness, and discovery evolved into lessons of empathy, self-confidence, and balance. By tracing personal growth and reflection, this chapter demonstrates how studying abroad can cultivate a global mindset, encourage critical self-awareness, and foster the capacity to live meaningfully between cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Many people think that studying abroad is a life changing experience, but only by experiencing it personally can one understand how profound its influence on a person is. This chapter shares my personal experience as an exchange student for

one academic year at Kean University in the United States. Through this story, I not only hope to show what I have experienced, but also how this experience has helped me grow, reflect and view the world with a new perspective.

Before the communication, I had already developed a strong enthusiasm for different cultures. From childhood to adulthood, I have participated in study abroad programs in Vietnam, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Turkey, Canada and other places. These experiences have filled me with curiosity and excitement about the global community. I enjoy making new friends, listening to new ideas and understanding how culture shapes our way of life. Spending a longer period abroad seems to be a natural next step in my journey of study and personal development.

This chapter will first introduce who I was before the exchange, including my educational background, cultural experiences and personal values that shaped my worldview. I will explain how my early experiences prepared me and how much I need to learn once I truly step into a new environment. Next, I will share why I decided to participate in the exchange program, the motivation behind my decision, the hopes I carried, and the fears I had to face. I will talk about how my family, teachers and friends have influenced my preparations, and how I have mentally prepared myself for the unknown. In this chapter, I will review how communication experiences have taken me out of my comfort zone and helped me grow in ways that simple travel or home learning cannot achieve. I will discuss the excitement, challenges and small but important lessons learned in daily life in another country. My story is not just moving from one place to another; It is about the line that transcends the invisible understanding, patience, identification and empathy within me.

By sharing my experience, I hope to offer a genuine and honest picture, allowing everyone to understand what cross cultural learning looks like and feels like. This chapter invites me to embark on my journey and see how a year away from home opens new doors, not only to the world but also to a deeper part of me.

THE ME BEFORE THE DEPARTURE

From Wenzhou's Classrooms to a Global Dream

I was born in Hangzhou, a vibrant city in Zhejiang Province, China. So, I spent my childhood and adolescence in Hangzhou, which is my hometown forever. My growth experience in Hangzhou has shaped who I am today. This is a city that integrates traditional and modern life. My growth experience in Hangzhou made me realize at an early age the importance of respecting history and embracing a diverse world.

My academic journey has been truly wonderful, which has paved the way for me to study at Wenzhou-Kean. I attended primary school in a small county town in

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