

Crossing Borders, Finding Myself: A Journey From Wenzhou to New Jersey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter explores the transformative learning experience of a student participating in the Wenzhou-Kean University and Kean University Study Abroad Program, which bridges Chinese and American educational contexts. Through cross-cultural immersion, this chapter examines how academic, social, and emotional adaptation contribute to self-discovery, independence, and intercultural understanding. It discusses how exposure to diverse learning environments and cultural values reshapes perceptions of communication, confidence, and identity. Key themes include the process of navigating cultural differences, developing autonomy through everyday challenges, and building meaningful global connections through friendship and shared experiences. The narrative concludes with reflections on sustained personal change, emphasizing how intercultural education fosters openness, empathy, and a broader worldview that continues to influence future learning and global citizenship.

BEFORE THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Many people say that studying abroad can change you significantly. Still, you can only truly understand how profoundly it alters your perception of yourself and the world by experiencing it yourself.

In this chapter, I share my journey as an exchange student participating in the Kean University–Wenzhou-Kean University (KUSA–WKU) Study Abroad Program. This unique cross-cultural initiative combines academic immersion with intercultural exploration. Through this narrative, I aim to provide readers with an honest, heartfelt look at how this experience reshaped my identity, challenged my imagination, and broadened my understanding of global diversity.

I start by introducing who I was before the exchange and how my upbringing and educational experiences influenced my background, values, and worldview. This foundation will assist readers in understanding how those early perspectives paved the way for the changes that followed. I then explain my motivations for joining the program, which include academic, personal, and emotional reasons behind my decision. These reasons offer insight into what I hoped to gain and what I feared losing by stepping out of my comfort zone. I also reflect on the emotional preparation required before embarking on a journey so far from home, a process that challenged me to confront my uncertainties with courage.

Next, I recount the early days of the exchange: moments filled with surprise, discomfort, and discovery. These initial encounters established the foundation for more profound transformation, which I will explore in the next section, focusing on how my thinking, behavior, and sense of self evolved throughout the semester.

The middle sections of the chapter explore the people I met and what I learned from them, the challenges I encountered while adjusting to a new culture, and how these experiences shaped my understanding of “culture” and “diversity.” These stories highlight the interpersonal and emotional aspects of studying abroad that are often overlooked in superficial summaries.

Ultimately, I contemplate what I will take from this journey: the enduring lessons, insights, and questions that continuously influence my interactions with the world. An epilogue wraps up the chapter by connecting these reflections and emphasizing the ongoing transformative learning process.

This chapter provides not only a personal story but also a contribution to a broader, ongoing dialogue about how education, empathy, and reflection can connect cultures in an increasingly globalized world.

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