

# The Feeling That Started It All: Lessons From China and Beyond

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This chapter per the author explores the transformative experience of studying abroad in China and the personal and academic growth that emerged from this journey. The purpose of this chapter is to show how cross-cultural immersion creates adaptability and self-discovery. Through thoughtful reflections on identity, upbringing, and intercultural encounters, this chapter explains how experiences in unfamiliar environments impact understanding of oneself and others. The chapter begins with background context on the author's multicultural upbringing, shaped by life between Ecuador and the United States, and how these roots cultivated a passion for communication and cultural connection. It then traces the decision to study abroad for a semester at Wenzhou-Kean University, highlighting the motivations, emotional preparation, and initial perceptions upon arrival. The following sections recount meaningful observations and interactions which revealed cultural values such as hospitality, humility, and education. Ultimately, the chapter portrays education as transformative and powerful.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

My journey in applying for an exchange semester to study in Wenzhou, China did not begin with a packed suitcase or a boarding pass, it started with a feeling. A

tug in my chest to explore the unknown. For me, that feeling sounded a lot like a question: What if I live somewhere completely different than what I am used to? I did not know the definite answer at the time, but I knew where to look for it. Looking past the familiar routine of home, across oceans and time zones, into a place where my comfort zone would disappear and not follow me. This chapter is about the moment I left my habitual routine and decided to follow that question halfway around the world.

The places I was raised in pushed me to make such a decision. Guayaquil, Ecuador, my birthplace, gave me my soul. Elizabeth, my hometown, sharpened my perspective. The two places though worlds apart helped shape a person who values culture and community. I have always been drawn to stories, those spoken in classrooms, at the dinner table and those I discover while helping a stranger in a store.

That is why communication became more than a field of study; it became a purpose. I believe that in a world that is always talking, I want to be someone who truly listens. This belief led me to Kean University. One table, one flyer, and a thousand questions later, I found myself stepping into something unexpected, a semester abroad in China. This decision unfolded with emotion, instinct and a deep desire for something more.

I came to realize distance is fascinating, not just in the way it is shown on maps or how time zones divide our days, but in the way it dares us to grow. 7,631 miles is a long way, every mile symbolizing a new layer of understanding. Not just of another culture, but of myself.

The following will be background information on who I am. It will center around my identity, upbringing, culture, personality and values, all of which have profoundly shaped how I see and move throughout the world. I also explore how being a twin and working in the customer service industry has taught me the value of connection and perspective. These parts of my identity are not just background details; they are the very tools and experiences that prepared me to embrace new environments.

The second part of the chapter explains the why behind my decision to study abroad. Rather than a single dramatic choice, it was a gradual unfolding of curiosity, sparked by dreams and meaningful moments. I describe how the idea of going to Wenzhou-Kean University evolved from a vague interest into a real commitment and how that decision was influenced by a longing to disrupt routine and grow through the unfamiliar. My goal is to provide a clear understanding of not just what brought me to the exchange, but who I was before it and why that matters for everything that came after.

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