

RETURNEE OF THE MONTH

SEPTEMBER 2018



ABOUT ELIZABETH CHUNG

Program: UVA in Shanghai: Fudan University with TEAN

Duration: Spring 2018

Major: Economics & Foreign Affairs

MOST INTERESTING CLASS & WHY?

The most interesting class I took was Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict. It was a theory-heavy class, but for me, theory enables me to see real-life situations through a lens that can be more logical, taking into account cost-benefit analysis. However, the best part of the class were the group presentations at the end of the semester, where each group would present on a different case study focusing on a particular ethnic conflict. Because the class was full of international students as well as Chinese students, we got a variety of perspectives, which is especially important for something such as ethnic conflict that happens all over the world and also tends to have international intervention as well. For example, I was able to hear from French students on how they perceive the ethnic conflict in Mali. Similarly, I was able to hear the comments from native Chinese students on how they perceived the Cambodian genocide. Despite these topics being very heavy, everyone was able to have great discussion and bring their own individual perspectives to the table.



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HOW WAS EDUCATION ABROAD DIFFERENT THAN ANTICIPATED?

Assimilating into my life in Shanghai was different than anticipated because even though I am a Chinese-American, and being Chinese is a big part of my life, I did not realize the extent to which modern Chinese culture has changed and been shaped. I had been to China before, but not Shanghai and also never for as long as I was there this past spring. So while I knew what it was like to travel China, I had no idea what it was like to **live** in China. Because I was there for such a long period of time, I noticed the small nuances of Chinese culture that I would have never picked up on had I not lived there for an extended period of time. The small moments of Chinese life like paying for food with a QR code, watching food delivery guys sprint up buildings, and witnessing young Chinese romantic culture all built up into this deeper and greater understanding of this vastly different culture and world that I was completely blind to before.



NUMBER ONE WAY THE EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR GROWTH

I learned to be more outgoing and to not be afraid of looking stupid. I am no way near fluent in Mandarin, but I still had to use my Mandarin skills daily to get around, order food, ask for directions, and a multitude of other activities. If I was scared to speak to someone, then I would have not been able to get to where I needed to be or try the things I was interested in trying. I looked and sounded stupid a million times when I was over there, but it was worth it for the experiences I was able to have. So, coming back to America, I realized that if I could look stupid or put myself out there in a completely different language, then I would be able to do it 10x more when I actually spoke the language of people around me. Now, I put myself out there much more whether that be academics and talking to professors or meeting new friends and going to new restaurants. I learned that my growth and the degree of my experiences is dependent on how much I explore and engage in new people and activities, and that is something I certainly brought back with me to the States.



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FAVORITE LOCAL HANGOUT & WHY?

By far, one of my favorite local places to hang was a place affectionately dubbed the "skewers place." Why? Because 1) I honestly do not know its actual name and 2) they serve the most delicious skewers. Skewers is a super fun concept for me to explain because unless you are actually living in Shanghai, you most likely are not going to fully experience skewers culture. What happens is that some small family-owned restaurants that serve normal Chinese food, at around 9 pm, shut down their normal kitchen, fire up their grill and place raw foods of all kinds on sticks in baskets out in front. You pick up an empty basket and pick your assortment of skewers (think all different kinds of raw meats, fish, vegetables, mushrooms, bacon wrapped mushrooms--everything!) and then hand it to the cashier where they will count them up and charge you. You pick your level of spicy and then they are cooked skewers are brought out to you. The best part is the community and camaraderie surrounding skewers. I always went with a good group of friends and we would talk about everything over a good pile of skewers. Around us were all locals, and the environment was just this loud raucous mess where we were all enjoying this good, cheap food, while being with our favorite people.

MOST INTERESTING/DELICIOUS CUISINE TRIED

This is such a hard question! Every single day, I was trying food that was both delicious and inexpensive. However, I would have to say that my favorite food that I had was Haidilao hot pot. Haidilao is a hot pot restaurant, where the wait can be as long as 3 hours! Hotpot is essentially Melting Pot, but with beef broth, spicy broth, and tomato broth (a Haidilao specialty!). You order all the dishes you want to cook in your hot pot on an iPad, and they have an array of all different kinds of meats, seafood, noodles, and vegetables. My friend and I even tried lamb brain—it was gross, would not try again, but was worth the experience! What makes Haidilao so special besides its great tasting food is its superb service. As part of your experience in the restaurant, you get complimentary snacks and drinks in the waiting room, you get free photo printing and even free manicures! (Also, for most interesting, I tried Scorpion).

SHANGHAI IN 3 WORDS

Fast

Vibrant

Delicious



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MOST MEANINGFUL INTERACTION WITH A LOCAL

My program plans a day with a local Chinese family, and my friend David and I got paired up to go this young family's home. The husband and wife were both relatively young and had a daughter who was about 5 years old. They spoke little English, so David and I were really tested while using our Chinese skills. They were so kind, and cooked us this delicious lunch full of foods they were had on a daily basis, so we could experience what they ate normally. The best part of this day was playing with their daughter. Their daughter, although only 5, had the most outgoing, sassy personality I have ever seen on a young girl. She was simultaneously stubborn, funny, and kind. Knowing that Chinese parents put a lot of emphasis on the academic rigor and education of their children, I asked her parents how they were raising her. This is not an abnormal question to ask in China because it is a relevant issue to all Chinese parents. They told me they knew that they were raising her differently than other Chinese parents would because rather than sending her to various kinds of tutoring or prep classes like many other Chinese students go to, they make sure that their daughter has free time to just be a kid. Every Saturday, they take her to a park in their neighborhood to just run around and be free. The little girl really loves to dance, so they take her to dance classes. Both parents acknowledged that childhood is a wonderful time, and they do not want to forgo that time for more studying. I loved being able to gain the insight into a young Chinese family and spend the entire day with them, just joining in on their normal activities, and being able to ask them questions about Chinese culture that I can't learn from a textbook.



ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

I had experiences on this program that I would not have had anywhere else at any other time in my life. If you are hesitant at all about this "study abroad" thing, please go for it. You will be amazed at every step of the way.