

My 20 page report-April Seale 6,044 words
April Seale

Research & Reflective Essay

“An Adventure in Chinese Cuisine”

China is located on the opposite side of the world from the United States. It is the fourth largest country in the world. Its conventional name is known as the People’s Republic of China. The population is estimated at a whopping 1,338,612,968 and is steadily growing; (according to the statistics recorded in a recent census.)

Like any place in the world, China shares many likenesses and differences. Each area explored on our journey, was a learning experience in its own ways. Our group traveled through Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai. The localized history of each area was reflected through its people and city structures throughout. The cities had a large amount of its ancient past mixed into its more modernized developments. The provinces of each area were severely over populated due to the growing numbers of people that arrived many years before who settled down in China and made this land their permanent homeland.

The people that I observed and met along the way seemed curious of our group. They approached our group as if we were celebrities or aliens from another planet. The language barriers we endured were quite uncomfortable at times. Observing the people in these cities and their ways of life helped us in the understanding of how they lived and gave us a glimpse into their ordinary daily lives. The Chinese people seemed always busy; determined to get things done. They seemed to be hard workers and for the most part, they really appreciated the things a lot of people take for granted. In the faces of some of the locals I had encountered, you could see the hardships of their lives and experiences embedded in their facial expressions, how they lived, and just how they carried themselves. Their way of life and their customs were not so different from other parts of the world, but I felt a sense of poverty and discipline inherited by each person from their cultural backgrounds and perhaps, their strict governmental laws.

Our culinary adventure began in Beijing. Beijing is an ancient city considered to be the capital of China. This city was born into the Yuan dynasty in the year 1271, during the times of Ghengis Khan and the famous Marco Polo. Most of what we experienced in Beijing was built during the Ming dynasty which occurred in 1368-1644.

This inspirational place was built with the powers of the emperor and his visions of the land he wanted to create for his own.

Beijing was built with a series of protective walls, as were other major cities. In the past, these walls were instructed to be built for protection of the emperor and the people from invasion from intruders. These walls show a huge amount of history in the materials they were built with and the long breakdown of the structures from past to present. We got to visit some of the historical landmarks in Beijing. These places had their own sense of the times in which they were built and the pride of the Chinese culture represented by the locals.

Our first place that we visited was the historical Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Tiananmen Square lies within the area defined by the next wall. The formal access gate to the square marks the boundary of what was once an enclosing wall of stone and brick. The tomb of Chairman Mao is centered in the path of the gate. On one side of the square the People's History Museum is present and displays large statues of historical moments and events. On the other side is the Great Hall of the People which is currently used for state official gatherings and governmental meetings. The square serves as a walkway for the Imperial City into the front gates

of the Forbidden City. On approach, I felt a little nervous walking by the armed guards who stood for hours on end protecting this landmark and the flag of China. This walk took me back to the ancient times of China and how strict and obedient behaviors were expected by the reigning emperor. A massive picture of Chairman Mao dressed in militant uniform, hung in the gateway as if to make a statement to those who encountered this site.

Thousands of tourists flooded the paths into the gates. It was this very moment when I observed that our group of Americans were of as much interest to the Chinese people as was the Forbidden City itself. We were definitely spectacles to the crowd, as Westerners are still, to this day, considered a rare sight. The stares, smiles, and the constant flow of people wanting to take pictures of us and with us, were never ending.

Entering the Imperial City was like walking through time. The red walls and doors, golden roof tiles, and the portrait of Mao contrast strongly with the surroundings. The bridge took us to the Gate of Heavenly Peace into the Forbidden City. We strolled through enclosed areas for hours. Within the walls and throughout the walking distances we conquered, there were sections of museums, rooms used for servants, offices, souvenir shops and restaurants.

The weather was atrocious and heated with fierce drafts of hellacious heated breezes. Our only relief was bottled water and the top of each shaded area nested at the peak of the hundreds of stairs we had to climb in order to get to the point of cooler comfort.

As we retreated further into the center of the palace it became more and more quiet and serene. We entered the halls of Harmony and eventually made our ways to the top of the hills where beautiful gardens and pagodas were displayed. Looking back from where they could first be seen upon entering, they seemed to be an ultimate number of miles away. I was so relieved that I survived this hike through this big piece of historical property and the experience... I will forever remember.

The Forbidden City and the three Halls of Harmony look directly south, towards the Temple of Heaven, also known as Tiantan Park. In ancient times, the emperor would come here to ask for blessings for the people. He would dress in the Hall of Middle Harmony and then go to the Hall of Supreme Harmony to form the procession. In the middle of an opened area square, stands a gorgeous hall for prayer. Its vibrant colors of blues, gold, and red hues took my breath away. The primary color was a deep color of blue which was considered a sacred color symbolizing Heaven. The

triple roofed Hall of Prayer is where sacrifices would be prepared and carried out for sake of good harvest. The rooms of this gigantic building are filled with utensils, costumes and symbols which represented the rituals of its religious past.

Today the park is used as a gathering place where people come to hang out and enjoy the company of friends and family. They use these grounds for walking, play time, gaming, and to listen to or play music with their unusual instruments. I spotted people doing all sorts of activities like people watching, writing in Chinese symbols, flying kites, and playing card and dice games. A group of women were doing cultural dances with long, bright orange flags in formation to the beat of some drums. I learned that this place is frequented by all sorts of performers. The feeling of peace and relaxation spread throughout the park grounds. The locals who utilize this park believe its purpose is to enhance the perception of and enjoyment of simple things. It is a remembrance of their past and a reflection of their fortunate future.

As we headed for the bus, I ran through my mind trying to remember every detail during the day so I will always keep it with me...every step we had taken, all of the photos we took that day of the things we thought were awesome and all of the locals that

decided to get courage enough to ask to take pictures of with us. We had worked up an appetite and we were destined to the next location to fill our stomachs.

During the remainder of time we had in Beijing, we experienced a wide variety of Chinese cuisine. The dishes presented to us were popular authentic foods of China prepared and served to us family style. Every meal was placed in a specific order with hot tea and rice present at every meal. The Chinese use certain staples of foods to help keep them full and energized. They have their morning tea with a variety of dim sum and eat everything with a great range of different vegetables, rice and soups. (Dim sum are snacks and dumplings central to the Cantonese tea house traditions of yum cha. Yum cha means "to drink tea".) The sequence of food was basically the same every time, starting with hot tea and ending with watermelon slices for dessert to cleanse our palettes. I was never afraid of going hungry. They served eight to thirteen different dishes at every meal. Being a foodie on a journey that involved eating our way through these cities of China was challenging at times. The Chinese are not picky eaters by no means. I saw unusual creatures and every part of an animal consumed and sold. This trip was not for the faint of heart.

To the locals, China is known as the homeland of tea. We took a guided tour of an imperial tea house which included a lecture and demonstration of the traditional tea house ceremony. It is believed that China had tea shrubs as early as five thousand years ago. Human cultivation of tea plants dates back two thousand years. Asian countries produce 90% of the worlds' total output of tea. Chinese tea may be classified into five different categories according to the different methods in which it is processed. (green tea, black tea, wulong tea, compressed tea, and scented tea.) Drinking these types of teas are beneficial. They aid in weight loss, constipation, medically, as an anti- inflammatory, relaxation, cleansing for smokers and aid in the remedy of hangovers. I had wonderful time learning about something I already put to use and the health benefits that derive from the teas.

Beijing is the political and cultural center of modern China. Amongst all of the hustle and bustle, our trip took us to many of the unique places of entertainment China has to offer. We ventured to our next destination after a dinner at another local Chinese restaurant. An evening performance of the Peking Opera was a delightful field trip that kept us mesmerized throughout. We sampled some of the fare they offered but it was the show that kept

our attention at full span. The Chinese artistic treasure, with its nearly 200 years of history is highly reputed by its artistic charm. The songs, dance and expressions of the performers told stories of China long ago and of loves gained and lost. The costumes were vibrant colors in which most had a special meaning to the Chinese people.

The next destination was Xian. It was quite different from Beijing, but still held an infinite amount of historical roots and ties to the culture and religion of its people today. Trees add color and lots of softness to most streets. It is quite a beautiful city and it moves at a slower pace than Beijing. Xian is scattered with the enormous tombs of emperors and other beautiful structures. It is the home to the Terra Cotta Soldier excavation, the beginning of the Silk Road, and beautiful Buddhist pagodas. Xian has a thriving tourist business and is in the process of building a diversified economy. Traveling around the area, there were many major modern markets dealing in foods, clothing, electronics and furniture. There are two factories that we made our way to; the jade and silk factories. The working conditions did not look very desirable, but the beautiful works of art and pieces are a huge product used to boost the sales in China and overseas.

During the Ming dynasty, Xian went through many changes. The town was refurbished and returned to a province as a center for trade and politics. The Ming emperors built walls around the inner city which kept them safe from those who dwelled in the outer side of the walls. These giant walls house the bell and drum towers. They were used to keep time for the town and sound alarms. At night the wall is lit up and such a beautiful sight. As you walk by this massive piece of history, the cracks and blemishes tell their own story of the past.

Venturing from Xian to Shanghai is a major change. Shanghai is a more up to date, modernized province. Its city lights, malls, and more bustle of traffic due to the overload of vehicles makes one have to search for historical marks. The people of Shanghai seem more hip and lively. The outlines of the buildings form a drastic view that can be sometimes overwhelming. The architects who built these structures were brilliant, none the less. They focused on building up instead of out in order to preserve land space. For example, what looked like a futuristic office buildings, were actually hotels and regular apartment buildings. The massive skyscrapers were all unique in form and design.

Shanghai can be broken down to three sections. The center

of the old city has been restored to house an abundance of shops and restaurants. On the Bund there is a strand of restaurants and offices that support a European influence. Both contrasted strongly with the modern, planned development across the river from the Bund which is known as the new Shanghai. Overall, it resembled places in the United States such as Chicago but with hints of Chinese influence. Most of the central city was built later in the twentieth century. Modern buildings replaced old factories, warehouses and offices of the earlier days along the shoreline of the Bund. The Bund is a term meaning embankment, but in Shanghai it refers to the main financial district of Shanghai. This area serves the financial and trade needs of one of the busiest ports in Asia.

During the Tang dynasty, Shanghai was known as a small fishing village. It wasn't until the Ming dynasty that it achieved some importance as a center for silk and cotton weaving. By the time of the Qing dynasty, Shanghai expanded on the basis of its silk and cotton industry and had developed into a small port. Today, Shanghai is considered the largest port in China.

From one spectrum to another, China has many things to offer from its past to its modernized times. As a student this unforgettable trip was an eye opener to how different people can be

in culture, religion, government, and life itself. There are new beginnings in the Chinese societies that are more similar to what Americans may be more familiar, but the strict and sometimes harshness I observed during my stay makes me appreciate where I come from.

Physical, social, and cultural features of the land tend to have a major impact on food production and livelihood in China. In reference to the World Food Summit, food security is defined as existing “when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Food security comprises 3 main elements:

- food availability - sufficient, appropriate food is consistently available
- access to food - people have the means to purchase, or barter for, the food they need to maintain an adequate diet and level of nutrition
- food utilization - food is properly used. This requires use of adequate processing and storage practices; an understanding of basic nutrition and child care; and access to health and sanitation services.

Food security is a global challenge. According to the World Bank (2008) the 2008 food crisis risks plunging a further 100 million people into poverty. The main causes of rising food prices are contested but generally said to include:

- high fuel and fertilizer costs
- poor weather conditions in some major grain exporting countries
- a rise in demand for food including from the expanding middle classes in China
- an increase in bio-fuel production reducing the amount of land allocated to food production.

However, even without the combination factors that have caused the 2008 food crisis, many poor people are affected by predictable seasonal cycles of hunger and food insecurity. The multidimensional nature of food security points to livelihoods approaches as a lens for aiding understanding of food security issues. Livelihoods approaches can provide a useful analytical framework because of their focus on:

- assessing risk, vulnerability and resilience
 - disaggregated analysis of issues and impacts on different groups
 - both local factors that affect people's lives and the wider institutional and policy
-

environment.

(reference: K. Hussein / Eldis, 2002)

Hardships due to poverty levels were apparent through each city we had visited. Many people who came to work in these cities had to leave their homes and families to make ends meet. They opted to move from their loved ones just to make very little money to help feed and clothe their families. Some of these workers only see their families maybe once a year. The jobs they seek are street sweepers, food vendors, and factory workers; all of which have very poor working conditions. In order to meet nutritional needs, different foods were incorporated into their daily diets. Bugs, rodents and other unconventional food sources are eaten on a daily basis. It may be bizarre to most, but this goes to show the extremes some people go for survival. The government seemed to have strict guidelines for everything except sanitation. Surfaces in which food was prepared and the places it was sold, seemed very unclean. Temperature and storage was not of any concern. It was terrifying to see the differences from what I am used to.

China has many small universities and tech. schools that provide an education to those who are seeking knowledge for advancement in their trades. We attended some of their culinary

schools, which were quite different from the kitchens and street vendors' cleanliness. The schools were equipped to provide for the educational needs of the few hundreds of people who attended. The basics were the same as how they are in the states as far as sanitation, prep stations, and some of the methods used in cooking. It was really exciting to see the differences, though not so far-fetched as our ways of cooking. In Beijing, we attended a morning professional visit to the Beijing International Youth Research Institute for a culinary workshop. We observed a presentation by a Chinese culinary instructor on the history and evolution of Chinese cuisine. We learned of the basic schools cuisine and ingredients, as well as Chinese northern style cuisines. The chef performed demonstrations of traditional Chinese vegetable carving techniques and table settings. He also taught us the way of cooking using minimal equipment such as chop sticks and a cleaver. He cooked everything using soybean oil in a wok with an extreme amount of MSG. After the demonstration, we got into groups of four and participated in a hands-on-lab which consisted of preparing the dishes that the chef had made. It was really awesome to learn the types of food from this specific region. My team and I took first place on best dishes prepared.

We sat down and enjoyed eating our new creations of Asia and then we took in another demonstration from the chef instructor. This hands-on- workshop was based on preparing dumplings from scratch. I must say there is a huge difference in the Chinese food we have here in the states compared to what the true version of Chinese food is.

: menu prepared:

Sweet and sour chicken with a sweet and sour sauce

Candied sesame seed potatoes

Sauteed broccoli with garlic

Traditional eggrolls (made from an egg crepe. Filling: traditional pork mixed with vegetables)

Pork filled dumplings

Each city that we visited had basically the same types of food. They were slight differences, but the spices and techniques were the same. China has some popular dishes and specialties that they take pride in. It is the home to the Peking duck. The roasted duck is a famous duck dish from Beijing that has been prepared

from the Imperial era and is now considered one of China's national foods. The dish is prized for the thin, crispy skin with authentic versions of the dish serving mostly skin and little meat, sliced in front of the restaurant patrons by the cook. They are heavily seasoned and hung in an oven to roast.

A variation of roast duck was first prepared for the Emperor of China during the Yuan dynasty and later in the Ming dynasty. It was considered to be such a dish fit for a king that it soon showed up on the court menus.

The cooked Peking duck is traditionally carved in front of the diners and served in three stages. First, the skin is served dipped in sugar and garlic sauce. The meat is then served with steamed pancakes (simplified Chinese: ; traditional Chinese: pinyin: **chūn bing**), scallions and sweet bean sauce. Several vegetable dishes are provided to accompany the meat, typically cucumber and carrot sticks. The diners spread sauce, and optionally sugar, over the pancake. The pancake is wrapped around the meat with the vegetables and eaten by hand. The remaining fat, meat and bones may be made into a broth, served as is, or the meat chopped up and stir fried with sweet bean sauce. **Otherwise, they are packed up to be taken home by the customers. (reference from: " The Food of China, a journey for food lovers." By: Whitecap)**

Here is one of the dishes of dim sum that I found delicious and it is considered to be the most popular of dim sum delights; it is

known as the turnip cake. Each turnip cake is sold freshly fried to order and served with a side of soy sauce or chili sauce for dipping.

Recipe:

2lb Chinese turnip, grated

1 oz dried shrimp

2c dried Chinese mushrooms

5 ½ oz Chinese sausage (lap cheong)

1tbsp soy oil

3 scallions, thinly sliced

3 tsp sugar

3 tsp shaoxing rice wine

¼ tsp white pepper

2tbsp cilantro

1 2/3 c rice flour oil for frying

Chinese meals always have a staple included such as rice at every sitting. Rice is the food most associated with China and is

usually steamed. It grows well in such harsh climates and is made into noodles and breads. In poorer areas, millet is more common and is eaten as porridge. Each meal is also accompanied by lots of seasonal vegetables, pickles, and condiments. The secondary dishes are meats and seafood. Noodles, soups, and dumplings are eaten throughout the day as sustenance and to satisfy the taste buds.

Chinese cuisine developed around the foods that were available; often there was little meat, poultry or fish, so rice and vegetables are particularly important. Many of the foods that we associate with China today, such as chilies, capsicums (peppers), and corn, came to China by trading routes. Preserving vegetables and dried foods are seen commonly throughout this region; especially in areas where growing foods in the bleak climate and harsh terrain make growing enough food a struggle.

Chinese cooking tries to bring a balance of flavor between tastes: sweet and sour, hot and cold, bland and spicy. The trinity of flavors most used is ginger, spring onions, and garlic. The most common flavorings are soy bean products, fermented tofu, soy and bean sauces, vinegars, and sesame oil which are the tastes that define Chinese food. A good Chinese meal will include a mix of cooking styles such as steaming, poaching, braising, stir frying, and

deep frying. A wok is without a doubt the number one most used cooking vessel in the kitchens of China. After cooking, all food is served family style all at once. The rotation of dishes can be anywhere from 5 to 13 dishes prepared for a single meal. All are shared by everyone at the table, parading the dishes by each person with the use of a lazy susan, and chop sticks are the tool used to get food from plate to mouth.

Being a culinary student on a quest to eat my way through parts of China was both terrific and mind blowing. The bizarre foods that I tried and sometimes just looked at, were boggling; the unfamiliar people, their language and culture made me curious enough to want more time there. I experienced a different side to life that was both intriguing and terrifying to say the least. The adventure took me to new levels of appreciation for my own country.

The most memorable experience I had on my journey through China was in Xian. One day, we loaded up in our huge motor coach, dressed professionally in our beautiful white uniforms and made our way through a poverty ridden village in to the middle of nowhere. As we approached a small neighborhood bordering the driveway to our destination we passed small shacks called hutongs .

These housed some of the poorest people that I have ever seen. Everything resembled the narrow dirt road we were traveling along. The small homes were made have badly weathered broken pieces of wood; the people looked hungry and unbathed, and the sight was overwhelmingly sad. The barriers that were meant to keep them in and others out were tall brick walls with spiked broken pieces of glass embedded into the top of the walls. I could not fathom how people could live in this extreme condition. Finally after almost two hours of driving, we came to the paved driveway of a school. (The Shaan'xi Culinary College)

The welcome we received was if we brought Jesus Christ himself with us to take these people to a paradise. The whole front of the school had every student, teacher, staff member, and leader lined up to welcome us. Each of us was paired with a student from their college to spend the day with. They started out a welcome ceremony with decorations, music, and applause. They made us feel so unbelievably important and valuable. They showed off their noodle making talents and let us join in making the noodles as well as a noodle twirling dance. We also observed shucking dough and vegetable carving. Every student from their school was not only talented but brilliant.

My partners name is Wang Shuang. He is 20 years of age

and has been at the institute for two years. He left his family to learn this trade of becoming a chef and to earn a better living for his family and him back home. Being hours away from home and never able to visit his family seemed a little heart wrenching to me, but his spirits were high and energetic. He showed me around the school and introduced me to his friends. I was sort of an attraction to all of the students because of my height and weight. I took pictures with so many students and faculty; it was almost like I was a celebrity.

We made our way through the school and watched the students from this facility show off their cooking skills. The advanced knife skills and cooking were amazing. I couldn't believe how more advanced they were than us. Throughout the day, I found out about their tedious schedules they endure daily. The long hours and dedication, along with a strict schedule made them into the perfectionists that they are. The dishes that were prepared for us were indigenous to the area.

They prepared lily flower which is a whole fish cut down into pieces and then sliced into something resembling mini pom-poms. It was deep fried and spruced up with a bright orange colored sauce. Also on the menu was chicken with mixed vegetables, dumplings, candied potatoes and other creations that were so

delicious. What amazed me is the sheer performance and discipline each student had instilled in them.

西芹百合 Parsley and lily

原料：西芹300g, 鲜百合200g, 大葱10g, 鲜姜10g, 盐, 生抽酱油, 味精, 淀粉, 纯净水, 精炼油, 香油

Raw material: celery 300g, fresh lily 200g, green onion 10g, fresh ginger 10g, salt, soy sauce, monosodium glutamate, starch, pure water, refined oil, sesame oil

成品要求：色泽亮丽, 咸鲜适口, 口感脆嫩

End product request: beautiful color, delicious taste, crisp and tender mouth feel

做法：1, 将西芹, 百合处理干净

2, 把西芹切成薄片

3, 把百合掰成片

4, 把大葱, 生姜都切成细粒

5, 把盐, 味精, 酱油放在一个小碗里加半碗纯净水调成适合你口味的味汁, 再向碗里加20g淀粉搅拌均匀

6, 把西芹, 百合一起放入开水中煮30s, 再捞出来沥干水

7, 大火把锅烧热后加30g精炼油等5s放入生姜粒和大葱粒炒香后, 倒入味汁大火烧至沸腾, 加入西芹和百合翻炒均匀并加香油, 放到盘子里。这道菜就好了

Procedure: 1st, process the celery and the lily cleanly.

2nd, slice celery.

3rd, break the lily into pieces.

4th, cut the green onion and ginger into fine-grain.

5th, place the salt, monosodium glutamate and soy sauce in a small bowl, add a half bowl of pure

water ,which sauce is to your taste , then add 20g starch and stir it well .

6th, place the celery and the lily together into the boiled water boiling for 30s , then to fish them and remove the excessive water .

7th, after fire the pot , add 30g refined oil waiting for 5s and put the ginger grain and the green onion grain in pot sautéing spicy, pour the sauce and burns to the boiling with large fire, add the celery and the lily then stir-fries with sesame oil, put the dish to the tray.

Easy sweet and sour sauce

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup of rice vinegar
- 4 tbsp of brown sugar
- 1 tbsp of tomato ketchup
- 2 tsp of cornstarch mixed with 4 tsp of water
- 1 tsp of soy sauce

Method

1. Combine the cornstarch with the water, making sure that the cornstarch fully dissolves into the water and set aside.
2. Place the rice vinegar, brown sugar, tomato ketchup and soy sauce into a small saucepan, mix together and bring to the boil.
3. Add the cornstarch and water mixture and stir all of the ingredients together until the sauce has thickened to the desired consistency

Vegetarian Pot Stickers

Ingredients

- 1 red onions, sliced
 - 1 tablespoon minced ginger
 - 1 cup sliced shiitake mushrooms
 - 1 cup white cabbage, shredded
 - 1 cup carrots, shredded
-

- 1 cup chopped garlic sprouts or 1 cup chives
- 1 teaspoon white pepper
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 package wonton skins, also called gyoza
- salt
- canola oil

Directions

1. In a wok or large saute pan, add a little oil and saute onions and ginger.
Add the mushrooms and stir.
2. Add the cabbage, carrots and chives.
3. Season.
4. When mixture is soft, place in colander to drain.
5. Add the sesame oil and cilantro when mixture is cooled.
6. Check for seasoning.
7. Using the gyoza skins, make half moon dumplings keeping the bottom flat.
8. In a hot non-stick pan, coat with oil and place dumplings.
9. When bottom gets brown, add 1/4 cup of water and immediately cover.
10. This will steam the dumplings.
11. Carefully watch the dumplings and completely evaporate the water so that the bottom gets crispy again and sticks to the pot.
12. Serve hot with soy sauce and vinegar for dipping.

The equipment used was so different from what I am used to using in the kitchen. A round of tree trunk was used as a cutting board, cleavers were used for cutting, and woks were used in cooking. It seemed really minimal compared to all of the tools we

use in the states. I found myself looking more into the hardships these students endure and compared myself to the life of differences between us. We all had things in common with each other in the fact that we loved the culinary field, we all work hard to reach our common goal, and we all wanted to become something bigger in our futures. I realized after talking to some of the students that they dream big, but they don't expect much after they complete their training at the culinary institute. Most of them are trying to become great chefs, but when they return home some will be dishwashers, help in family businesses, and take on lesser positions than they deserve.

When the day came to an end, it was almost a sad feeling to have to leave. The Chairman of the school had offered to any student willing to come back, free classes, room, and board, in return of coming back to teach the students Western cooking and English. I would have loved to take this opportunity, but my situation back home is not permitting. I am determined to come back to this place and discover more of China and its people and offerings. Magic occurred when these people touched my heart in an instant. As we said our good byes, I felt a tremendous amount of gratitude, appreciation, and envy from the students we were about

to leave behind. I have never felt so important and loved by a group of strangers than I had this day. Their friendships and hospitality will be forever etched in my heart.

I realize how lucky I am to be from the United States. My dreams do not seem unrealistic or out of grasp. I have the best opportunities available to me, and when I dream big, I know my dreams can come true. Wang told me that he has big dreams, wants, and needs like everyone; but the opportunity is far to none. His talents over exceed mine or anyone I know. At such an early age and as hard as he has had it, I can't imagine living life thinking hard work won't get you closer to your dreams. I have made some life time friends in some of the people I have met there. Maybe one day, my friend and pen pal, Wang and I will meet again. My dream of success is now also entwined in hopefully helping him in the long run.

This trip was phenomenal. It heightened my education, my skills, awareness of others and their cultural differences, and my overall appreciation of life as I live it. I learned some of my strengths and weaknesses; I faced challenges, and conquered some of my fears. I have a more global understanding of China, its people, and their beliefs. I went into this trip with a mindset of me just

getting to try new foods and seeing parts of China. Never in a million years did I think this would impact my life as strongly as it did.
