

7/7/18

Dear JSSCC President Grace Liu and board members,

Not many 16 year old girls in the world can say they've traveled over 6,000 miles across the world alone. Furthermore, not many teenagers can claim they've traveled over 6,000 miles to Beijing and Jinan as an exchange student and youth ambassador representing their home city. When I received the letter on March 1st stating that I had been chosen to receive the youth ambassador scholarship for \$2,000 I didn't know what to feel except disbelief, excitement, and even fear. Because of JSSCC, I generously was given the opportunity to visit Beijing and Jinan and experience 10 days that I truly would never forget about.

Although I had previously visited Beijing with my family before, traveling there 8 years later at age 16 alone was obviously a complete different experience. Throughout the span of about 3 days, I came eye to eye with Beijing and its culture that ranged from thousands of years ago. If I had to choose, my favorite spots in Beijing would have to have been the Forbidden City and Wanfujing Street (where I ate a spider). Meanwhile, this trip was the first time I had visited Jinan and I couldn't have been more pleased with the city. I absolutely loved Jinan and after having visited, classify it as being one of my favorite cities in the world. It was quite modernized, but at the same time had ancient sights such as the Yellow River. My favorite places I visited in Jinan were Baotu Springs, Daming Lake, and this cat cafe my host family took me to.

Ever since I've returned from my trip to China, one of the reoccurring questions I receive from relatives and friends is "What was your absolute favorite part of the trip?" Despite all the awe-inspiring landmarks I visited and the delicious food I ate, my answer always seems to gravitate towards the local people and students I had the pleasure of meeting. Of course, there was my host family in Jinan who took me in as one of their own and spoiled me as I've never been before. I had such a fun time living with my host family and saying "goodbye" to them was one of the hardest things ever. But besides from my host family, I genuinely enjoyed meeting the elementary, high school, and college students. Although we reside on different parts of the world, the conversations I had with these students were no different than if I had been speaking with my friends in America. Of course we exchanged information on the various differences between our daily lives, but we were always able to find some sort of connection whether that is in beliefs or interests. Everyone in Beijing and specifically Jinan treated us with immense kindness and generosity, and for that I will be eternally grateful towards them.

Going into the trip, I knew I was going to have an amazing time. What I didn't realize was that I'd come home with such a different perception of Chinese culture and people. I grew up in a very Chinese orientated household, but seeing firsthand how people in China live and what they go through each day truly opens your mind into understanding others' world views. What I experienced in China definitely influenced my perspective, and will continue to have an effect on who I am for the rest of my life.

While visiting China, there wasn't a single moment I felt bored or home sick. As my trip came to an end, I grew excited to see my family just so I could tell them about all my adventures in China. The 10 days I spent in China were both the longest and shortest days of my life. Each day was an adventure of its own, and it's astounding how much we were able to accomplish with each experience. It hasn't even been 10 days since my return from China and I'm still trying to mentally take in everything that happened. I'm thankful towards JSSCC not only for the scholarship, but for uncovering a side of me that I never realized existed. Visiting China forced me to have a sense of independence and step out of my usual comfort zone. Some moments were harder than others, but as time passed on the trip I grew closer to not only the situation I was in and the people who surrounded me, but myself and who I perceived me as becoming. This experience has widened my perspective into realizing there truly are no limits as to what one can accomplish as long as they set their mind to it. Looking back, I'd definitely be interested in visiting Jinan again as either a student or even tourist. Going into the future, I hope to remain in touch with my host family in Jinan as well as JSSCC with the goal of continuing this cultural bridge between China and America. Words can't express how grateful I am and will forever be for having been given this once in a lifetime opportunity. I look forward to connecting with you all soon!

Sincerely,

Samantha Tsang