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Final debrief

A shift through time:

As a Chinese, how my culture background has influenced me?

As I brainstormed about what I should do with my final project, I decide to make it something personal and something that can speak for my race, my culture and my background.

A certain case has triggered some interesting thoughts in my minds recently. One day, my friend from Cambodia, he was watching Stranger Things 2 and I noticed the fact that he only watched American TV shows. I have never seen him watching shows in his own language. So, I asked and he answered, "There are not TV shows from my countries that are good. Since I was a small kid, I have been watching Chinese TV shows. There is nothing that interesting in my language, not even music. And right now, here, I find American shows to be best." I was surprised and shocked. How can a soul that constantly feed on other cultures remain pure for its culture and has nature pride of itself? I feel sad for him, because there is nothing in his culture that he can connect with and be proud of. As a Chinese, I always have my own cultural comfort zone. I have abundant well made Chinese songs and TV shows I can listen and watch. It's a culture genre that I can spend my life to absorb but not seem to even get close to the end. I'm proud to share with my American friends and say "Chinese stuffs" are good. However, it has not always been the case.

It reminds me of my own story, relating closely to the fall and growth of China, my hometown, a country that has been defeated and despised in old times but has grown so fast in recent years that everybody started to respect this typical type of culture genre. My experience as an international was closely connected with that.

When I was still a little kid, I studied in China. I was a really outgoing person with constant new ideas in my mind. I was always like to share. I talked freely and thought freely. Confidence embedded in my heart and I was always surrounded by friends.

However, after my first year of high school, I made a big decision of going study abroad as an exchange student. When the plane landed in Texas, the first time I felt I got totally separated from my home, my family, and was completely out of my comfort zones. Anxiety dominated my heart. I was an outlander. I was excluded. I knew in my heart.

I was not accepted by the community. My broken English and my typical Chinese accent made it hard for me to communicate with others. Even I was brave enough to speak up, it was not a guarantee people will talk to me with patience and a welcoming generous heart without any prejudice. Making friends seemed to become a mission everyday. I tried to fake myself everyday to get attention and notice. To please other people, I became someone that was not me.

Cultural difference was a major gap between me and my “friends”. I laughed at jokes that I didn’t find funny at all. I was stressed and isolated inside, but I never showed. I never wanted my parents to get worried also, so I always told them everything was super great there. That was the same thing I was keep telling myself. My background was a major boundary for me to get attach to the society. Chinese culture was not appreciated there and we don’t own the respect we deserve. Most of the teenagers in Texas don’t know much about the outside world. They also don’t appreciate the culture diversity in the world. They treat someone from outside with insiders’ rude manner and weird eyes. They had their mind sets of China being defeated and weak. Even I didn’t want to admit, but certain “racists” did exist and their heart seem cold and unchangeable. They were always with arrogant eyes, saying “Americans are the best”. I ignored the emptiness I felt deeply inside my heart and didn’t care about some major mental break downs. I tried to be super strong in that environment and I never cried. I was disconnected with my so-called “friends” mentally. The loneliness I felt was deep and unspeakable.

However, things change a lot when I arrived LA. It’s a place where Chinese has made their dominance of the area. Chinese culture was perfectly combined with the local culture. People recognized Chinese as a powerful race that has strong economic background at home. The culture was fully embraced and worshiped. For the first time, I felt accepted by the American community, and I know it won’t be like this if it wasn’t the fast growth of Chinese’s economy in the recent years. It was also the first time I felt how a powerful country behind as a support will make me a much more confident person. I was getting accepted, because Chinese were getting rich and powerful now. I was proud.

Right now, I’m studying in New York, a city that is full of intelligent creative thinkers and open-minded people. Here, Chinese culture is embraced. Whenever I go to Chinatown, I see abundant shops with big Chinese letter flyers blowing in the wind and I feel proud. When I go to shops, American vendors say XieXie as thank you to show respect to me and my language. When I talk about different names of the cities in China, people immediately recognize them. When I go on iTunes, I can see songs made from the collaboration between Chinese and American artists. There are also Chinese films shown in AMC theaters to fulfill the need of the public for this typical culture genre. Memory sometimes flashes back. I recall a time, people used to judge Chinese as being weak and poor, and offensively squint their eyes in front of us. However, right now, we are being treated well and fair, equal and valued. Growing influence of Chinese culture makes Chinese people become much more interesting. People from all around the world right now want to talk to Chinese and be friends with them. We are becoming more and more powerful. We are being accepted.