

My relationship with China has been a cascade of opportunities that have presented themselves one after the other, and have come together quite serendipitously to lead me to where I am now.

Even before my enrollment at the University of Rhode Island, I had not even the slightest idea that my collegiate career would have shipped me half way across the world on two separate occasions before graduation. I didn't even apply to URI as an engineer, but upon hearing that my first degree choice had already been filled, I went with something that seemed similar while still allowing me to participate in the New England regional tuition plan.

After freshman year, I decided that engineering was something worth sticking with, as I was still unclear what my ultimate goal was to be. Then half way through sophomore year, I received a notice in the mail outlining a new summer study-abroad session in Hangzhou, China. I took notice, but didn't necessarily give it a second thought until my parents had offered to support my decision, both academically and fiscally, should I be interested. I was, and so that summer I was shipped out along with two-dozen other students and recent graduates to become the first, of the now annual, exchange at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou.

Coming away from that trip left me in awe. I was so smitten with almost everything about China, I was enthralled at the way people moved about each other, how deference was met with chaos and few people held their esteem above others in such a way that one became upset. The language was also intriguing, steeped in metaphor and context, thoroughly engaging and in many

ways hopelessly complex. I wanted more; I liked being unencumbered by certain social norms that exist in the United States, and I wanted to get closer to the root of what it is to be Chinese. If any of you have been to China, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about, though you may not have been as thrilled as I was.

Even after those six weeks during the summer of 2006, I was not ready to return home, and so during my junior year, another classmate and I were in constant contact with Dr. Grandin with the goal of returning to China the following year as the first participants in URI's fledgling Chinese division of the International Engineering Program. Also, during that year Al Verecchia of the Hasbro Company had donated a sizeable sum of money toward China-related studies at URI, and even gave me the opportunity to work at their facilities in Pawtucket, RI with the hopes of paralleling that work at their Far East division in Shenzhen the following year as part of the IEP program. So my classmate and I took the next two classes that followed in the path of Chinese studies, but due to the lack of essential of Chinese language skill, I must admit I was a little nervous about going to China with what I had acquired, but also figured that I would learn so much while being over there for a year. And I did.

Concerning my stint in Hangzhou, I can unequivocally state that Hangzhou is my favorite city that I have ever been to. As one of the richest cities in the richest province in China, and an old capital of the Southern Song Dynasty, Hangzhou is beautifully constructed and maintained, and at over 3 million people in the metropolitan area, has a great big-city feel. With proximity

to Shanghai, you're well connected with the rest of China should you want to do any cheap or major travel, yet within Hangzhou there is escape from the big city, and there are even places you can go where you can be alone. My classes were engaging and I met many friends from around the world, which allowed me to grow personally and academically by sharing unique experiences surrounded by such a foreign and dynamic setting.

Qingdao is decidedly different, though equally as enthralling and also a great city. It is situated across the Yellow Sea from South Korea and is north of Hangzhou, which gives it a much milder climate. Qingdao lacks much of the grand history that exists in Hangzhou, as Qingdao really got its kick-start around the early 1900s when the Germans re-established Qingdao as a strategic outpost, creating a brewery and church, in that order, to make this city home. Qingdao feels more like a Western big-city in many ways, with a lot of western architecture that still exists from the German establishment, over 100 years ago, and lacks much of the wacky modern architecture that peppers the skylines of Shanghai and Beijing. Qingdao was also a much more de-centralized city. I rode a bus with other co-workers for an hour to and from work everyday, and it took me at least 20 to 30 minutes to get into the city center, and another 30 minutes from there to get to the shopping district or to the beaches from my apartment. Living alone in a neighborhood where I was most certainly the only Western face definitely forced me to practice my survival language skills, and upped my basic fluency more than I could've imagined.

As for my work experience, to trace back a bit, the opportunity with Hasbro had fallen through, but Dr. Grandin aided me greatly in helping to quickly find another position for me to fill as part of the program. That salvation was found at the Pentair outpost in Qingdao, where I was sent to work as part of Mark Lamps' team of engineers under a fellow URI graduate named Eric Chen. Even though I was taken on under rushed circumstances, everybody at the factory was very helpful and allowed my language skill to grow even further. I worked in Qingdao for roughly 4 months, during which I learned more about the industrial aspect of engineering, which I was fairly unfamiliar with, and became good friends with many of my co-workers.

I also learned, mainly through observation and occasional blunder, an introduction to the subtle practices of Chinese professional interaction. Things like when to subside, what to expect from exchanges, what to thank people for, and how to behave in social settings where work is not involved, but roles are potentially on the line are all aspects that I had only read about. The *guanxi*, which is a mire-some Chinese business-relation quotient that illustrates your character as a businessman and not simply ability, is enough to make your head spin at times, but ultimately respect gets respect.

I was also able to partake in some travel while staying in China. I traveled to Beijing on a couple occasions, once during the October holiday, and once in the spring for an international Ultimate Frisbee tournament, as well as numerous outings in Shanghai, as it was only an hour and a half away by train. I also

accompanied some college-age Chinese friends of mine to the Yellow Mountains in Anhui, and Tai Shan, the birthplace of Confucious, north of Qingdao. I was on Chinese television in Huzhou for a Calligraphy competition (second place), and was an extra in a low budget movie as a German soldier in a place they called the Chinese Bollywood outside of Hangzhou. I even planned a big trip to Japan where I wandered around Tokyo and went skiing in Nagano for 2 weeks and it almost cost me everything I made while working in Qingdao. Though varied, I still wish to see the mountains of Xinjiang and Tibet, the banks of the Li river near Guilin, and the Gobi desert. But without living in China, I never would have been alerted to any of these places with the ability to act upon urges to visit them. I can safely say that I am eager to return someday soon.

Upon leaving China, though excited to return home to my friends and family, I was still thinking to what lay ahead in terms of my relationship with China. Currently I am very interested in pursuing my newfound interest in Chinese language and culture. The jobs I am now looking into would give me the opportunity to possibly become an ex-pat, or at the very least allow me extended stays for various purposes. I am also looking into a program new to URI, the Flagship program, which centers very heavily on China-related studies and accredits individuals with a very reputable language skill.

My future is, of course, still up in the air, but thanks to the opportunities given to me by the International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island, I do have focus and potential plans that are so much greater than anything I could have imagined entering college as a freshman. The things I have seen and the people I have met through this program are all extraordinarily enriching, even life changing, and it is all in thanks to Dr. John Grandin and this program. *Thank You*