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Person to Person in China

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Cody Agee

China—April 30, 2013

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in China

I chose to interview my roommate, who was a professor at the institution that I studied at. Just a brief introduction, I studied at Peking University in Beijing, China for the spring semester, where I solely studied with the goal to improve my Chinese in all aspects, including reading, writing, and listening. The lifestyle of a Chinese person contrasts greatly compared against that of a westerner. The single greatest difference between a Chinese person and a westerner is how they value friendship. The definition of friendship is entirely different. In the U.S, you meet a person and view them as your friend. However you may not talk to them for months or even years, before coming in contact with them again. But you still consider each other friends. In China, once you are a friend, it is generally held that you often stay in contact with each other very often. Otherwise you are viewed as weird.

There are both similarities and differences between the east and west. How others view you through material wealth is becoming more and more important. Residing in Beijing where there is an astounding amount of economic growth, the desire for material goods is evident. The model car you drive is one of the most important pieces of many Chinese people's lives. They may spend up to 50% or more of their wealth just to purchase a car. Americans are very similar in that they judge other people based on their material wealth. A difference in culture is evident in Chinese social culture. Chinese don't understand why Americans have a significant other for a short period of time, and then move on. They believe that once you begin a relationship, there

is an expectation to marry. Socially there is a big gap between Chinese and American culture.

Most of my interview was just reiterating what I already learned from being in China. But overall, I learned so much about China from aspects ranging from government to societal norms. I do have a different perception of our world after my experience. Just knowing there are different people and cultures with entirely different motives, goals, and ideas is amazing.

Interview: Lixin Meng (Associate Professor of Chinese, Peking University)