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Journals from American University Center of Provence, France

2010-10-17 Study day



Studying at the Book in Bar

Aix, October 16th 2010

It has been a peaceful Saturday. All libraries are closed during the weekend; there is no field trip today either. It was hard to study at home by myself right on my comfy bed. Luckily, one of the girls texted me so we came to the Book in Bar, an English coffee bookstore, to study together. The place was quite nice, and their tea is amazing. I love the English tea, but I have heard the Italian one is super delicious as well.

I really like the people here at AUCP. They are all sweet, smart, but special in different ways. I personally think that it is such a privilege to be with them. We always have so many interesting discussions about cultures, languages, and life in general which fascinate me all the time.

According to my friends, my case is absolutely remarkable as I am a Vietnamese who has entered French culture under the American identity. They told me they count me as one of them so they even forgot that I am not American sometimes. My host mom introduces me to

everyone by saying that I come from the U.S. My volunteering job, my club activity, library, and bus office assume that I am an American since I am a student from the American Center. And even all the Vietnamese people I talk to know me as a girl from America. Oh yeah! I am enjoying it every moment.

I personally think that people here like Americans a lot, although I have heard that French and Americans do not get along very well. My host mom even told me that she would like to be an American her next life as she loves all the American shows. And French students want to be friends with me immediately when they know that I am from the U.S.

At the same time, I recognize there is a huge difference between the two cultures. Because I encountered with American culture during my adolescent period, I find myself being more familiar with American culture than my own culture. For example, I was seriously freaked out when my host mom took my clothes and washed them without my permission, I noticed that people on the street looked at me like an alien when I went to the public library in my sweatpants and flip-flops, and one of the students at my volunteering job turned sideways to evade my hand while I was just trying to give a Hi Five.

According to history, French culture has had quite a big impact on Vietnamese culture. Our language, traditional costumes, architecture and even cuisine are influenced by French colonizers. I feel that I understand my culture better as I am learning about French culture here. The more I learn about it, the more I realized the value of my education in the U.S. for me.

It takes me a couple seconds to explain my culture shocks with French people. After that, I would realize that those things are absolutely normal back when I was in Vietnam, which was just two years ago. It was when I knew my mom was naturally the one doing all the laundry, when my uncle was mad at me because I wore shorts to a family reunion, and when I was teaching my little cousins the Hi Five and telling my guy friends to get over their shyness as I wanted to give each of them a goodbye hug.

I truly agree that it is a cool thing to be an American. But it was just the introduction. My favorite part is when they asked my origin. Of course, all the French people I met asked me if I was Chinese. But that is understandable, because a Chinese salesman at the market started speaking in Chinese to me right away when I came to his shop. Luckily, I know enough Chinese to tell him that I am not Chinese and he gave me a pair of types with dots on it for free after our little conversation, which made my day. It was also kind of funny when a super nice Vietnamese friend I ran into this afternoon gave me a compliment by saying why I am also Vietnamese but my skin color is so light. I told her it was just because I got pale from being freezing, but she did not take that answer and told me that I looked Chinese. Okay...!

I actually do not mind being looked at as Chinese at all. I always have fun when people trying to guess my origin. I have only had two people get it right and none of them are Vietnamese. Even when the Vietnamese ones know that I am also Vietnamese, they could not guess which part of the country I come from. The first thing my 'coup de foudre' asked me was if I was French with

Vietnamese origin while I tried to talk to him in Vietnamese. No and yes, I am a hundred percent Vietnamese although I may sound like a foreigner when I speak Vietnamese.

There is a very interesting point I have learned from my French assistant who is also crazy about languages. Different languages require different uses of different muscles of our mouth. Therefore, when we learn a new language, the sound of our first one will change naturally. If I were majoring in linguistics, I would totally write my thesis about this.

Anyway, I think it is really cool to have an American identity. It is nice to be seen as a Chinese, and I am always happy to tell people that I am Vietnamese and listen to their responses. I have got a lot of nice compliments from the French people such as Vietnamese girls are gentle and beautiful, that there are a lot of Vietnamese people here in Aix, that my Chinese is really good, that I speak French really well, or I also speak English just a little bit. And after a while they would suddenly roll their eyes at me asking why I am learning so many languages. It's simply because I know I will have all the wonderful experiences like the one am having right now.

That is all about me, so here is the news: the strike in France right now about the retirement is huge. President Sarkozy changed it to 65 instead of 60 years old and French people are not happy about that at all. Thousands of people are on the street everywhere during the day. The high school kids burned the trashcan in the middle of the street so my bus drops us off fifteen minutes away from where it is supposed to be. Luckily, I love walking through town. We can watch the strike go by through our classroom windows so I always have my camera ready. Many trains got cancelled and people wait in long lines to get gas before they are all closed. Look at the bright side: nobody here cares about the terrorist warning anymore and my language partner has time to see me because her professor is on strike, too. This is the best experience ever.

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