

Exploring China, Studying China

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After being asked to write this article on my time at East China Normal University for 留学丽娃 I struggled to figure out what to write about. It is not that I didn't do very much at ECNU, in fact I feel almost as though I did too much! How would I summarize in some form of coherent article the opportunity to take Chinese studies and Chinese language classes with students from around the world as a part of the Global China Program (GCP), the chance to work with Chinese and other international students on the first semester of the Global Business Project (GBP), my experiences outside the classroom living in and exploring Shanghai, and all the new friends I made along the way? Then it struck me, one of my favorite things about my time at East China Normal was how it felt like everything, in the classroom and outside, both curricular and extracurricular, tied neatly together.

Shortly after my arrival in Shanghai I attempted to buy some pastries for lunch at TESCO in the Global Harbor Mall by ECNU's Zhongbei (中北) campus. Little did I know that the lady at the pastry counter would be the proctor for my first Chinese test of the academic year, a test I unfortunately failed. After what felt like an eternity going back and forth with the lady at the counter and a Chinese shopper trying to help the confused foreigner (老外), I finally understood that they were trying to tell me to buy three pastries, since three pastries cost the same as one. I promised myself I would never buy bread in China again, a promise I did not end up keeping.

Thanks in part to my Oral Chinese Language class at ECNU and my new Chinese friends, I am now able to successfully order food for myself in Chinese by name. I can now enjoy potato and beef noodles (土豆牛肉面) and soy sauce braised fresh beef noodles (红烧牛肉拉面) at the Hui Muslim owned noodle place across from the main gate or spicy tofu (辣豆腐) from a street vendor without just pointing at what I want. Shortly after ordering the tofu, my Issues in Contemporary Chinese Society class discussed street vendors in Chinese cities and they relate to migration and regulation. We also discussed minority peoples, like the Hui people, and their role in China.

My experiences off ECNU's campus went beyond the short walk to the noodle place. I got to visit the SAIC-Volkswagen plant in Shanghai with my China's Macroeconomic Impact class. While I would find visiting a car plant to see how human workers and robots work together to build new vehicles interesting enough, I found it even more interesting because of my GBP group's case study and my Globalization & Urbanization final paper. Even though my GBP group's case study was not on Volkswagen in China, it was on Tesla Motors in China, I still found it useful to help me better understand the SAIC-Volkswagen plant. As part of my general research for the case study, I got to look up the rules surrounding foreign auto manufacturers in China, particularly the rules forcing foreign auto companies, like Volkswagen, to form a joint-venture with a Chinese car company, like SAIC, to be permitted to make cars in China. For my Globalization & Urbanization final on Chinese copycats I did some research on how Chinese copying affects the automotive industry, a problem that foreign firms in China, like Volkswagen, face regularly when they tried to bring their new models into the country.

While I could continue talking about how my class work, fun, and extracurriculars at ECNU all connect, all writing must end somewhere. Part of the point of study abroad is to see things from a different perspective so that you can better understand them, something I felt East China Normal did very well. I feel like getting a chance to study China from many different viewpoints while at the same time getting to live there has helped me understand one of the world's most important countries better. I also feel that being able to study Chinese in China has helped my language skills immensely. I am very happy that I chose to study abroad at East China Normal University in Shanghai.