

Interview with a tourist



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Interview with a Tourist For this project, I decided to interview an exchange student who is in a couple of my classes. I knew that Julie was from an Asian country of some sort, but I did not know which one. The first question that I asked was “what is your home country?” I did not realize it at the time, but I used her English name Julie because that is all I knew. When she responded, she told me that she was studying here for one semester and had come from China. She also corrected her name and told me that her Chinese name was actually Qiu. The reason why she adopted an English name is so everyone would be able to pronounce her name. She had thought about keeping her Chinese name in the United States, but other students that had studied abroad advised her that she should take on an English name to make life easier.

Qiu told me that although she studied English when she was younger, she did not feel comfortable speaking it out loud. The main language that she spoke at home was Mandarin. No one else in her home spoke English, so the only time that she ever heard it was at school a couple of times a week.

When I asked Qiu about common gestures in her culture, she told me that Chinese culture has many signs and symbols that may seem strange to an outsider. A lot of communication is nonverbal where hints have to be picked up from the way the other person uses hand signals and facial expressions. Qiu said that she was a little perplexed when she came to the United States because most people talked very loud and did not use many hand gestures. I also asked Qiu about how she felt that the American people had treated her during her stay here. She told me of some incidents in her first few weeks here that made her regret her decision to study abroad. Name calling and insults from people on the street really stressed her out. Since that time, Qiu

now believes that most Americans are welcoming of people of other cultures and will go out of their way to make sure that they are okay. The negative incidents that she told me she described as coming from a few bad apples and not representative of the American people at all.

One thing that I did not ask her, but that she brought up during general conversation, was the way in which Americans dress. Qiu told me that Chinese people dressed rather conservatively and considered it shameful to be underdressed or show any unnecessary skin. When she came to America, she was shocked to discover that university students could wear such informal dress. In China attending university was considered an honor, so almost every student wore smart dress to class.

The final question that I asked Qiu was about what she thought of Chinese culture now that she had experienced another culture and also what, if any, culture shock would she experience when she returns. Qiu replied that her views on Chinese culture had changed considerably because she is now able to see weaknesses in Chinese culture that she was not able to see before. When she returns back to China, she is expecting to take a short time to readjust because everything will have changed.