

I eat rice, play ping-pong with my father, and wear red to celebrate every Lunar New Year. I eat cheeseburgers, watch football with friends, and make a tradition of watching the New York Ball Drop. Every single day, aspects of the Chinese and American cultures combine to form the life I happily call my own. Yet this fusion means so much more than just the outward differences I have mentioned.

For the 1,445,400 minutes I have spent in high school, I have strived to work with the passion and creativity that my teachers encourage, while valuing the discipline and perseverance that my parents believe will take anyone far. Growing up between two cultures has been difficult, especially when Chinese and American values at times seem mutually exclusive. Academics versus extracurriculars, order versus innovation, conformity versus individualism.

Over time, however, these differences have become a blessing. My outlook on what it takes to be successful in a world of constant globalization has benefited immensely – during every turning point in my life, I have pitted Western and Eastern doctrines against each other while struggling to make a choice. Each time, I have gained a clearer idea of how to apply myself in any situation.

This is where an educational tour to China comes into play. As I endeavor to improve myself in school, I largely employ the work ethic that my parents bestowed upon me. Nowadays, however, we live in exponential times. Cross-cultural exchange is not merely “exchange” anymore – it is sharing. Though the United States, China, and India will always retain their unique identities, the beliefs of each country have rubbed off on the others. 10 days offers me enough time to examine the opinions and convictions of people my age living in other nations. I hope that through our exchanges, I can see how Chinese and Indian students view themselves and their role as the next generation to take a stand in the world. Have their traditional values changed at all, during the recent industrialization they have directly witnessed?

I also hope that meeting these like-minded students will prove equally fascinating for them. As someone born in the United States, who has nonetheless kept in touch with the implications of her Chinese heritage, I have always hoped to embody the aspects of my two cultures equally. I hope to explain to these students I meet how I have managed to strike this balance, and in the process gain even deeper

insight about myself.

The preview of the documentary 2 Million Minutes left me in awe. My vision of what I want to accomplish for EF Educational Tours if given the Global Citizen Scholarship has become much more focused. When Vivek Wadhwa of Duke University remarked in the video that “Americans aren’t globally aware,” adding that “they’re more worried about what’s happening in their community than they are in the world”, I understood the unpleasant truth he was illustrating. Communication between all nations is vital today, and the key to achievement lies not only in improving one’s own country, but also in being connected to others.

In fact, my ultimate dream once I attend a university and go on to pursue a career is helping to improve relations and understanding among people of different nationalities. I have already decided that my biggest career goal is to act as a bridge between the East and West, in whatever way possible. I keep up with international news daily, and wish to become deeply involved with diplomacy someday. In anticipation of this future vocation, I am quadrilingual. English is my primary language, I am fluent in Chinese, I have a strong proficiency in Spanish after studying it for the last 5 years, and lastly, I have a basic knowledge of Japanese. I have steadily developed my skills and passion in all four languages for the last 16 years.

This tour would have such a positive impact on my personal and academic growth, and I would contribute all I am capable of to the program. My whole life, I have upheld a “Chinese” work ethic, yet I cannot help but sometimes feel out of touch with Asian culture. Because I was born in the United States, my primary experiences have happened here. The emphasis I put on Chinese values such as discipline and self-respect are not inherently ingrained in me; rather, they are qualities that I have come to appreciate, ones I have developed thoroughly over time. My parents haven’t lived in China for almost 30 years, so what they pass on to me is not necessarily embedded in China’s current psyche. This tour would bring me into direct contact with students who participate in the Chinese educational system regularly, and they would surely provide scholarship recipients with valuable insight. How do they feel about their educational standards? How do they think they compare to the U.S.? Has the system changed since China has emerged as a dominant economic player? I have a

strong intellectual curiosity, and the answers to these questions would enhance my critical thinking skills in the international context.

Being in the company of students who are similar yet so different will definitely enhance my communication skills. I will be an attentive friend to whomever I meet, but at the same time I will demonstrate my own views. I believe that this unique multicultural opportunity also opens the door to exercising leadership traits. We would all need to improve the ability to show others what matters to us. As Theodore Hesburgh once said, “The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision.” I have a vision of international reciprocity, global communication, and deeply rooted cosmopolitanism. I hope that during this tour, my fellow students and I will create an environment of camaraderie and understanding that is highly conducive to these goals.

As a result, this scholarship would provide me with a wealth of career opportunities in the future. Besides ensuring that I maintain a high level of academic achievement, I participate in a handful of activities outside of class that prepare me for the international relations major I plan to pursue. I am President of the Richard Montgomery High School Spanish Honor Society, and this year I have spearheaded various projects for community outreach, cultural immersion, and language fluency. I also am an active senior member of my school’s Model United Nations delegation, and I attend the North American Invitational Model UN Conference each year. During these conferences, I simulate a country and work with other students to negotiate and pass resolutions dealing with timely global issues. Additionally, I serve as the Master of Ceremonies for a multicultural performance that my school shows the student body. It is called the Common Ground Assembly, and I have helped coordinate the show for 2 consecutive years.

Outside of these experiences, I nurture my great love for public speaking. This year, I held the best record on my school’s award-winning Lincoln-Douglas Debate Team. I coach many teammates, and will be Team Captain next year. I also won 1st place at a Persuasive Oratory Competition last month. Lastly, I have been working for Congressman Chris Van Hollen since I was 12, and have steadily developed my deep interest in politics. Though during these 4 years I have acted locally with Representative Van Hollen, I have thought globally.



*Educational
Tours*

Melissa Y.
Richard Montgomery High School
Clarksburg, MD

Global Citizen winning essay

eftours.com/globalcitizen

Thus, by combining a love of culture, a passion for speech and negotiation, and a dedication to governmental progress, I believe I have already pinpointed what I want to do in life. A career in international relations offers me a chance to help others and be fulfilled, and it is a vocation that I couldn't look forward to more. It would be an invaluable blessing if I went on this tour to China. My bicultural background leaves me uniquely fitted for this opportunity: though I have much to learn about my homeland, at least I have a natural connection to it that will aid my 10-day study abroad. Also, because the program is specifically tailored to students who strive to be effective global citizens, the educational opportunities would be fantastic considering my chosen career path. I promise EF Educational Tours that its goal for the scholarship recipients would certainly be satisfied.

It is so important to experience things firsthand. By touring China, I will not only be hearing about the Eastern culture (which has almost always been the case) – I will be feeling it, and living in it!! I hope to bring to life the lessons that my parents have taught me back at home, and then return to the United States with an appreciation for the experience that I will keep with me forever after. The power of 14,000 minutes to change a life cannot to be underestimated. I have a firm faith that my personal connection to China and desire to understand this distant homeland better will allow me to take the most out of this tour. Those 14,000 minutes will go far.