



Marianne Williamson, an American author and lecturer, once said, “Personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, so goes the world, for the world is us. The revolution that will save the world is ultimately a personal one.” The world of today requires global awareness, but with such large-scale thinking, it becomes easy to forget that it is 6,692,030,277 unique individuals that make up the world today. 6,692,030,277 people that get up every morning, complete their respective tasks, and go to bed every night. The world consists of 6,692,030,277 global citizens whose personal transformations have global effects, and I believe I am one of the global populace whose personal transformation would definitely produce a positive and progressive international ripple. Spending 14,000 minutes of my existence in China would give me the opportunity to undergo a personal transformation to improve my communication skills, especially in Mandarin, and lead me on the path to become a global citizen as well as a cultural critical thinker.

China has always been a country that has thoroughly intrigued me. The culture, traditions, and Chinese way of life have always held a mystifying charm, which is part of the reason I was so adamant about learning Mandarin. Through my previous Mandarin teachers, I have learned bits and pieces about Chinese culture through their teachings but I have not come close to ascertaining what life in China is like. Being able to immerse myself in Chinese culture would give me the opportunity to gain a genuine, authentic understanding of Chinese culture by witnessing it firsthand. It would also grant me a chance to apply my conversational Mandarin and allow me to cross cultural borders of communication to explore a society different from mine.

Through my global interactions I have realized that Americans are only concerned with American affairs. This is a broad generalization, but it holds true. This is not to say that many Americans aren't globally minded, but as a whole, American society is very focused on what is happening between the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean, no more and no less. Often times, that mindset leads to intolerance because of lack of global exposure. The direct result of being “American-centric” is prejudices toward other cultures, ways of thinking, and lifestyles. High Tech High International is one of the very few schools that not only promotes global tolerance, but also expects it from each and every student. By going to China, I would be able to understand the culture, people, and society to appreciate the differences, and put the skills I have acquired throughout my years at HTHI to practical use. When I come



back, I will not be contributor to the “American-centric” ideals but a proponent of global understanding and appreciation.

The most important thing that I have learned from my years exposed to the global community is that every action or event has a distinct purpose. The world consists of causal relationships and this premature realization has led me to filter everything I see through a critical lens. I am constantly asking myself why something happens? What historical, social, political, or economic event in the past influenced this specific action? How did culture contribute to this decision or outlook? Because these questions are always present in my mind, I make a conscious effort not to dismiss an action, like eating a strange food, as something distasteful, but rather as a cultural nuance that occurred because of a cause. To simply write off this tradition as uncivilized would undermine the core principles that I have been taught through my upbringing and formal education. Through my experiences in China, I would be able to share my views and hone my critical thinking skills by making sure that I do not become a person who judges but rather a person explores reason and makes logical, unbiased conclusions.

As cultures vary across the globe, leadership varies too. Leadership is plainly put as the act of leading. It requires motivation and inspiration. How can a leader effectively guide a group without understanding their culture, motives, or lifestyles? If a leader’s job is to inspire, how can he or she inspire without knowing what is inspirational? They cannot, therefore leadership, much like food, clothing, and language, is cultural. In my community, I consider myself a leader. I have founded many social activist groups at school and continually provide support for these groups to flourish. In China, the leadership style will be completely different from anything I have encountered before because of the stark cultural contrast. I would be thrilled to have the opportunity to witness and learn from a new leadership style. Having this knowledge would equip me with leadership skills, as I would be aware of the cultural adaptations to leadership necessary to lead in a foreign country, such as China.

In the documentary, “2 Million Minutes,” the filmmakers chronicle the lives of 2 American, Indian, and Chinese students throughout his or her high school high school experience. After watching the short clip provided by EF, it became clear that that culture does guide attitude. Ruizhang, who was a



*Educational  
Tours*

Rishika D.  
High Tech High International  
San Diego, CA

Global Citizen winning essay

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student in China studied every day, was naturally bright and had an intrinsic number sense, yet didn't get into the higher education institution of his choice because he was not in the top one percentile, regardless of his persistent studying. On the other hand, the American student, Neil, didn't study astutely and had no determination, yet got a full scholarship to Purdue University because he scored well on his PSAT. This further pushes my desire to go to China because I want understand the student culture driven by the Chinese society that is incomprehensible to an American student, such as myself.

As I only have about 600,000 minutes left of high school, I often get asked what I want to be when I "grow up." My consistent answer is I have no idea because if I did, it would mean that I was done learning and exploring and I hope that never happens. With that said, I am considering doing a double major in political science and international business in college, and then possibly get my MBA, law degree, or both and see what path that leads me down. As China is now the hub of international business in the eastern world, having exposure to the culture, environment, and business in Asia could affirm or completely realign my passions. A trip to China could yield an opportunity to make business contacts or academic contacts for the near future. But more importantly, a trip to China yields the opportunity for cross-cultural interaction in a global age and the chance to truly understand a distinctive culture. If I am afforded this personal transformation in the form of cross-cultural interaction, I will use my experience to become a catalyst of change in not only my current community but in all my future life endeavors.