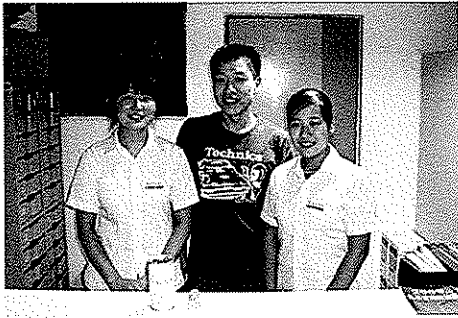


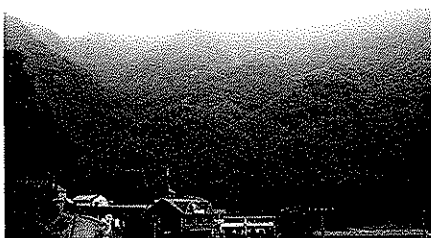
## Summer Abroad: NU IPD-China: Emerging Legal and Economic Structures



*XianXian, Ben, and HanYing, front desk attendants at Tsinghua's international students' dorm.*

The Chinese government really hates swine flu. That's the lesson that I learned when my roommate and four other Northwestern students were quarantined for a week shortly after landing in Beijing because several people on their flight showed symptoms of the H1N1 virus. It was not the most auspicious start to my eight weeks long summer study abroad program at Beijing's Tsinghua University. Thankfully, it wasn't a premonition of things to come. It's cliché to say that studying abroad is a life-changing experience, but the truth is that it can and often does change your whole outlook on life. I was born in China and had gone back there to visit before, but it was never without my parents and never for such a prolonged period of time. I didn't know what to expect when I left for Beijing last June. What I got was one of the best summers of my life.

For almost a decade now, the Northwestern Office of International Development has been offering the China Emerging Legal and Economic Structures (ELES) program to students interested in learning about China's politics, economy, and culture. Given my



*Village of Shishe in Zhejiang Province*

personal connections with China and the fact that I am a Political Science and International Studies major, this program suited me very well. Along with approximately fifty other Northwestern students and several students from other universities, I lived and studied at Tsinghua University for two months.

The program consisted of language courses

in the mornings and subject courses in the afternoons. The language classes were geared towards all levels of students ranging from first-time learners to fluent speakers and were divided into several tiers so that they accommodated all proficiency levels. As a native speaker who has trouble reading and writing Chinese characters, I was placed in the second highest level. Students also chose to attend either the ELES class or China Public Health class, in which students learn about traditional Chinese medicine and China's public health system. The ELES class, which I took, was divided into two segments. The first part, taught by a Northwestern political science professor, focused on the history of the

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Chinese Communist Party, while the second part, taught by a Tsinghua professor, dealt with China's political economy. The classes were augmented with field trips to relevant historical sites, such as the People's Revolution Military Museum and the mansion of the widow of Sun Yat-sen, an icon of modern Chinese history. We also had guest lecturers, including a Party official who, surprisingly, answered a number of tough questions regarding the prospects of democracy in China. The content of the classes were fairly straight-forward and could have been taught at Northwestern just as well, but living in the country that we were studying created a more immersive learning experience. For example, on the first day of class, we discovered a hidden camera in our classroom, and our professor half-jokingly suggested that Party officials could be monitoring his lectures. We were also told to be careful about openly discussing taboo topics such as the Three T's of Tiananmen, Taiwan, and Tibet, even while in class. This impressed upon us the degree of control the state still holds over Chinese society.

Classes were typically over by 4 PM, which gave us plenty of opportunity to explore Beijing. While our classes were informative and interesting, these trips into the city really made the experience awesome. No city in China better reflects the country's rapid development and striking contrasts than does Beijing. The city had everything, ranging from ancient Buddhist temples to trendy nightclubs, illegal street markets to name-brand luxury stores. One minute, I would be exploring the narrow alleyways of one of the Beijing's

surviving hutongs (traditional neighborhoods made up of mazes of narrow alleys or streets, some of which date back to the Ming dynasty), and the next, I would find myself at a bustling intersection surrounded by hypermodern skyscrapers.

After the program was over, I stayed in China by myself for another three weeks to do internships and visit relatives. Losing the crutch of having fifty fellow Northwestern students for support was a little intimidating, but exhilarating as well. Everything from buying dinner to travelling on an overnight train felt like a min-adventure when I had to do it alone. Through family connections, I

had the opportunity to shadow an executive at a technology corporation and a judge at an appeals court. They taught me about what it takes to do business in China and how to maneuver the Chinese legal system (hint: they both involve a lot of bribery). I also visited my grandparents at their village and participated in a traditional fengshui ceremony for the groundbreaking of their new house. These and many other experiences that I had over the summer were not strictly academic, but they taught me a great deal about Chinese culture and society. Living in and traveling around China gave me a chance to connect with the country of my birth deeper than ever before. At the same time, it instilled in me an appreciation for how lucky I am to have grown up in America. I may not have had a single life-changing watershed moment while in China, but I can confidently say that studying abroad was one of the most important and enjoyable experiences of my life.

~ Benjamin Zhu  
International Studies & Poli Sci (WCAS '11)



*Ben's grandparents' new home*