Leaving home to experience what China is truly like

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By Zhou Wenting in Shanghai |   
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Louis Demetroulakos was a top graduate from Boston's Milton Academy, one of the most prestigious private boarding schools in the United States. People in his shoes would usually go on to study in an Ivy League university before securing a job with a high profile company.  
But Demetroulakos had other ideas — he wanted to study in China instead.  
The 21-year-old said he first developed an interest in China during high school when he took a class on the history of modern China. What he read on the news left him even more intrigued.  
"The media in the US was always saying something bad about China, like how there's an economic slowdown and how the country is not innovative, but my teacher and classmates from China painted a different story. I knew I had to go and experience it for myself," said Demetroulakos.  
He then applied and was admitted to New York University Shanghai (NYU Shanghai), the first ever Sino-US joint university, majoring in global China studies.  
To assuage his parents' fears of him leaving home for a "big, scary country far away", Demetroulakos penned them a letter to explain his decision. He wrote that while he thought the US was experiencing stable development, China was developing at an incredible pace.  
"There is an amazing energy in this city that is hard to find in other places in the world," said Demetroulakos, who will graduate from NYU Shanghai later this month.  
Living in the city has also showed him a side of the Chinese that has left him impressed.  
"My smart and diligent Chinese classmates are filial and obedient to their parents and grandparents, which is rare in Western families," he said.  
Demetroulakos said the timing of his studies in China was perfect as the country is now transitioning from a traditional infrastructure-based economy to a consumption and service-based economy which is healthier and more sustainable.  
"Every day I try to put myself in a position where I can experience this growth firsthand and actually contribute to the Chinese economy in a small way but still feel like I am involved," he said.  
"Sino-US relations will continue to grow in importance in the coming decade. I look forward to taking on responsibility to help both sides mutually benefit."  
He chose to study in Tel Aviv, Israel, the world's high-tech capital, for a semester during his time at NYU Shanghai. The experience further reaffirmed his belief that China will be the next global hub for technological innovation.  
"You only have to look at your phone. WeChat is a miracle — you can do everything with it, from getting a taxi to booking a vacation to ordering food and communicating with co-workers," he said.  
"This is an example of how efficient things are in this country. China is all about synergy."  
Demetroulakos, who speaks Chinese and Greek, will work as a business development manager at the Shanghai office of Hellas Group, an Athens-based company that provides Greek products and experiences to people in other countries.  
"We have strategic businesses focusing on leveraging the Belt and Road Initiative to promote health, happiness and wellness. It is a meaningful job and I'm quite excited to be bridging the two cultures," he said.  
Looking back, Demetroulakos said the decision to study in China is the best he has made in life. Studying here, he added, has allowed him to critically evaluate the positive and negative things he has heard about the country.  
"I'm thankful for this life-changing education because without it I may still have those pre-conceived ideas about China. I now feel like I am ready to be a global leader, but one who will be involved with China for the rest of my life," he said.  
"I have even told my high school classmates to come join me in China. I believe some will heed my advice."  
 

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