Hai Xu

ENGL 093

Paper #1

My Experience of Living in American Culture

I still remember the day when I first set foot on America. It was sunny, and the wind in Chicago awakened my tired body and mind. I realized that my new life had started.

Upon landing, the feeling of nervousness was immediately followed by excitement. With the feeling of freshness, I spent some time observing the environment and people around me. Men and women with different skin colors, speaking English or other foreign languages, were passing by. That was a picture I never saw in China. After spending some time living here, the freshness went away but I started to see something more that’s different underneath that picture. That is the culture.

The first difference I noticed is the way people treat strangers. People I met were very friendly and polite. When I walked down the street, strangers would greet me with smile or saying hello. People held the door for the next one following up. In 2016, I was at the state fair in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I just walked out of a tent, waiting for my friend. A tall man came towards me raising his right hand. The first thought I had was that he was going to harm me. When I was frozen there, terrified, my friend came out and saw both the man and me. He just raised his hand as well and gave that man a five. Then I realized I totally misunderstood that guy. He was just trying to be fine and show his enthusiasm. That was an awkward moment. But after that, I started to greet others when they were greeting me. I held the door for people after me. And even more, I tried to not just passively receive others’ enthusiasm, I also proactively expressed my kindness.

Tips come as the second difference. In China, we don’t have the culture of giving tips. Here, each time after I finish my meal, I have to make some effort to calculate the percentages so I can pay the proper number of tips. It’s definitely not a good experience. But gradually I realized that tips are the evaluation of the service quality. Tips are also the main source of income of the service persons. Giving tips actually benefit both sides. I learnt to give tips whenever I received services from others. I remembered spending a few days in Las Vegas in 2016. When I checked in, I gave the front desk receptionist some tips as my friend suggested. She was very happy and helped us arrange a suite with a beautiful mountain view. That was a positive experience of giving tips.

Last, I want to write about food. It’s the most difficult part to get used to. At the beginning, I had meals in American restaurants. I found American food tends to be oily and contains too many calories. I couldn’t get used to this kind of food. Then I went to some Chinese restaurants here. However, the food there was not the same as what I expected. They were changed to appeal to Americans’ taste. Though I found some authentic Chinese restaurants, I still learnt to cook at home because they are expensive and not as delicious as in China.

All above are some experiences I went through during living here. My understandings of the differences are based on my observations and can be incomplete. But as life goes on, I’ll have a deeper understanding of the American culture. I’ll try to get used to these changes and find the balance of the two cultures.