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27 November 2012

To whom it may concern:

This is a letter of recommendation for **Luyao Zhang** (Ashley). I know Ms. Zhang because she was a student of mine in three classes (Frontiers of Psychology, Data Analysis Using R, and Academic Writing) over three years.

She attended high school in Jiangsu Province. She was one of a tiny number of students in her home town (Nanjing, population 8 million) to be admitted to Tsinghua, one of top two colleges in China, based on test scores. This was such a great accomplishment that when her letter of acceptance to Tsinghua arrived at her house, there were twenty journalists gathered there, alerted by the post office. (One journalist, working for a TV station, asked her to say something to those who failed.) A month later there was a full-page profile of her in Nanjing’s largest newspaper.

In my Frontiers class, she impressed me because her English was unusually good. (Her TOEFL score is 117 out of 120.) At one point, it turned out that she knew what “cold call” (= unsolicited sales call) meant. None of the other students did. The term was in the assigned reading. It turned out she had looked it up. I suppose she was the only student who looked it up.

She did especially well in my data analysis class, which was optional rather than required. She challenged herself by choosing a new dataset to analyze each week, in contrast to other students who stuck with a single dataset. After my class, she used R (her choice) to analyze data in research that she did with another professor – which shows she got comfortable using R.

She has had an unusually large amount of research experience. In her third year, she acted as an interviewer in a project surveying Beijing families all around the city. It was a difficult project because people were reluctant to open their doors. In her fourth year, she began a cognitive psychology research project that measured switching of visual bistable images and speed of processing (e.g., reaction time measurements). She has been working on this project more than a year. Also in her fourth year, she worked as a research assistant (e.g., recruiting participants) in a study of the emotion evoked by a video clip. In her fifth year, she is working on a project developing a psychological scales app for smartphones.

She has taken a class in Management Psychology, which has given her an understanding of some of the main issues in Industrial/Organizational Psychology.

Her within-major class rank, based on all of her classes, is #4 out of 21 psychology majors. Given the enormous difficulty of getting into Tsinghua University, this is extremely good performance.

Sincerely,

Seth Roberts

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