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Person to Person in China

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Field Notes From Abroad: Person to Person in China

The lifestyle in China has several distinct differences from back home in the Philippines, or even in the United States. First of all, and possibly the most immediately prominent, is the fact that Facebook is banned in China. There isn't much freedom of speech here, and it's especially interesting that privately owned social media sites simply cannot be found. China has its own version of Facebook, called "Ren ren" (translated it is two identical characters that mean "people") but I've heard stories of censorship that I've never heard of happening anywhere else. For example, one of my professors in an online response tried typing in the Chinese characters for "Tiananmen Square" and when she published her answer they were transformed into the star characters. She then tried to type in the pinyin and it was still deleted. Another difference is the importance of connections. It seems that in China, working hard is simply not enough to get a promotion without the right connections. Another thing that surprised me about the culture in China is that one of the most popular TV genres is hairstyle modeling.

Despite the small differences, however, I found it relatively easy to get used to China and all its mannerisms. Truth be told, the air here is polluted, but the streets are relatively clean. The people are friendly and I had no trouble at all adjusting to the food. It was as if I'd been eating it my whole life. The trick is to just try what looks good, and I discovered a lot of my favorite foods that way. Another really interesting value is that in the Philippines, being slim is valued, but in China it's valued even more. In the States, I feel that some guys don't like it when a girl is too thin, but in the Philippines and China it's almost never an issue. Another cultural difference I noted between China that is different from The Philippines and America is the public transportation culture. On the West Coast, at least, there is relatively little public transportation, and in the Philippines it's not common

either. But in Beijing it's practically my life, along with most of the other Chinese population. To get anywhere you want, you either walk, take the subway, take a bus, or ride a taxi. It's amazing.

I used to be wary of going to China because I thought I would be discriminated for being Chinese but not knowing Chinese, or that people would be rude, rules wouldn't be followed, and it would be dirty. But the people are nice, and the longer I stay in China the more I like it. Even though there's no such thing as an orderly line here (there are lines though! It hasn't been too big of an issue so far), the people are decent and there isn't any major need for rules such as "no guns" because there aren't any guns allowed in China anyway. The most important rule I've seen in China would probably be "no begging" in the subway stops, and that is generally followed.

I interviewed Bob Zheng, who lives on the boys' floor of our dormitory. His family lives in Beijing and he grew up here. I interviewed him on October 22, 2011.