

The Half-year Vacation

Looking back to my life to see who I am, where my identity lies and what has influenced my spirit, I found it hard for me to ignore the half-year vacation I had just before my coming here. Then I realized this does not only happen to me, but also some other international students. However, the influences are never same since we spent the time in totally different ways.

The background of the half-year vacation is essential for you to understand the magic of time behind the simple "vacation". Even though nowadays more and more Chinese high-school students choose to study abroad in university, they are still a special students group. At least in one aspect, they are different from other Chinese high-school students who have to take Gao Kao to get to university. That is, some of them don't have to take any class in school during the second senior semester. Since they are going to university in foreign countries, such as United States, UK, Canada and Australia, once they have finished all the required tests like TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and SAT and also submitted their admissions to universities and colleges, there will be a nearly half-year "vacation" ahead of them. They don't have to take any compulsive courses in the high school and can spend the time at their own disposal. It's just like the gap year which some students will experience during their sophomore or junior year. So during that kind of vacation, the Chinese students may also experience something different and memorable. And this period of time has a significant influence not only on them, but also on their college life.

For me, what happened in that half year was like a series of crystal dreams. If my memory serves, the seven months my boyfriend and I spent together were the happiest time one can have in the world. That half year might not be as carefree as we are in childhood, but the happiness was enriched in depth by our love. It was new experience for us to give the whole heart to each other. I believe his love and I believe in him. By rendering everything to him, I gained more than what I wanted, and the feeling of fulfilling kept my heart sensitive to every clip of happiness. Holding his hands, I have visited so many beautiful places that I would never forget. I remembered we tried tons of restaurants of range of scales distributed in every corner of our city with the best food ever in the world; I remembered the mountains around the city which I have climbed with him, where we shouted out, overlooked tall buildings in the city and boats in the river, with colorful neon lights in the evening; I remembered the streets where I walked for a thousand times and where I hugged and kissed him among the crowds, warm and humid. I remembered our trip to India: the Christmas balls we bought and the French dinners we had in France-colonized Pondicherry; the windy seashore and coconut trees out of the window of our room in Kovalam; the blue iron-made train in poor but exotic way we took with the locals to Kalam; the colorful sunset we saw and the tutu driver we met in Cochin. And I remembered I kissed him at the first minute of his 18th birthday, my love. After coming back to our city, we've been to almost every interesting place in our city. We rode the Ferris wheel at night in the amusement park. And we climbed the scenic

mountain together and took the cable car to cross the Yangzi River. And we walked together in the most beautiful park in Chongqing. In the spring many kinds of flowers blossomed and the grass turned to green, we just lay on the lawn, surrounding with the warm spring sunshine, till the twilight came. And during March and April, we also went to Chongqing University to sit in on a class, though for interest more than for learning. The half-year vacation for me is more about experiencing life than learning and preparing for my college, since I have already been hardworking the whole time during my school years. As Dead Poets quote from Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately/ I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life! / to put to rout all that was not life/ and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived..." In some degree, my soul and spirit soared and my heart was open in the half-year with him, and I believe, he'll be there for me for the rest of my life.

After I did five interviews with five Chinese students who comes from different parts of China, I find the influence of the half-year vacation on Chinese students can either be positive or negative. For most Chinese students who plan going to university in United states, the admission letter means far more than the acceptance to their dream school, more than a coming college life, but a half-year "vacation", which means they do not have to take any classes in high school anymore. So without the compulsive courses in high school, Chinese students will have much time at their own disposal and make their own schedule everyday during such a special period. They may plan to learn some skills, such as driving, dancing, playing guitar and playing tennis. Also, they may plan to do some volunteer work or community services and get a job. And they will make a self-study schedule, list the books they will read during the vacation".

Moreover, they will indeed have some travel plans, both domestic and international traveling. And hanging out and having fun with friends is also part of their everyday life. After receiving the admission letter, they will be totally relaxed and excited about the coming half-year "vacation". However, ironically, during this "vacation", some of them will also feel worried, anxious, upset or even depressed, since things do not go off according to their plans. They might not spend any time learning a skill or might not do any volunteer work. Maybe the thing they always do in this time is just staying at home, watching TV or sitting in front of computer all day. And the worst thing is they actually do not study or read one single book at all. So without learning, without getting any knowledge, they may feel hollow and worried about their coming college life.

For my first interviewer Sunny Sunny and I are friends since high school, though we were in different high schools. In this interview, Sunny talked about how he spent his second senior year("the half-year vacation"), about what he had planed to do, what he actually has done, and what he had not accomplished. And throughout the whole interview, I find that Sunny might be the first type of students who have had this half-year vacation. For the first type of students, they indeed spend their time happily, but perhaps not very efficiently, since they finally haven't accomplished the

learning or activity plans which they are ambitious to do at first. So at the end of the vacation, they may realize that they have wasted a lot of time and feel upset and depressed. Also, when they get to university, they may find more hard to adjust the college life than other students because they've just spent little time studying and learning in the last half year. Therefore, the half-year vacation may have more negative influences than the positive on the first type students.

Before I had this interview with Li and Amber, we were just friends and did not know each other well. However, by chatting and sharing stories with each other throughout the whole interview, three of us felt more closed to each other and became best friends. Comparing to Sunny, Li and Amber were more positively influenced by the half-year vacation. As Li said, the half year vacation was a good transition for her from high school to university. It helped her better adjust to the college life. Under the education system and cramming method of teaching of her high school, she had little free time to do what she like. She could barely developed her own interests and displayed individuality. However, in the university she choose courses according to my interests. Also, she has to plot out my free time properly in an attempt to improve my study efficiency. She thinks that she would not have adjusted to the college as she do now if there was no such a half-year vacation, because she just doesn't know how to properly plan all the things by her own after being planned by others more than two years. Moreover, Amber thinks that this vacation was also very important for her family because it allowed her to spend more time with her family, her parents. Since in high school she usually went to school at 7:30 AM and stayed there till 10:00PM, she had a very little time to be with her parents, to talk with them or dinner with them. However, during the vacation, her family just spent a lot of happy time together, such as traveling, doing some outdoor activities together or just sitting together watching TV. She feels whatever they did, what really matters is she spent the time with her family.