

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

### Lost and found

## The journey of a caterpillar from crisis through resilience to fulfilment

Giuseppe Grispino

LM Lingue e Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa Mediterranea

Destination: Capital Normal University, Beijing, China

Giuseppe Grispino arriving in Beijing feels like a piece of lost luggage 'patiently waiting on the carousel to be picked up by his owner'.

I woke up to the voice of the captain announcing that we were about to land in Beijing. I still remember the nerves and the excitement that kept me buzzing for the duration of the entire flight.

The days before I left for China were filled with hope, curiosity and a bit of genuine fear. I knew I was about to live a great experience, but I could have never imagined it would twist my life around the way it has done. I had spent days wondering what this experience could teach me, planning and carefully scheduling the coming months. But the truth is, I could have never guessed what was about to happen in my life.

By the moment I stepped out the airport, I was surrounded by a world so different than the one I was expecting.

The first few days in China were the toughest ones in my life. I could not sleep, I could not eat and I could not even breathe. I wondered for the first time whether I should just give up, whether this *Eat, Pray and Love* stage of my life was seriously taking me somewhere, or it was just showing me the darkest side of me.

I wanted to give up. I wanted to take the next flight back home, wherever that place was.

When I started my classes, neither my classmates nor my professors thought I could make it through to the end of the program. They said I was not good enough, my Chinese language skills were too weak.

Just in the first month of my stay in China I lost six kilos; I spent nights awake and I felt so down, as I have never felt in the seven years I lived away from home.

I did not give up. One night, as I was reading a book trying to fall asleep, I came across one word that would resonate with me for the time of my whole stay in China: resilience. I printed that word, typed a definition and stuck it on the wall of my upper bunk-bed. I knew I had found my word.

From that day, I faced the reality I was surrounded by in a completely different way. I would take everything negative that came across my life and turn it into something positive. I had decided that everything I was going through, no matter how good or bad, would be a significant experience, something I could learn from.

I took the bad feedbacks from my classes and I sat in a library every day. I have spent countless hours in the library, reading, writing and learning. Eventually, my grades improved and I passed all my exams.

I stopped wishing away all the time I had left. I made every single second of each day count.

I lost myself a thousand times in the streets of Beijing.

I found myself in the faces and smiles of strangers in a stranger land.

I learnt from the country-boy working as a guard in my dormitory, to the most inspiring professor at university.

I made friends, I ate great food and, for the first time in my life, I experienced the greatness of falling in love with someone. I also managed to put together all the pieces of your heart, once this person was gone.

I understood that all the things that shocked me, all the thoughts that invaded my brain and would not let me sleep at night, they were all signals of the great change that I was going through.

I felt like a caterpillar inside his cocoon, unaware of the greatest change that it is going to have on his life. And once that change of attitude was completed, I was the happiest and most fulfilled version of myself that I have ever been.

To all the people that might take into consideration the opportunity to join this program, please do it. Don't let fear stop you, don't let imagination and expectations drift you away from the reality you are surrounded by.

Be aware, you might get lost in the process, but you will ultimately find your true-self.

The day I arrived in Beijing, I felt like a lost luggage patiently waiting on the carousel to be picked up by his owner. No one came to reclaim me and so I had to learn to step out from my comfort zone and start experiencing a whole new me, a whole new life.

One year after I arrived, I went back to the airport with an extra luggage. I filled it with all the things that this experience had taught me. I had to pay for overweight, but I was ultimately lost and found.