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This past summer in Beijing, as well as the long road finalizing my trip, was much like my previous summer experiences in that almost nothing went according to plan. After moving through one NGO's interview process to the next I finally confirmed an internship with Hua Dan, an organization that works to empower migrant women and children through the arts. Hutong School set everything up: from the internship offer to my housing and contract. Based on information I gathered about the organization and what my interviewers told me, I expected to be writing reports, completing research, and most of all, working closely with the migrant community. These were all things I looked forward to.

Yin, one of Hutong School's employees picked me up from the airport and gave me a quick tour of Tuanjiehu, the area of Beijing where I would be staying. We arrived in my apartment where I met my two flat mates, a German engineer named Ben, and Francis, a student from Canada.

On my first day of work, another one of Hutong School's employees, Anne, accompanied me. She helped me navigate through the subway for my lengthy one-hour commute to Tiantongyuan.

Hua Dan's office was originally much closer to the city center, but they moved in order to accommodate the migrant community on the city's perimeter. This move happened right after I accepted my position. After learning this, Anne considered placing me with another organization closer to my apartment. But we tried the commute out, and it definitely sounded a lot longer than it felt, so I decided to stick with Hua Dan – a decision I would not regret.

The new office was located in a residential apartment building, which is common for many official businesses and organizations in Beijing. I was greeted by Yangyang, Hua Dan's project director and my interviewer. From that moment on, I don't remember much English being spoken. It was my first full immersion experience in the Chinese language. Previously I had used my Chinese to give directions to cab drivers and order at restaurants, but this was a whole different ball game. I had to quickly grasp a new set of vocabulary for the business world. Words like "prototype" and "implementation costs" were things I did not learn in Chinese I or II.

Yangyang used Chinese to orient the one other intern and myself with the organization's current projects. This is when I first heard about *Dumpling Dreams Migrant Theatre*. Basically, this project was aimed at compiling a series of stories written and performed by migrant women. The migrant stories served two purposes: first, they afforded the migrant women a cathartic outlet for painful memories and experiences. Second, these stories provided the public an opportunity to grasp the plight of Chinese migrants outside of cold facts and figures. One performance would take place in Beijing and later another would take place in Edinburgh.

For the first few weeks, I wasn't too overwhelmed with work. In fact, I would have appreciated quite a bit more of it. I primarily translated various documents from English to Chinese and sometimes vice versa. On the weekends I assisted the Hua Dan team facilitate workshops in the migrant community. Many of the workshops were held in preparation for *Dumpling Dreams*, so they consisted largely of reflection exercises and narrative readings.

Unfortunately this was usually the only time I would work directly with the migrant community. Before my internship started, I expected to be assisting with the annual youth camp that Hua Dan orchestrates. However, they announced later that the camp would not be open this year, which left a lot less work for the interns. To be honest, I was feeling very pessimistic about my work at Hua Dan until after one specific team meeting. During this meeting we discussed roles and gave each other feedback on projects. Yangyang also took time to ask the interns what we personally would like to be more involved in.

At this time, I basically expressed my sentiments about not having enough duties and responsibilities. I offered myself in any capacity, to assist with any project. I suggested that I could use my audiovisual knowledge to edit videos, I could use my graphic design skills to design templates, or I could even help design workshops. Up until this point, my coworkers were not even aware that I possessed these skills. I had long assumed that just because I listed them on my resume, the team would take advantage of them. This was not the case.

Fortunately, from that point on, I was given more work and responsibility. I was given the task of composing the Annual Report, constructing a script book which would later be published, and even designing a workshop for children. The last few weeks of my internship were the most exciting because the team often called upon me to hold workshops to train the staff in PowerPoint, Photoshop, and video editing.

I still continued to translate, but as the performance grew closer, I began translating more of the women's monologues for *Dumpling Dreams*; this, I really enjoyed. Not only did it give me an opportunity to test my Chinese language abilities, but it also enlightened me to many non-nominal migrant issues. I was able to grasp the women's courageous

adventures to leave abusive homes and gain financial independence. I unfolded a character's narrative with each sentence that I translated. In addition to attending the workshops, this allowed me to understand the women I worked with on a more intimate level.

In my time interning with Hua Dan, I came to see migrant women in a new light. Prior to my internship, having never met a Chinese migrant worker before, I imagined they would be poorly clothed, uneducated, and vulnerable. I've found this is certainly not the case. The women I met in Mulan were some of the most lively, strong, courageous women I had ever met. They walked with their heads held high because they were aware of all the hardships they had overcome.

In mid-July, Hua Dan had their first theatrical production of the summer, showcasing the memoir-monologues of migrant women to a large public audience. It was amazing watching the migrant women work on their monologues over the past few weeks and shed tears as they shared their personal, intimate stories with the world. I was incredibly honored to have been a part of the team that made that happen.

