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As a Chinese minor and International Studies major at the University of Oklahoma, I have always felt connected and intrigued towards a particular alumnus at the university who pursued my same degree a mere ten years earlier: Chinese pop singer Slater Rhea. Rhea took classes with my same Chinese professors, sat in the same classrooms that I do now, and most importantly, utilized his time abroad to launch into Chinese stardom.

After graduating from the University of Oklahoma, having only previously travelled to China intermittently, Rhea went on to pursue a graduate degree in international politics and China studies at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center in Nanjing, China (Torbett). Committing to an education abroad requires committing to an entirely new way of life, culture, and (potentially) language in a very permanent way. In the past few years, this change paid off for Rhea as he became recognized for his music - singing live on CCTV (China's most popular TV channel) in fluent Mandarin, prompting him to become one of China's biggest singing stars today (Torbett). But his life abroad has had a bigger impact than his music - Rhea is now involved in a very big aspect of improving and understanding Chinese-American relations. Through his time abroad, Rhea has advanced his professional career as not merely being viewed as a pop star, but as a respected cultural icon committed to showcasing the best of American culture with the best of Chinese culture. Rhea has had the opportunity to perform for ambassadors such as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former president Bill Clinton (Torbett). Albright herself told Rhea that he had "the gifts to become a cultural ambassador between our two countries" - which was only made possible through Rhea's time in China and commitment to understanding Chinese culture (Torbett).

As such, I believe his experience and career abroad in China means something more personal than simply the vanity of fame. Going abroad is an act of courage as such an act involves willingness to step outside of one's comfort zone. An experience abroad is self-transformative, requiring the advancement of resilience and curiosity to be successful in a foreign country. The personal achievements that his education abroad has given him - such as being fluent enough in Mandarin to defend his 100 page thesis in Mandarin Chinese - are the fruitions of labor that occur when one enables themselves to be open-minded to foreign surroundings (Torbett). As the Seattle Times describes, having been a shy child with dreams of entertaining people, Rhea's "ability to connect" has turned his "farfetched dream into reality" (Jones).

Beyond the example of Rhea alone, the practice of going abroad creates far more opportunities for personal and professional growth than standing still. The more connections made and experiences had while travelling, the more one can know about the world. And the world is full of opportunities to change someone's life, something that Rhea (and many others) know very well.

Citations:

Jones, Chris. "Oklahoma Singer Gains National Attention in China." The Seattle Times, The Seattle Times Company, 11 Nov. 2017, www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/oklahoma-singer-gains-national-attention-in-china/

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