

i-mag

KNOX
COLLEGE
INTERNATIONAL
FAIR
2011



Welcome to Knox College International Fair 2011!

Every fall at Knox, the incoming freshman class experiences a personal culture shock. These students come to Knox with their own distinct backgrounds and stories and cultures and must adjust to the ways of college life. It is a daunting shock, harder for some than others, but it is only a small example of a much larger phenomenon known as Culture Shock. The international students at Knox know this experience well; many have lived in a multitude of different countries and cities throughout their lives before arriving to the modest town of Galesburg, Illinois, a shocking place in its own right. This year, I-Fair aims to share this experience of culture shock. Together, we have lived in eight different countries and have had to continually go through the confusion, excitement, anxiety, and intrigue that comes with being in a new place. It has been an adventure and it is exciting to share our stories with our friends at Knox. This magazine is filled with stories from Knox students who have lived in, studied in, or visited a new place and were given the opportunity to experience a culture shock.

Thank you for coming to the International Fair! We hope that you have a great time!

-Sara Ahmed and Supriya Kasaju

International Club Co-Presidents



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THE LAST SHANGRI-LA:

Alan Ning's Journey to Bhutan

Kyle Cruz

Compared to its neighbors, namely China and India, the country of Bhutan continues to maintain a relatively unassuming political presence on both the regional and global stage. But at heart, there is nothing unassuming or ordinary about a country surrounded on all sides by the towering spires of the Himalayas, sometimes referred to as the “abode of the Gods.” What Bhutan lacks in geopolitical oomph, it certainly makes up for in the exotic nature of its location. The country is actually considered to be the last haven on planet earth; that is, the “Last Shangri-La.”

Last summer, Knox junior Alan Ning had the rare opportunity to visit Bhutan; I say rare because the Bhutanese government is not all too keen about expanding the tourist industry, which in its view might undermine the serenity that has come to characterize the country. To obtain a visa, Alan had to be formally invited by his Bhutanese friend, Tashi Ongmo, who also attends Knox College.

Obtaining a visa was not the only problem

Alan faced; getting to Bhutan all the way from Chicago proved also to be quite the hassle. From O'Hare, Alan had to take a plane to Brussels in Belgium. From here, he took another plane to India, waited a day and then took a connecting flight to Bhutan where Tashi's family picked him up. According to Tashi, it takes an additional two hours by car to get from the airport to her house in Thimbu, the capital of Bhutan.

Despite the arduous journey, Alan says that the trip was worth it. Born in China, but raised for most of his life in the United States, Alan had the unique opportunity to experience Bhutan from the perspective of two different cultures. On one hand, Alan noted that life in Bhutan was significantly calmer than life even in suburban America. Simultaneously, Alan found many similarities between Bhutanese and Chinese culture such as the close-knit nature of family units.

Other aspects of Bhutanese culture Alan found altogether new. For example, members of

a family do not have to share a last name; rather, individuals either choose or are given last names. Case in point: Tashi's last name is Ongmo but her father's is Daktugado. Alan also noted that many Bhutanese wear the national dress everywhere – at school, at work and at home – and all times. Although seemingly inconvenient given the boost national pride and preserve essential elements of Bhutanese culture in the face of globalization.

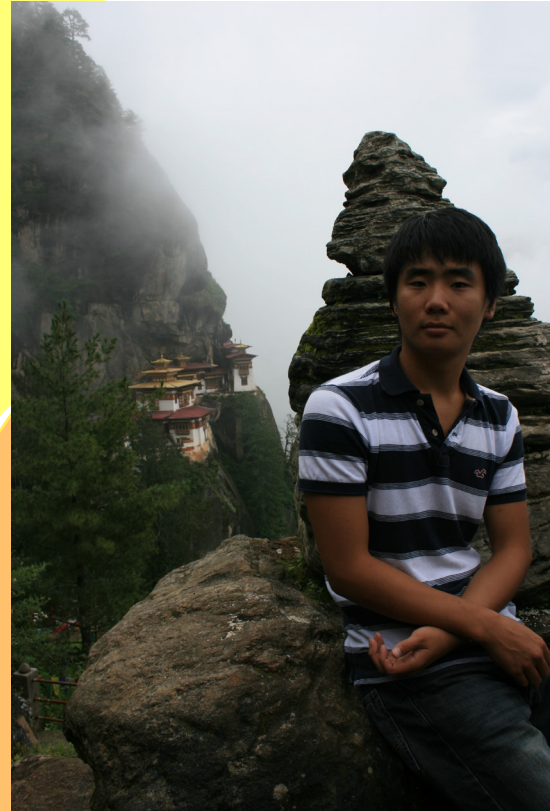
The Bhutanese sense of fashion was not the only thing Alan found unusual (in a good way); Bhutanese cuisine also had its surprises. Butter tea, for instance, was one drink Alan completely understood, gastronomically speaking. Composed primarily of tea leaves, hot water, yak butter and salt, butter tea is consumed by Bhutanese as well as Tibetans and Chinese ethnic minorities. Although this concoction was not Alan's cup of tea, he took a particular liking to Bhutan's version of milk tea. He also found interesting the idea that pepper is considered a vegetable rather than a seasoning as

most of are accustomed to.

When asked what part of the trip he liked most, Alan – although hard pressed to choose one particular moment – admitted that his visit to the Tiger's Nest was the most memorable. Taktshang Goemba or Tiger's Nest is a Buddhist monastery carved uncannily into one of Bhutan's many cliff sides. It was built in 1692 but suffered a devastating fire in 1998. However, thanks to carefully archived architectural drawings, the monastery was rebuilt and is most often visited by practicing Buddhists on pilgrimage.

Although not too religious himself, Alan felt at peace at the Tiger's Nest despite trekking for more than two hours up a mountain slope to get there. At the monastery, Alan met the abbot who happens to be Tashi's uncle. He also had the privileged opportunity to touch the holy water inside the temple, which is often only open to the most ardent and devoted of Buddhist pilgrims.

Alan stayed in Bhutan for about one month. If he could go back and redo the trip, Alan says that he would want to go camping and fishing. He still misses the country and all the people he met during his stay. Aside from being a great experience, his trip to Bhutan had some therapeutic effects. Alan claims that just being in Bhutan made him want to be a nicer person because everyone else was nice even though in some places, people immediately knew that he was a tourist. Bhutan, in Alan's words, is indeed one of, if not the, last haven on planet earth. Ironically, being one of the most peaceful places on earth is what makes Bhutan shocking – no pun intended.



PARO TAKTSANG -> PARO
VALLEY -> BHUTAN



WEST OF KAMPALA -> UGANDA



BARCELONA -> SPAIN

Honeyed wine was in my veins
when we first talked
oil dripping from lips--
the mediterranean diet
Barcelona, me dijo, es bellissimo.



“Oh, and where are you from?”

Indonesia.

“Oh, you’re Indonesian.”

No I am from Pakistan originally.

“Oh, so you live in Pakistan.”

No, I live in Virginia.

If only the answer to the first question was made easier. In my case it isn’t. Growing up I have had a childhood that I will never forget. Being a diplomat’s daughter, I have traveled to over twenty countries and lived in six. I have had around thirteen ‘first day at school’ moments. My first school was in France and that’s where the story begins. From France to Syria to England to Indonesia to Pakistan and finally to the United States, it has been a wonderful experience to say the least. Not only has it been a dream come true, but I have also been able to experience so many lifelong lessons each step of the way.

I have learned something from every place I have been to, and, more importantly I have given something back of my culture in every place. Wherever I was, I always kept my culture and nationality strong. Other diplobrats usually change themselves to fit in, until they completely forget their roots. This did not happen to me. The credit for that goes to my parents. As a child I was always instructed to speak in Urdu, never English. We always celebrated all our national holidays and important religious events no matter where we were. We celebrated Pakistan Independence Day, Eid-UI-Adha, Eid-UI-Fitr, Muharam, and

Ramadhan, to name a few. The aspect of religion held strong as I almost always had a Quran teacher. Even the way I dressed did not change with the place I was in. It is important to understand where you are from. You should never forget your culture as it will always be what you are identified by and I tend to strictly follow this ideal.

Looking back to my childhood there are certain events that I remember where I have clearly showcased my Pakistani side. In Syria, we had UN days where I always dressed up in a typical Kashmiri dress and took part in several Pakistani dances. In England, my sister and I were the only Pakistanis in the entire school. Moreover, the only colored people in the entire school. I wouldn't say it was easy, but it taught me a lifelong lesson: to stick by your identity no matter what. At the end of the day, your identity is everything, and your mission is to protect it from everyone. Even amongst great racism I did not change. I was denied admission to one of the top secondary schools in my area and instead was recommended to attend another school that was infamous for its high crime rates. My parents filed a case against the school for discriminatory behavior. They won the case and I was soon admitted to the school.

The best experiences I have had was in Indonesia and trust me, it wasn't because I had more fellow-Pakistani company. In fact, my sister and I were the only Pakistanis in this International School. Still, I found true friends and teachers that were very interested my culture and nation. I had several very remarkable conversations with my fellow Chinese, Korean, Indian, Indonesian and Japanese classmates. It was surprising how misled some people were about Pakistan. I remember after I told a friend of mine where I was from she shockingly looked at me and said, "Oh really? But isn't that where all the bad people are?" One thing this predominantly Indian school taught me was something even a school in Pakistan could not teach me

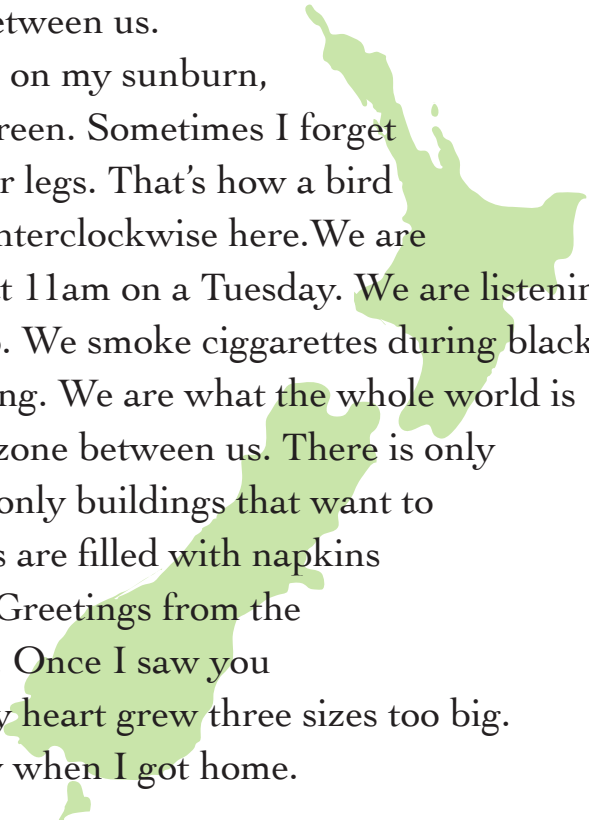
and that is of tolerance and respect. Many people in Pakistan have a negative view of India and vice versa in India. Studying amongst Indians taught me to better focus on meaningful present friendships, clear people's doubts, voice my opinion, and move beyond past issues.

Finally we come to present day Knox College where I am of a few international students, who make up about seven percent of Knox College. Once again, I am part of a minority group. But I feel the most I have learned by far came from Knox. Knox has taught me further to stand up for my country among people that may have different views about it. I speak of the positive aspects of Pakistan, educate others about my culture, take part in cultural clubs and activities, and fundraise for disasters that are occurring back home in Pakistan. The truth is that I live in Virginia. But whenever someone asks where I'm from I always say Pakistan. I don't really know why but I know that I want to be labeled as 'from Pakistan' before being labeled as 'from Indonesia/England/France/Syria/USA.'

Whether in classroom scenarios or over the lunch table, I wish that people would more often ask about the future instead of asking about my hard-to-explain past. I wish to hear 'where are you going next' instead of 'where are you from.' The answer to the latter is even more uncertain, but full of promise. If it were up to me my next mission would include being somewhere in Africa or even Canada, but only time will tell.



DURBAR SQUARE -> KATHMANDU -> NEPAL



There is no ozone between us.
When the sun burns on my sunburn,
sometimes it turns green. Sometimes I forget
that I don't have four legs. That's how a bird
feels. They turn counterclockwise here. We are
sipping warm beer at 11am on a Tuesday. We are listening
to reggae-funk radio. We smoke ciggarettes during blackouts. Bus
waiting, i-pod swaying. We are what the whole world is
doing. There is no ozone between us. There is only
hot sand. There are only buildings that want to
be trees. My pockets are filled with napkins
and dirt and ocean. Greetings from the
bottom of the world. Once I saw you
from 30,000 feet. My heart grew three sizes too big.
It was still yesterday when I got home.



PALI LOOKOUT -> OAHU -> HONOLULU -> HAWAII

On the few occasions when I am afforded the opportunity to talk candidly about my country, the Philippines, I find that most people know almost nothing – at least nothing accurate – about a place once famously deemed to be the Pearl of the Orient. Even the few who are in the business of erudition often cling onto historical stereotypes about this archipelago nation and its people.

While the Philippines still nurtures a benign economic and political relationship with the United States of America, we have moved well past the Marcos era (1965-1986) when all things American – American soldiers, American cars, American cigarettes and even American names – were placed on a pedestal, if not idolized.

Nowadays, the Filipino people have to reckon with far more than the clutches of an imperialist economic power – the incessant onslaught of globalization, which puts at risk the very tenets of our values, customs and cultural mores, is the more pressing issue. In the face of such an aggressive and untamable foe, what can be done to salvage what's left of a culture that, like others, is slowly losing its distinct niche on the world stage? To the Filipino people, as it has always been in the past, the answer is adaptation.

Before we continue, you might ask what makes Filipino culture unique? In reality, not a lot but I guess this is exactly what makes the Filipino culture distinct. We are in many ways the chameleons of the world. Why is it that Filipino cuisine is not as widely known as that of our neighbors, like Thailand, even though the Philippines is the largest exporter of overseas workers? Some would say that it is a matter of poor advertising or our excessive affinity to oil and swine, which deters food lovers. I, on the other hand, would submit that it has more to do with our willingness to adapt to the food preferences of other people we meet.

In the Philippines, foreign cultures are increasingly taking more of a center stage in peoples' lives.

On top of the appalling economic statistics, rampant corruption and uncontrolled population growth, the Filipino culture has to contend with western music, attire and even the English language. But who is to say that the cultural invasion is necessarily bad? I am certainly not qualified to say that all outside influences are undesirable. I can only express concern in the knowledge that the things that may have once been distinct to the Philippines will soon be lost in the melting pot of globalization.

Cultural postmodernism has turned out to be one of the inevitable effects of globalization at least in the Philippines. In urban as well as rural areas, it is a common thing to hear above the din of local banter, contemporary western music (i.e. Lady Gaga's "Just Dance") being blasted from the back of a pickup truck or even some inconspicuous house around the corner. Moreover, without at least some mastery of the English language, it is hard to think how any Filipino person can carry on a conversation even among other Filipinos.

We owe much of the foreign influences in our country to our tumultuous history as a colony first of the Spanish, then Americans, then the Japanese and then the Americans all over again. Under each and every oppressor, the Filipino people and culture managed to survive in one or another. In short, there is no reason to think that we will lose our renowned amicability, frugality, sense of humor and propensity to smile.

Despite being a people of irreconcilable contradictions, no doubt, the Filipino people are too adept at the art of adaption to be shocked by anything new in the horizon. An innate capacity for adaptation is not to be interpreted wholly as complacency. Adapting is just our way of saying that life is too short to care so much about how special our culture is, which is no better or worse than others that come our way.



BLUE MOSQUE -> SULTANAHMET SQUARE -> ISTANBUL -> TURKEY

Streaks of turmeric dash across the sky,
Cacophonies of silver platter roar,
Thus ensues tears drops from Heaven's eye,
Infiltrating deep within Mother's core.

Seas of umbrellas flood the streets,
Hurrying past brown curries of puddles.
Bright garments of spices hustle in fleets,
Thirsting for elusive monsoon riddles.

Palms pressed together, a farmer prays
For a fruitful harvest on his earth.
The ripening of the stalk for better days,
Feeding not only the Valley, but his hearth.

But the season of plenty comes and goes.
Will the farmer always reap what he sows?



BUKOVINA -> CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS -> ROMANIA



GALESBURG -> ILLINOIS

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