*My China Experience*

Hospitality – what does this word actually mean? The German word actually emphasises the friendship with the guest. And that in nutshell is what I experienced during my stay in China. I arrived as a stranger, I left as a friend.

When I visit a foreign country, the most interesting experiences for me are to see how people live, learn about their culture and get in touch with their habits. Hence, I was kind of disappointed during my first two weeks in Dezhou, Shandong, where I absolved my internship at Himin Solar. I met a few people and hung out with them, but the language barrier between us was quite big, which made communicating a challenge. Furthermore, everyone was pretty focused on work and did not really have time for group activities. On the other hand, I have to accuse myself for not putting enough effort into getting more in touch with the people. I just couldn't motivate myself enough considering that communication was so difficult.

After two weeks, I met William and Vivian – and everything changed. They invited me for dinner and we became friends right away. They sacrificed their time to show me around Dezhou. William introduced me into the Chinese lifestyle and Vivian prepared excellent local food. In return, I shared my travel experiences and played guitar for them. I came early in the morning (or late, depending on how long the previous night lasted) and only left when we were already yawning. I finally found people who I could talk to and who took care of me, which was kind of helpful for me in this foreign country without having any language skills. Their flat became my second home.

I also told Vivian and William about my plans to go to Beijing. Originally I was supposed to book a hostel, but these two amazing guys organised everything so that I could stay with their friends. It not only saved me a lot of money, but also enabled me to get the real Beijing experience. Various people took a day off from work just to show me around the city. I strolled through the Forbidden City, visited the Heavenly Temple and climbed the great wall. I experienced living on little space, one thing Beijing citizens have to deal with in this huge city, but I also visited the suburbs, where people still live in a small house with a garden. I tasted the original Beijing cuisine, either in restaurants only familiar to locals or – even better – homemade.

I was not only amazed by the hospitality, also the generosity sometimes left me with my mouth wide open. Everybody invited me for food or paid for entrance tickets. Even when I insisted on covering the bill, they would not let me pay. Mahui helped me out several times when I got in trouble with my phone card and covered the due owing balance, which just existed because I was not careful enough. It really showed me how important it was for her that I had a good time with as little trouble as possible. At some point I asked myself, how I deserve all of this.

As a foreigner you would experience hospitality and generosity in Germany as well, but only to a certain extent. I wonder, if people in Germany would have ever helped me so much. Before I went to China, I would probably not have done it myself, if I am honest. However, this experience changed my attitude towards hospitality and how to treat a foreign guest. Next time I will do my best to help other people in the same way as I got supported in China. I think the Chinese hospitality and generosity enhanced my whole trip a lot, and they will always come up in my mind when I think back to this outstanding time.