



China

Members: James Drews, Vikram Rana, Sara Schwartz, Aristo Setiawidjaja, Mark Valkenburgh, Yuan Wang, Ming Yao

Team Advisor: Julie Lang T'93



1. Had any of you worked in that country before this project?

Four members of our team had experience working in China prior to this project. Yuan and Ming are Chinese natives from Beijing and Hangzhou, respectively. Aristo is from Indonesia, but speaks mandarin fluently and has worked for Kohler Co. in China. Julie, our team advisor, had worked with other TGC groups in China. This collective experience – the ability to communicate as well as navigate social customs and leverage personal networks – was critical to our team's success.

Before Tuck, Vik worked for 7 years for 3 leading start-ups in the enterprise software industry in Boston, including 3 yrs in healthcare IT, as a consultant and engineer. He spent his summer in the Online Sales and Operations group at Google.

Jim worked in the healthcare practice of consulting firm Charles River Associates for four years prior to Tuck. He spent last summer as a consultant with Bain & Company in Boston.

Sara worked as a consultant with the Advisory Board Company, a healthcare research and consulting firm, prior to Tuck. During the summer, she worked at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and plans to return full-time next year.

Before Tuck, Aristo worked in the global operations of Kohler Co., where he was part of the start-up team of Kohler subsidiary in China. Last summer, he worked with the investment banking division of Bank of America.

Mark worked in marketing and strategy consulting prior to Tuck serving clients in the pharmaceutical arena. He has managed brand positioning research for blockbuster drugs in Japan and South Korea.

With work experience in over 20 countries, Ming was US Representative of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade prior to Tuck. He spent last summer with the internal strategy group of Boston Scientific-CRM.

Yuan is a corporate finance expert with experience in a public listed Chinese company prior to Tuck. She spent last summer with ING U.S. Financial Services focused on several six sigma projects.

Julie spent fifteen years in management consulting and now splits her time between consulting and teaching. She is a visiting faculty member for Tuck's Executive Education programs. This is her fifth TGC project.

2. What was it like working in a foreign country and how was it different from working in the states?

Living and working in China was fascinating to say the least. We were able to immerse ourselves in a culture so different from our own, thanks to our incredible Chinese and Indonesian counterparts, who so generously shared their knowledge of their home, their networks, their customs, their food, and the many treasures of Chinese culture.

Whether we were sitting across from senior executives at a lavish board room table enjoying tea which was continuously refilled before we could finish, interviewing doctors and touring around hospitals, walking through Walmart and interviewing the pharmacists among the display of herbs, roots, and other natural remedies comprising Traditional Chinese Medicine, everything we experienced was delightfully new.

What was different from home was a certain amount of ceremony and hospitality at every meeting, sometimes 30-minute introductions to the organizations about which we were learning, personal exchange about our school and why we were there, dining out, etc. Typically, hosts seemed to genuinely value our presence, and took pride in how they presented their organizations.

3. Were there any surprises? Please elaborate.

A few things that surprised us:

- *How much we could accomplish in a short amount of time, when we put our heads together and leveraged our individual strengths.*
- *The Tuck alumni network produced a surprising number of valuable leads in China, given the small size of the overall alumni network around the world.*
- *Breadth and depth of some topic related articles written by foreigners (journalists and analysts etc) who have been in China for a long period of time and can provide objective views to some hot issues.*
- *Globalization does stimulate the spreading and standardization of good practice across the borders, but local norms and traditions still play a significant role if outsiders want to succeed in local business.*

4. How did you manage working with a cross-culturally diverse team?

Because we foreigners were open-minded and anxious to learn about anything and everything Chinese, and our Chinese teammates were eager to teach and share, the team dynamic could not have been better. Our success came from our collective desire to do a great job, and deliver something of value to Microsoft, as well as recognizing and leveraging what each of us uniquely brought to the table. Perhaps the most important underlying team dynamic was the fact that we valued our differences, laughed a lot, listened a lot, and contributed wherever we reasonably could (but also recognized our limitations).

5. What did you do to immerse yourself in the local culture?

We were very fortunate to have two native Chinese citizens on our team (Ming and Yuan) who were amazing and gracious hosts during our time in Beijing and Shanghai. In addition, a third member of our team (Aristo) had also lived in China previously, is also fluent in Mandarin, and was an incredible resource for us in our travels.

Having these individuals on our team was critical – not only for our research, analysis, and interviews, but also for the way they helped the entire team experience the Chinese way of life. From a project perspective, we conducted our interviews onsite at various hospitals and offices which provided a valuable glimpse in the healthcare industry. We also interviewed a wide variety of people from pharmacists and techs at local pharmacies to the heads of large corporations.

On a more personal level, we immersed ourselves in the culture by taking time to explore our surroundings. We ate at many delicious and authentic Chinese restaurants (we particularly loved tasting Beijing Duck!); we saw many major historical sites (including the Great Wall, Tiananmen

Square, the Bund in Shanghai, and the terra cotta soldiers in Xi'an); and we were able to travel to Ming's beautiful hometown of Hangzhou – a highlight of the trip for many of us.

Overall, the team is grateful to Ming, Yuan, and Aristo for being wonderful hosts and allowing us to experience Chinese culture first-hand.

6. What key things did you learn from your overall experience?

a. Doing/understanding business in a foreign country like China is greatly accelerated by having natives with cross-border experience who can understand modern methods of management and link that with traditional business cultures of their home country.

b. As outsiders, it is critical to be able to offer something in return to business people in foreign countries like China, if nothing more than to satisfy their curiosity regarding other countries.

c. Having a genuine personal interest/curiosity in the people and culture of a foreign country goes a long way to opening the door to more productive business conversations.