

Columbia University Statement of Academic Purpose

Prompt: All applicants must submit a statement of academic purpose. Please compose a succinct statement of approximately 1,000 words describing your past academic work and preparation related to your intended field of study, your plans for graduate study at Columbia, and your subsequent career objective. If you intend to transfer from a graduate program at another university, please explain why you wish to do so. If you are not currently pursuing an academic program, please describe your activities since you last enrolled in an academic institution. If there has been a break in your educational experience, please include a brief explanation.

I have always known that I would love to become a professor, but I was ambivalent about what my focus should be since I am fascinated by all aspects of East Asian Studies, including literature, history, religion, philosophy and language. However, during my junior year of college when I studied abroad in Japan, I discovered my true academic passion: Confucianism. Therefore, I want to pursue a degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures.

I grew up in Qingdao, Shangdong Province in China. As a child, I enjoyed learning about my mother's nine years of living in France. Not surprisingly, perhaps, I became obsessed with Western culture and crazy about reading Western literature and history. When I was ten years old, I read the *Red and the Black*, and it remains one of my favorite novels. However my mother kept telling me how important it is to know my own culture first, and required me to write calligraphy, to memorize classic Chinese texts, and to play the Pipa, the Chinese lute. Still I wanted to leave China to see the world on my own.

When I was sixteen years old, I made the decision to travel to America to study for my last two years of high school. As an exchange student in both Utah and California, I lived with two American families. Surprisingly, I found that it was fulfilling to tell people about myself and my life in China. I had many opportunities to present about my country in elementary schools and high schools. I felt delighted and proud to share my culture with people who knew very little about Eastern culture. I even played my Pipa for many groups. Through these significant experiences, I came to realize that I wanted to major in East Asian Studies in college.

I am interested in how Confucianism has shaped modern China, Japan, and the Four Little Dragons—Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. For my senior thesis in East Asian Studies titled "Confucianism, Profit-making, and Modernization in East Asia," which I am writing under the supervision of Dr. Chen, I am researching how to reconcile the teachings of Confucius and the goals of East Asian modernization.

In addition to my interest in Confucianism, I want to learn more about Buddhism, especially since it is one of the three major teachings in China. Thus far, I have read some Buddhist texts and learned the trends of Buddhism in China including its emergence, decline, and revival. Yet I want to know more about its connections to other Chinese philosophical and religious influences such as Confucianism and Taoism. In fact, I grew up in the Buddhist faith. I always go to a Buddhist temple in my hometown as a volunteer; however, I now desire a deeper understanding of Buddhism.

I would like to address my questions by immersing myself in East Asian Language and Cultures. During my undergraduate study in both Japan and America, I have taken various courses related to East Asian cultures. In Japan, I was a student at Waseda University where I took courses such as "Japanese Literature after 1945" and "History of Modern Japan." I learned about postwar literature and the modern historical events of Japan. I am a double major in East Asian Studies and Comparative Literature. The course "Great Books of East Asia" provided me the opportunity to study both the social and historical backgrounds of Japan, Korea, and China by comparing their literary works. A prime comparison is when we studied Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*, Yi Kwang-su's *Mujong*, and Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*. All three novels deal with national identity formation at a time of historical crisis. The course began with a section titled "Foundations," in which we studied the *Analects*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Tao Te Ching*. This foundation served to help students understand the intellectual heritage that imbues modern works such as the ones I cited above. I think my formal study of pre-modern and modern East Asia with my personal interest in ancient East Asia will help me with my graduate learning. I hope that I will be better equipped to unravel the contradictions in East Asian cultures through my studies in graduate school.

Furthermore, I have always loved traveling and exchanging my cultures with others. During my internship in Taku, Japan, my friend and I helped a Confucian temple translate its guidebook from Japanese to English. My experience of living with two Japanese host families in Taku and Tokyo opened my eyes to both urban and rural Japanese cultures. In addition, when I volunteered in Bali last winter break, I enjoyed teaching elementary school children English and sharing my culture with them. At Ohio Wesleyan University I am a member of both the Chinese Culture Club and Comparative Literature Student board. I have helped these departments and organizations with different events. The most recent event in the Comparative Literature Department in which I was involved was the organization of a pop-up art exhibit called "Text-iles." Faculty and students in the department discussed what "texts" really mean. We discussed different ways in which stories can be told and focused on the art of textiles as voices of people from around the world. I attended a guest lecture about the gendered economics of textiles in India and participated in the launch event for this exhibit. Experiences such as these in which I work with professors outside the classroom to talk about the significance of understanding literature from around the world is a joy for me.

Because Columbia University has an excellent reputation for its program in East Asian Languages and Culture, I would be honored to study at Columbia University. I am excited to know that professor Gao Jue's primary academic interest focuses on early Chinese religion and cultural history. I am also interested in taking courses with professor Li Feng who specializes in the history of Shang-Zhou period. It would be my pleasure to study at such an outstanding university with these great professors.

I am prepared; I am passionate about my discipline, and I hope to earn my doctorate at Columbia University and become a professor in the future.