To me, Chinese is an art form, one that requires practice, and patience, and precision. Admittedly I hid from Chinese at the beginning, too shy to dare utter even one syllable for the fear of using the wrong tone. But alas, with a little time, a few classes, and most importantly with a burning desire to get out on the street and communicate with the local people, I was able to break free from diffidence and let syllables roll rhythmically off of my tongue.

I find that what draws me to the language is that it is incredibly infectious. Once I was conscious of the fact that I was able to understand snippets of radio conversation, or even give directions to taxi drivers without succumbing to the spectacle of charades, my approach to everyday life in China changed. I began walking around the hallways of our hotel muttering sentences to myself that were completely out of context in the hope that I would get to use them in conversation sooner rather than later. Whilst talking with fellow UMAPers it became more and more common for sentences to consist of a bizarre concoction of English and Chinese, and when answering phone calls from fellow English speakers I found it notably hard not to say “wei nǐ hǎo” rather than the standard “hello”. I would even stop people in the street to ask what their name was, or whether their work was busy.

Although the language barrier is still great, I have no doubt that the Chinese that I have acquired over the last three months has, and will continue to be a valuable asset.