Dear Supporters of the Halsey Scholarship,

I will never forget this year. From the first day to the last, it was jam packed with once in a lifetime experiences. Although the road to the final days in Beijing has been a bumpy one, I feel that I can now say Beijing is a second home.

Nearing the end of my time in Beijing has made me think about how I've changed over the year. The most obvious change is that my language abilities have skyrocketed. I can currently hold conversations about the Cultural Revolution and current problems China is facing in Mandarin, something that I never thought I would be able to accomplish. I also have grown to be much more mature than I was in America. Every day I have to clean my room, navigate Beijing, schedule my time well, and create my own motivation for finishing homework, all without family members watching over me.

Another interesting way that I have grown is in money management. In America, all the things I needed to survive and have fun were all presented to me by my mother, which I am now very grateful for. I now understand the value of money and how to decipher if what I’m buying is necessary or not needed. These are only a few examples of how this experience has, and will continue to, influence my life.

There has not been one moment this year that I have regretted my choice to come to China. Some of my favorite experiences are even just simple tasks such as taking the bus or random conversations with strangers. I also love exploring Beijing. I just recently went by myself to climb 香山 (The Fragrant Hills), a mountain in the west of Beijing, and it turned out to be one of my favorite memories so far. I got to speak to many locals also climbing the mountain and saw the most beautiful view of the city from the top. It reminded me of our trip to Yunnan, which was filled with hikes to the top of mountains and rice terraces. Traveling to places such as Yunnan, Shanxi, and Gansu really made the experience that much more enjoyable. Not only did we get to see the city life of Beijing, we also got to see small tea villages in Yunnan, vinegar factories in Shanxi, and Buddhist monasteries in Gansu. This year has just been overflowing with amazing experiences.

While there were so many amazing moments, there were also some challenging ones as well. I remember my first ever 听写 and being very discouraged. 听写 (tingxie) is a quiz where your Chinese teacher says a vocab word and you must write the character, pinyin, and English translation. My first grade wasn’t what I was hoping it would be, and I didn’t feel very confident. But once I figured out a study method that suited me, those grades slowly but surely made their way up. I soon became excited for our 听写 to see how well my studying went. Another difficult moment was during the first month away from home. I felt very upset that I was missing out on so much at home and was very homesick. At that time, I was still making friends and my support system wasn’t a very strong one. During that time, I
just had to pull myself through and focusing on the moment and the amazing things I was experiencing. I can now say that I am so thankful that past me was able to withstand the initial homesickness, because if I had gone home then I would have missed out on so many life changing experiences.

This year has truly been the best year of my life and it will stick with me for years to come. I have learned more Mandarin than I did in my first two years of classes combined and made friendships that will last forever.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this opportunity to strengthen my Chinese skills, meet an amazing host family, and make lifelong friends!

Sincerely,
Hollie