Growing up as a typical Asian American in the United States, I knew very little about my Chinese heritage and my Chinese cultural background. I could only use the limited resources provided to me to further understand China. After nine years of living in the United States, I finally moved to China and began fourth grade at an international school there. As an international school student, I realized that although we all live in the same areas, the international and local communities in China are, for the most part, separated and in a sense even isolated from each other. Although I learned a lot about Chinese culture while living in China, I also began to realize that to fully understand the country, I, along with my fellow international students in China, must interact with the local people and learn about their perspectives of the world. However, until I was given the opportunity to go to Brown, I did not know how to address this issue. Through interacting with the various knowledgeable, helpful, and insightful professors and mentors at Brown University, I was able to formulate a plan to address this concern of mine.

My plan originally was to address the issue of limited cultural interaction by means of gathering volunteers at my international school and travelling to a nearby Chinese village every few months. Once we arrive, we spend a number of days teaching the local students various subjects. The plan also indicates that the local students will select the subjects that are taught. Through teaching these subjects, my teaching fellows and I will be further exposed to the local culture and social interaction between the international and local communities will be increased. However, during the process of proposing and implementing this plan to turn this idea into a functioning project, the plan was changed in order to make it more feasible. Eventually, after several discussions with my school’s administration (which spanned the time period of about a month), the plan was changed so that the idea of promoting cultural interaction through means of teaching was preserved. However, rather than travelling to a local Chinese village and living there overnight in order to teach various subjects over the course of several days, my teaching fellows and I will travel to a nearby local school for one afternoon every few weeks. Rather than teaching subjects of the students'
choice, our group will teach various English skills through interactive activities as well as teaching in a classroom environment. After the adjustments were made in order to make the plan more effective and successful, the school administration finally recognized my community service group, known as Reach to Teach. Since then, we have been conducting these trips and organization meetings for an entire academic year.

From the special bond I formed with the local students that I have taught and the insights I observed, my knowledge of the Chinese culture has expanded. Through this program, the teaching fellows and the local students have a better understanding of each other. I feel that I am a step closer toward a personal goal, which is to foster stronger ties between China and the West by bring the international community in China and the local Chinese closer together. From running this cultural exchange program that I founded, Reach to Teach, I realized the importance of learning insights from personal interaction. For example, the Chinese emphasis placed on education and discipline can be seen in the behavior and learning attitude of the students. During lessons when games are played just for fun, the students played the games in a very serious and competitive manner, which naturally reflected the cultural conditioning of these students since young age. The difference between western and Chinese cultures can be seen in this example, as western students would have taken such games in a more playful and fun manner. This different attitude and behavior were also cultural shocks to our teaching fellows that have western upbringing. Through this program, I was not only interacting with the locals and helping in the community, but also learning and expanding my knowledge of Chinese culture first hand. Prior to founding Reach to Teach, I simply wanted to connect with my Chinese heritage as a Chinese American. Now my experience with Reach to Teach has changed my knowledge and perspective of China, along with my desires and goals. Instead of just learning about the culture, I want to focus more on prompting meaningful interaction between the international community in China and the local population, in hopes of getting people from both cultures to better understand each other through direct interaction.
While at Brown University, I focused primarily on conflict resolution, which is an essential skill that many leaders of organizations such as Reach to Teach must have in order to successfully establish and run their programs. During the process of establishing my group as a school recognized program, the skills I learned at Brown proved to be helpful during the several discussions that took place leading up to the success of my plan when listening to the opinions of the several parties involved in the implementation of this action plan. When considering my action plan, it seems as though my project is successful. However, I still aspire to expand my project to different schools and cities. This way, I can provide more opportunities for valuable cultural interaction between international and local students in other communities beyond my own.

If one wishes to make a change in their community, the Brown Leadership Institute is a great place to begin. The resources and mentorship available at the program creates the perfect environment to formulate an effective and detailed plan to fulfill one’s desires to change their communities. One may arrive at Brown with a plan and several ideas in mind already, but I suggest keeping an open mind and welcoming other ideas. The Brown Leadership Institute is a diverse academic program, with scholars coming from all corners of the globe, with insights and experiences unique to themselves. Hence, attending the Brown Leadership Institute is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about others and receive insights based on these unique experiences in order to make one’s action plan as feasible and effective as possible.