AIMEE BAILEY | Beijing, China

Prior to starting the Luce Scholarship, I had never been to Asia. It was an entire continent waiting to be explored and understood. Stepping off the plane in Beijing, I discovered quickly that reading about China from afar had given me only small clues of what life would be like here. My apartment sits in the “spiritual district” near the Lama Temple, one of the largest Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the world. To the south, hutongs, or traditional courtyard alleys, spread out in a maze. Walking through the neighborhood, I pass an assortment of teashops, grocers, public toilets, incense vendors, and fortune-tellers, accompanied by a dizzying mix of their corresponding sounds and smells. Motorized carts, bicycles, and dog walkers pass idly but steadily from every direction. To the north of my apartment is the Second Ring Road, a multi-lane monstrosity that circumscribes the city center, beyond which a quilt of high rises and traffic unfurls as far as the air quality will allow you to see.

In short, I live at the intersection of old and new Beijing, the past and future of China. Here, although development has lifted millions out of poverty, it has not been without cost: examples of environmental degradation and its corresponding health impacts abound. After all, as some citizens contend, what good is a higher GDP, if you can no longer breath the air? Each day, I work on energy and climate change issues at the Global Environmental Institute (GEI), a think tank focused on designing and implementing market-based solutions for environmental problems to enable economically, ecologically, and socially sustainable development. Specifically, I am researching innovative low-carbon policies and finance mechanisms that will have a high chance of success when utilized by provincial-level governments. I am also writing a white paper on the status of crowdfunding in China and its prospects for significantly contributing to sustainable development here. Although living and working in Beijing present a host of challenges – language barriers, restricted internet access, and poor sanitation, to name a few – it has given me a priceless perspective and appreciation for the world’s most populous country. I am already a self-described Sinophile.

LAUREN BUCKLEY | Bangkok, Thailand

Bangkok mornings greet me with an urban birdsong– the din of traffic controllers’ futile whistles for order on my soi (small street), which is forever crowded with motorbikes, Nescafé stands, som tam (papaya salad) vendors pounding chilies... and sometimes ankle-deep with floodwater. Each day the friendly building guard – who insists I call him Pii Chaai (older brother) – pauses to ask the same question: gin khaao ruu yan? Have you eaten yet?

From helping migrant children in Bangkok to teaching dance in Taipei, from coaching Chongqing’s first and only American football team to rock climbing in Hanoi, from learning to say “high five” in Khmer to navigating Beijing bus routes in Mandarin, the 2012-2013 Luce Scholars report on their endeavors and adventures after half a year in host countries all across Asia.
This greeting is as ubiquitous as Thai reverence for food. And in this live-to-eat culture, one flavor reigns: shrimp. Fresh shrimp, shrimp paste, dried shrimp, shrimp crackers: no wonder Thailand is the world’s largest shrimp exporter, and the U.S. is Thai shrimp’s main destination. Unfortunately, unlike the delicious dishes, the shrimp industry practices in Thailand are notoriously unsavory. Trafficking of migrants from Myanmar, worker exploitation, and child labor run rampant. In late 2012, the U.S. banned public sector import of Thai seafood, prompting a call to action in Thailand to fight child labor.

For my part, I am working with Raks Thai Foundation to increase support for migrant children learning centers, and to encourage shrimp factories – where children would likely work if they were not at the center – to improve their corporate social responsibility. I am currently making fundraising media and a short documentary about Samut Sakhon, one of Thailand’s shrinking centers. In a month’s time, I will be teaching in Samut Sakhon weekly and delving deeper into migrant issues there. I will help develop the curricula of a fledgling learning center, and have fun with the kids.

Considering that I studied biochemistry, this project focus may seem surprising. However, my helpful boss encourages my efforts in media and education, even though I have limited experience, because of my growing interest and ability to help. And I have not ignored science completely. One focus of my time at the learning centers will be science education, including hands-on experiments and a health education series. Outside of this growing project, I have had the opportunity to attend the CARE International conference and a number of workshops and field visits, where I take photos, conduct interviews, and write reports for donors and the website.

In my free time, I study Thai in all its tonal glory, discover nooks of this megalopolis through food treasure hunting, and play some particularly friendly volleyball. I look forward to floods more learning in the next six months.

**MADDY CASE | Hanoi, Vietnam**

By now, I have been in Hanoi long enough to develop routines. Every morning I drive to work by motorbike, wending through narrow alleys and around the edge of Dong Da Lake in a route that helps me avoid the worst of the traffic. Most days I stop on the way to buy a ball of warm yellow sticky rice, wrapped inside a banana leaf with crispy fried onions and mung bean topping, from a girl who sits on the sidewalk with her basket and smiles when I pull up. Wednesdays after work I study Vietnamese, and Tuesday and Thursday evenings I go to the rock climbing gym, the center of my social life in Hanoi, where friends shout encouragement to fellow climbers in a mix of Vietnamese, English, and French.

I spend my days in the office of the Center for Education and Development, a Vietnamese NGO, working on developing environmental education programs for Vietnamese schoolchildren. It’s a small and friendly office, with co-workers who are always eager to help explain cultural mysteries and offer me unfamiliar snacks. I’ve learned a lot from this job about the education system in Vietnam, and I’ve especially loved the opportunities to visit potential sites for field trip programs, from a bear rescue center to a mangrove forest. We’re excited now to be kicking off the GLOBE program in Vietnam, an international science education program that gets kids directly involved in scientific research.

In six months, Hanoi has gone from being hot enough that I couldn’t walk to language class in the morning without sweating through my shirt, to cold enough that I sleep under four blankets and drink tea constantly so I have something warm to wrap my hands around. Meanwhile I have become a person who can drive a motorbike in rush-hour traffic and joke with vendors in the market and slice potatoes thin enough to make my Vietnamese housemate happy. I’ve fallen in love with limestone karsts and eating on tiny plastic stools and the way Hanoi’s lakes look on hazy days. I still make a fool of myself daily. Life is good.

**ANA MARIA CRUZ | Beijing, China**

In every challenge I face in China, I think of my mother and how she went from a small village in Colombia to New York without knowing the culture or the language, a similar journey I would embark on thirty years later.

Across China, rural migrants are moving to big cities like Beijing in search of a better life. Everyday I see them carry over their shoulders all of their belongings wrapped in blankets, their hands callused from manual labor and their eyes always tired. My neighborhood hosts the first stop of the buses connecting most migrants to their homes in the outskirts of Beijing where rent is more affordable yet the living standard is low. There is a phrase describing the migrant experience: *chiku* - eating bitterness.

Made second-class citizens without access to local benefits such as public school because of China’s *hukou* (household
registration) system, many migrants are forced to send their children to expensive migrant schools often run by unlicensed teachers. My placement, Compassion for Migrant Children, builds community centers in China to provide support for these children. Responsible for external communications, I frequently visit the centers located on the edges of Beijing, which gives me truly unique opportunities to interact with the migrant community in their living environment. It also highlights to me the importance of studying Chinese.

My first trip to a center was a huge flop. I took the train to transfer to a bus that would take me closest to the center. I asked the woman conductor to let me know when it was my stop. I sat down and felt great; I had made it this far on my own with my Chinese. Well, I rode that bus close to the last stop when the woman suddenly realized I was still there. I then got on a bus coming back, and again it wasn’t until I arrived back at the train station that I realized I had missed my stop again. I tried getting a taxi but the answers were all the same: hen fuza- [the route is] too complicated. I never made it to the center that morning. I called my mother and cried. She laughed, “M’ija you weren’t lost. You made it back home; that is a victory.” Every time I start to believe I have made progress, I realize how much more there is to learn and every challenge I face I think about what my mother told me that day, and I count it as a small victory.

JUSTIN HENCERO TH | Bangkok, Thailand

As a Public Policy graduate, I could not have picked a better place or time to be than the Philippines now. In the past six months, the Filipino government has passed the Kasambahay Bill which will advance the rights of thousands of Filipina girls and women who work as live-in servants, the Sin Tax Bill which hopes to curb the number of Filipino smokers and use the funds to support more access to affordable healthcare, and the Reproductive Health Bill which renders contraception bans illegal and increases access to sex education. Each of these measures took over 10 years to pass.

We work with networks of stakeholders in four Thai cities to help them understand how urbanization and climate change threaten their cities. We help cities outline strategies and develop and implement practical interventions that measurably improve their resilience. On a daily basis, we struggle through conversations with stakeholders, who have to weigh the very real social and economic benefits brought by rapid economic development with the ever-increasing potential for all types of man-made and natural disasters. Those conversations, which touch on how politics, business, and culture are changing and reacting to development, have served as one of my primary tools for observing and learning about modern Thailand.

And it is this modern Thailand that has increasingly begun to feel like home. From the modern and very cosmopolitan center of Bangkok, to the chaos and vibrancy of street markets, to the unique beauty of Thailand’s famous beaches, I am learning to live life in a place that is almost nothing like the home I left in Colorado. Looking forward to the rest of my Luce Year, I am excited by the prospect of diving deeper into and connecting more with this unique country and culture.

AMBER KOONCE | Manila, Philippines

As I travel across Thailand, I continue to hear the same refrain: “you should have seen this place five years ago; it looked nothing like this.” The statement is made with a variety of emotions, from pride and wonder to fear or condemnation, and is always accompanied with my hosts or colleagues pointing out some of the new buildings, factories and housing developments that spring up seemingly overnight. Much of this new development is happening in unplanned and unpredict-
In 2006, The Philippines passed a Juvenile Justice Act that rendered it illegal to incarcerate youth who were under the age of 18. Because there was no juvenile justice system in the Philippines, prior to the passage of this act, any child who had been found guilty of a crime would be imprisoned with adults. It is now the responsibility of village governing bodies, or “Barangay Councils”, to rehabilitate their delinquent youth and this has turned out to be more responsibility than they have the capacity to handle. This year I am working with the Humanitarian Legal Assistance Foundation (HLAF) to facilitate the rehabilitation process of delinquent youth in the Philippines and to support Barangay Councils in their efforts to reintegrate these children. We aim to increase the capacity of local governmental units to care for delinquent youth through trainings, conferences, meetings with parents, and referrals for community engagement.

I have been deeply involved with the lobbying effort against a new bill that asks congress to lower the incarceration age to 12. I have staked out senate and congressional hearings on behalf of HLAF, written an editorial for a national news source, and conducted interviews to create a video montage of reformed youth.

In 2009, I founded a non-profit called BeautyGap that seeks to affirm the self-concepts of girls of color, through the dispersal of black and brown dolls internationally. In a culture where the value of white skin is immeasurable, it has been my greatest pleasure, thus far, to hand out brown dolls to young, beautiful Filipina girls who had never owned a doll that looked like them.

BRENDAN LEHNERT | Beijing, China

China emphasizes its centrality vis-à-vis the rest of the world, beginning with its name, the “middle country.” This idea is deliberately built into an exhibit in the Beijing Capital Museum, where visitors are invited to walk a circular path that juxtaposes China’s history and achievements with the rest of the world. The inner, central wall is dedicated to Chinese history, thought, and technology, while the outer wall documents that of Egyptian, European, and American civilizations. Near the end of the exhibition, as the present approaches, scientific and technological achievements are noticeably absent from the inner Chinese wall, while the opposite wall features Western scientists whose work has shaped the world.

I work in the Center for Structural Biology of Tsinghua University, where it feels like I am witnessing the beginning of a Renaissance. Five years ago the Center was founded with special support from the Chinese government, and its scientists now tackle some of the most intractable and important problems in the biological sciences. They have since determined the atom-by-atom structures of more than a dozen transmembrane proteins, molecules that are among the most important drug targets. Culturally, it has been informative to observe the points of tension and cooperation between Western-educated and domestic scientists, as well as their unique approaches to work in the lab. For my part, I work with three graduate students on the atomic structure of a protein in the nervous system that allows cells to communicate with one another.

The charm of life in China is the near impossibility of getting anything done without learning something new. The Luce Foundation purposefully selects individuals with little experience in Asia, but afterwards encourages and generously supports language training. With this support, typical responses to my Chinese language queries have gone from “什么？(huh?)” to “我明白你的意思（I understand your meaning）.” As I learned by accident last autumn, there is only a slight difference in pronunciation between “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves” and “Snow White and the Seven Lovers,” so communication is often rife with misunderstanding. I am very fortunate that my wife, who grew up speaking Chinese, also lives and works with me in Beijing, as she gives me the opportunity to see China through her perspective and better understand our common experiences.
REID MAGDANZ | Vientiane, Laos

I don’t think I’ll ever get over the fact that nearly every Lao person I meet, in their delight to see me, gives me one of the warmest smiles I’ve ever seen and often then invites me to drink Beerlao. Sometimes I can’t help but feel a little undeserving because, despite most Americans knowing nothing about it, the United States once leveled rural villages across the country in its hunt for communist soldiers, and singlehandedly turned Laos into the most bombed country, per capita, in history, leaving hundreds of thousands of ordinances behind, unexploded. I also grapple with recent history in this small, long-isolated nation: how the communists easily and brilliantly deposed the monarchy in a revolution and how many people were sentenced to years in harsh “re-education” camps. When I look at people around me, I wonder what their stories are and how this history has shaped them.

But much as I value understanding the past, I’m not one to live in it. I relish my work here for the opportunity it gives me to see Laos as it develops today. I’m placed with Village Focus International Laos, an NGO working with poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities in the southern uplands in Laos. Serving as a project advisor on a team monitoring the implementation of Lao hydropower policy, I couldn’t have dreamed of a better project that matches all my interest areas – resource development, rural people, field work, policy – while giving me a front-row seat to the most important sector in Laos’ now breakneck development.

My home remains in the United States, and in Alaska. I know that. But every time I return to Laos from abroad, my heart lifts when I cross the Mekong. I have developed such feelings for a nation that was dark, communist-infested jungle to my parents, a nation that shocked me into reality a month ago when Sombath Somphone, a prominent civil society leader, disappeared after being stopped at a police checkpoint. Laos has its dark side, yes, but it’s hard to despair when I am greeted with bright smiles every day, welcomed at every house I visit, invited to join dinner and drinks on most any road I walk down, and, most importantly, always given a share of the pleasure and value the Lao place in life, no matter its form.

ERIN MCGONAGLE | Siem Reap, Cambodia

I begin this Sunday morning as I do most Sunday mornings in Siem Reap, reclining in my hammock and listening to sounds of the awakening town fill the silence around me. From my perch, I hear my landlady chopping food in the outdoor kitchen behind the house, the neighborhood children laughing as they play in the alley, the din of motorbikes as they zip along the main road, and Khmer wedding music—it is wedding season, after all—floating above it all from several blocks away. These sounds, once foreign and played in an unfamiliar key, are becoming the sounds of home.

If I were to pull myself out of my hammock, I would be greeted by the playing children with outstretched hands to teah dai (high-five), and by their mothers asking touv na (where are you going?). Turning onto the dusty main road, I would cross the bridge over the Siem Reap River; dodging traffic along my way. A short distance along the same road stands my favorite café; a bit further still and I would find myself in front of the front gates of Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC).

My placement at AHC has allowed me insight into a program developing at the forefront of healthcare in Cambodia. I have been given the opportunity to observe rounds, attend lectures, and work with several doctors on an ongoing retrospective study. I have joined AHC’s Capacity Building and Health Education Program (CBHEP) on outreach visits to villages many kilometers from Siem Reap, occasions that have allowed me to practice my Khmer conversational skills and learn more about Cambodian culture as the only barang (foreigner) amongst CBHEP staff and villagers. My current project has introduced me to yet another area of the hospital as I begin to collaborate with AHC’s Art and Play and Social Work programs. Like most of the current healthcare system in Cambodia, AHC is only less than two decades old. In fact, this past weekend we celebrated AHC’s 14th Anniversary in conjunction with a handover ceremony, marking the establishment of AHC as an organization entirely independent from its parent NGO, Friends without Borders. It is an exciting but at times frustrating system to be
learning from. I have become familiar with the many obstacles encountered by the hospital that are taken for granted as non-issues in the more developed West.

Writing this down paints a busy picture, and I have indeed experienced quite a bit. Yet what I have appreciated most about my time in Siem Reap has been the opportunity—no, the necessity—to slow down and take it all in, to develop my capacities for patience and acceptance. Life here runs like the Siem Reap River during dry season, more slowly but consistently so. I have tested the waters, warm and welcoming they are, and I am so thankful that I have six more months to learn to navigate this current.

CHRIS MCLAURIN | Chongqing, China

On a typical day in Chongqing, a shroud of heavy fog and rain settles from the top of Nan Shan Mountain down to the foot of the Yangtze River basin. The only penetrating light can be seen from the enormous LED displays that illuminate the top of the city’s skyline. Throughout the day, the sound of ship horns low down the river, street vendors play pre-recorded slogans on megaphones, and the twang of local accents are shared over rounds of baijiu. Occasionally, the fog will clear, each time revealing yet another grand structure, lifted by one of the forty-odd cranes that surround you at any one point in the city.

Chongqing is known as the “Invisible City” not just because of the smog and fog that tends to hide it, but because it still remains in the shadow of China’s more traditional hubs for international visitors. Yet, with a GDP growth rate of 20% in Chongqing’s northern industrial zone and industrial output soaring above other competing cities, not even invisibility could hold this place back. The megacity of over six million people (32 million if one counts the entire administrative area) has become a landscape of possibility for my Luce year.

With the operating motto of “nothing is impossible,” my placement at the Liangjiang New Area Innovation & Start-Up Investment & Development Corporation provides a front seat view of this transformation and a place to take part in it. In this state-owned investment company formed by the municipal Science and Technology Commission, I work with local and international automobile companies to advance leadership, efficiency, and sustainability in the industry. My position has offered incredible exposure to both the costs and benefits of its rapid growth and the challenges that remain before Chongqing can be considered a “first-tier” city in China.

The company motto has applied even more to me personally. From doubling for Shane Battier in a shoe commercial to coaching Chongqing’s first and only American football team, my Luce experience has been a test in courage to speak more, eat more, and do more. I couldn’t have done all this without tremendous friends, teammates, and colleagues that have shaped my time here. Their patience and fellowship will be the reason behind any success I achieve during my time in the Mountain City.

ANDREA NIEVES | Jakarta, Indonesia

The old men around me were visibly shaken by the scenery around them. It was an ordinary afternoon in Central Sulawesi: windy, brutally hot, and humid. We were standing on the banks of the Palu River, looking out at the concrete levee across the way that the old men had built with their bare hands over forty years ago. Everyone was quiet for a few minutes, despite the size of the group. And then the stories began, as if the levee had just broken and the opas, the grandfathers, were finally free to speak about the horrors they had suffered as political prisoners.

All day we had been traveling on a rattly old bus as part of the “Forced Labor Sites Trail of Memories Tour.” This was the fourth or fifth site of the day, just one of many public works projects that the opas had built during their period of imprisonment. They began to share with me how they were taken from their families, tortured and imprisoned, without a trial or
due process, in 1965 and 1966. These men were the lucky ones, the ones who survived. Many of their friends and family members, and hundreds of thousands of victims in other parts of Indonesia, did not.

I was spending the week with the opas in my capacity as a Luce Scholar placed at the Commission for Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS). KontraS is as exciting and vibrant as the diverse nation of Indonesia, the world’s fourth most populous country, stretched over 17,000 islands. Every day, activists from all over the country walk through our doors to share a cup of coffee and the latest news from the farthest reaches of the archipelago. They are Muslims from Banda Aceh, Hindus from Bali, and Christians from Papua. Despite differences in religion, language and experience, they are all committed to improving human rights in Indonesia. I assist KontraS staff in advocating for a meaningful truth and reconciliation process for past human rights abuses. I also conduct research about migrant workers and criminal justice.

I am based in Jakarta, a bustling tropical metropolis that gets a bad rap for its notorious traffic jams, flooding and pollution. But thanks to my Indonesian friends I have found many hidden treasures: great cuisine, diverse arts and cultural events, and free yoga classes in the gorgeous Suropati Park.

I spend my days refining my Bahasa Indonesia language skills by networking with activists, and my weekends exploring the country’s volcanoes, rain forests and beaches. I’ve already completed my open water SCUBA certification and look forward to discovering Indonesia’s many pristine dive spots.

I look forward to spending the next few months learning all that I can from this exciting experience and living life to the fullest!

CODY POPLIN | New Delhi, India

The car careened along the highway with no noticeable deference to traffic laws or marked lanes. As we whisked away from the international airport and into the city, the driver slammed the brakes, overtook the next vehicle, and honked interminably. Turning off the main road after just passing an elephant, we zipped down a little lane, where rickshaw-walas slept bivouacked next to a collapsing market. All in my first hour in India, I remember asking incredulously, “This is the world’s next rising power?”

It’s true; traffic never moves at the pace expected or desired in India. Coming way too often from the opposite direction on your side of the road, you encounter scooters, bicycles, and even camel-drawn carts. Yet, off the highways, one sees signs of India’s rise in each passing billboard advertising cell phones, new cars, and even daily direct flights to dozens of international destinations. Apartment complexes and glassy malls rise in the distance alongside Mughal monuments and Hindu temples, and Bollywood tunes boom out of appliance and tech stores.

To say it shortly: It’s an exciting time to be living and working in India. Friends have provided intimate, if limited, glimpses into what India’s rise will entail. Everyday interactions, from neighborhood Diwali celebrations to homebrewed chai tea and murg masala, have filled in the stark contrasts of Indian society away from the noise and bedlam.

When not out exploring in twenty-first century India, I am usually writing about it at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi as a policy analyst. There, I’ve worked to construct a comprehensive database of Indian foreign aid expenditures in hopes of understanding how India is employing soft power in its rise. I am also engaging in an independent project, exploring the structural causes of and global threats from South Asian insurgencies and their resulting policy implications. My position at CPR has presented incredible opportunities to understand India that I would not have had elsewhere, whether that is speaking with members of the Indian parliament or conferencing with other young fellows in the office.

In addition to my work at CPR, I spend time volunteering with Salaam Baalak Trust, a non-profit that educates and houses more than 4,000 former street children. By far, my most memorable moments in India have come while at SBT, where I work with two young men named Noor and Iqbal, helping them practice English and develop computer skills.

With time and persistent humility, I have found that India is not unknowable, and I’ve tried to experience all sides of its rich colors. While the roads are still chaotic, what once seemed confusing and foreign has become more navigable. I look forward to traveling them over the next six months and seeing what all they bring.
DANIEL RUBIN | New Delhi, India

I am spending my Luce year at the Observer Research Foundation, a foreign affairs-oriented think tank based in New Delhi, India. Given my broad array of international interests (and lacking Indian foreign policy expertise), I was fortunate to be placed at ORF. In my short time here, I have worked on papers and initiatives dealing with Indian defense cooperation, the BRICS Forum, global governance, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In addition to writing and doing interesting research, ORF values having their large cohort of young interns and researchers do original work on issues of interest to them. Being exposed to many diverse, relevant topics and having the freedom to do my own research have been valuable.

Perhaps the best part about ORF is my coworkers. Whether it is young Indians, foreign interns, or more senior fellows, everyone has been generous with their time. They have helped me learn about India’s incredibly complex and often frustrating political system and given me great insight into India’s diverse cultures and states. Additionally, ORF frequently has roundtables and events, which expose me to the broader universe of Indian and South Asian policy issues straight from relevant government ministers and military officers.

While happy with my ORF experience, I have come to see that the Luce year is about much more then work. In addition to the Indian friends I have made, Delhi has a large expat community. It has been great getting to know people from various Asian and European countries who bring different perspectives and experiences to India but also a common love for foreign affairs, travel, and new cuisines.

Finally, in addition to seeing Delhi’s many historical sites, I have been lucky to explore India beyond its capital. Cody, the other India Luce Scholar, and I have already traveled to nearly ten cities. Tackling India’s varied terrains, cuisines, and cultures has been both amazing and sometimes intimidating. Whether it be the hills of Srinagar, the forts of Jaipur, or the beaches of Goa, India has a diversity of sites unparalleled by most other places I have visited. I am excited to continue exploring, learning and eating my way through India for the remainder of the year.

DANIEL RUDIN | Manila, Philippines

I’ve traveled abroad before, and in one instance had to practically learn a new language on the fly. But I must say, working with Rappler, a social news network, has thus far been an experience that has challenged me in ways that I could not imagine, and has changed me at my very core.

Rappler, which might be called the “Asian Huffington Post,” has a loose organizational structure and its content is very much driven by a team of young reporters who work quite independently. The mantra of Rappler’s CEO, Maria Ressa, is that we are in an “Age of authenticity vs. an age of authority.” It is, in fact, a radical critique of traditional journalism. Employees and interns use social media; indeed, the website itself consists of a modified Wordpress template, thus the independence and “authenticity” in reporting. There is really no micro-controlling here, which I found immensely refreshing.

However, it was all the same quite difficult to adapt to the structure of the organization. I was expected to not only generate my own stories in the strange and sometimes bewildering social and urban landscape of Metro Manila, but to also
adapt my documentary video-making and video-art skills to produce media at a turn-around rate that I was little accustomed to.

Dealing with the language gap also took some time. Despite the assumptions that many have about the Philippines as being an “English-speaking” country, the reality is that only exceptional students and the upper classes have the wherewithal to fully express themselves in English. Getting a personal workflow down for translation was remarkably complicated, given that Rappler could not provide adequate assistance in this regard.

I realized that, in effect, I was responsible for production myself. This was, in fact, a refreshing realization, since I realized that I could truly work with the themes that most interest me.

My interests in documentary video making have always been with labor. It was therefore with great pleasure that I profiled, on several occasions, members of the Philippine Airlines Employees Association at their picket camp near Manila Terminal 2.

In addition, I have partnered with a disaster management specialist from the Asia Foundation to make a short video on informal settlers and the National Housing Authority’s relocation program. I am in discussions with the Asia Foundation to collaborate on a video, which will depict the Foundation’s conflict-mitigation process in action in Mindanao.

Currently, I am launching a video series that seeks to mainstream labor issues to Rappler’s viewership. The series will focus on young, active unionists and association members who have confronted labor abuses through leadership initiative and collective action. The project seeks to utilize social media, via a crowd-sourcing micro-site, in such a way that allows viewers and workers to dialogue about their own work situation, and seek redress for the labor problems that they confront. I see the project as an evolution of my own documentary video-making practice into a hybrid form that embraces social media and viewer participation, and eschews the older, more authoritarian form of documentary authorship.

The patience and generosity of my hosts, collaborators, and new friends have fully rewarded the efforts I have taken in producing short-form and hybrid documentary videos here in the Philippines. I truly look forward to my remaining time with Rappler, and already can look back at the previous months and say that I have been greatly and positively changed by my Luce year!

ABIGAIL SELDIN | Hong Kong

My placement is in the Office of Strategic Planning & Research at the Hong Kong Tourism Board. The HKTB works in partnership with relevant Government departments and organizations, the travel-related sectors, and other entities directly or indirectly related to tourism. With rising numbers of tourists from the Mainland to this tiny Special Administrative Region (SAR), this year has provided a special opportunity to see first-hand the unique identity politics of Hong Kong.

My husband and I are living in Sai Ying Pun, a traditional Cantonese neighborhood soon to be rebranded as “Midlevels-West.” We are very close to the infamous dried seafood street of Hong Kong. Though not tempted by its offerings of sharkfin and dried octopus, I walk along the street as part of my normal route to the Sheung Wan MTR and pass traditional butchers and small markets on my way. Though slightly out of the way, we enjoy our low-key neighborhood. Unfortunately, the new MTR stop now under construction next to my building has contributed to a rise in local real estate value, and will likely change the character of this community.

I thoroughly enjoyed my Mandarin lessons this past summer. I suspect other passengers on the MTR considered me to be entirely mad, as I sat whispering to myself in Mandarin, describing what I saw around me, or obsessively flipping through a large stack of note cards. My Mandarin teacher, Vivian, is fantastic and very supportive. Only 30 years old, she is the proprietor of a small school, and hails from a small city near Beijing. She originally came to Hong Kong for a graduate degree at the Chinese University and stayed to start her business (Priority Mandarin). In August, we moved on to practicing my new vocabulary by chatting about Sex and the City characters in Mandarin. Vivian assures me that gossip is very important in Chinese culture, so I need to have the vocabulary and colloquialisms necessary to do it correctly….

The two hours that I spent with her each morning were great fun for both of us.

Highlights to date have included the Hong Kong Book Fair (incredible!), the Hong Kong History Museum, a summer visit to a Harbin Ice Sculpture exhibition in Macau, a beach trip to Chung Hom Kok, a visit to the artist’s colony in Fo Tan, regular visits to the Wattis Fine Art map gallery and lots of dim sum.
RENA T A S E H E P P A R D | Taipei, Taiwan

Let’s start with the fact that I live in an apartment I have dubbed the “jungle-gym-tree-house:” a studio with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Danshui River with multiple, handmade wooden platforms and a distinctly Japanese-inspired flare. It’s not luxury but it is absolutely priceless to me and I wake up every morning to catch the light as it dances across the high rises facing the mouth of the South China Sea and think, “I must be hallucinating.”

Apologies, but I sometimes luce myself in puns—and on the streets in Taipei which are teaming with activity and curious nooks and crannies that seem to reveal themselves in layers each time I walk by. The street life alone is a living exhibition that fascinates me, especially when a scooter whizzes by with a family of four, a sound-asleep baby sandwiched in between mom and dad and two dogs somehow fastened (I hope) to the base.

After living abroad in Europe for two years I thought I knew what I was getting into with this cross-cultural adventure. Ha. This has been an incredibly challenging yet rewarding experience more for what I didn’t expect than for what I did. Taiwanese culture is deep, rich, complex, and diverse. And due to multiple periods of colonization, Taiwanese national identity is even more so. There is a mixture of nostalgia and rebellion in relation to Japan and a strong voice that urges to (re?)identify, or perhaps I should say delineate, what Chinese means to the Taiwanese in relation to China. The complexity of politics and (re)emerging identities extracts deep and ancient rhythms, injecting them into modern life. Traveling to Beijing in October for a cross-cultural dance conference/workshop with several faculty members from my placement, the Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), revealed a very delicate dance that was happening beyond the studio and stage.

The island is also home to an indigenous population (yet another dimension to contextualizing the Taiwanese identity) whose harvest festivals offer an amazing opportunity to see culture in action. And I mean action. I joined in a three-hour, fast-paced circle dance during which “outsiders” are encouraged to participate. Undergoing this annual rite of passage into a new phase of manhood, young men would dance from sunrise to sunset. I learned about betelnut giving as a way for a young woman to show her interest. The girl next to me in the circle even touted to me her brother’s available status and search for a wife. I did not give him any betelnuts but appreciated the gesture!

As Taiwanese artists embrace technology-based performance, I am able to engage in a very tangible way with the dance and multimedia art community. One of the highlights has been working with the freshman class at TNUA teaching Laban Movement Analysis and Interactive Technologies. I also gave a keynote at the Stage! Dance and Technology Conference held at the university, led a workshop/demo on dance and technology, wrote a book review for the Taiwan Dance Research Society Journal, guest lectured in other departments at TNUA and guest taught at Chinese Culture University (I love the students there!).

I have just begun a much anticipated pause after a very long semester that was not broken by Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations we know and love in the United States. Working through the holidays away from my family wasn’t easy but I can’t imagine my Christmas 2012 in any other way: good company and doing a job I love. And New Year’s Eve fireworks on Taipei 101 are not to be missed!

I am looking forward to collaborating with a Taiwanese dance company for a show in May as well as making an experimental piece for a Sound Festival this spring. I am sure the next six months will continue to reveal hidden gems and unforeseen opportunities for growth, both personal and professional. And that I will come up with more puns to explain the shift from Confucian to clarity as I Taiwonder what on earth could follow this incredible year that already has me forever grateful to the Luce Foundation.

DANA TOY | Daejeon, South Korea

Working in a laboratory at Daejeon University in the “Silicon Valley” of Korea has provided me the opportunity to learn a tremendous amount about neurophysiology research, but also about Korean culture. In the lab, I run independent experiments on the roles of proteins in nerve regeneration. Outside, I get authentic, Korean experiences through my lab “family.” My lab colleagues insist that I refer to them as my older brothers and sisters—and that is exactly what they have been to me. They mentor me on new research techniques, teach me Korean idioms, and invite me to dine on foods as common as stir-fried chicken, dak galbi, or as weirdly delicious as stuffed pig intestine, sundae—not to be confused with an ice cream sundae. In addition to my research experiments, I also pres-
ent cutting-edge, field-related research articles to professors,
doctors, and researchers on a monthly basis and have even
prepared lesson plans and gave guest lectures to biochemistry
and neuroscience doctoral candidates.

Beyond my work placement, I have been fortunate to witness
historical events as a result of South Korea’s dynamic state.
From electing its first female president to PSY’s “Gangnam
Style” taking over the global pop scene, living in Korea during
this time has been a true privilege. Daejeon offers both small
and large city vibes as Korea’s fifth largest metropolis. And when
not studying Korean or heading to a noraebang (karaoke room),
I am comforted by the many mountains surrounding Daejeon,
which are beautiful year-round. I have also had the opportunity
to travel across the country to large cities and small towns, finding
special qualities about each place I visit.

Halfway into the Luce year, Korea has become my home; I am
comfortable, happy, and have a solid routine. Yet, I am aware
that I still have much to learn about Korean history, culture,
and language and wholly welcome the experiences that lie
ahead in the latter half of my Luce year.

JEN ZELNICK | Phnom Penh, Cambodia

I arrived in Cambodia at a particularly pivotal moment in the
country’s complex history; in late October, the beloved King
Father Norodom Sihanouk passed away, leaving the country
in fear of land sieges and general instability. Soon after, Phnom
Penh hosted the ASEAN conferences, where Obama spoke
critically of the Prime Minister (who has been in power for
nearly 30 years). The speech, needless to say, was not aired on
television in Cambodia. Amidst such historical events, Cambo-
dia’s sociopolitical atmosphere appears to be changing steadily,
albeit quietly.

My placement as a Policy Officer at KHANA (the Khmer HIV/
AIDS NGO Alliance) provides a unique lens through which
to consider these tenuous changes. My assigned areas of re-
search focus on the ways people who use or inject drugs
and entertainment workers are marginalized by laws and pol-
ices that are punitive, rather than responsive, to the needs of
these populations. My work affords me diverse opportunities,
from participating in clean needle exchange programming, to
developing case studies and policy papers on the rights of
entertainment workers and authoring a best practice manual
on harm reduction, due for publication before the Luce Year
is over.

When not at work, I spend my time as I would anywhere else in
the world, except much, much sweatier. As one of my favorite
anthropologists once noted, no one likes to talk about the mi-
nutia of the weather; but the elements cannot be overcome or
ignored. I’ve learned to embrace sweating. I regularly go out to
eat with Khmer friends and coworkers, trying new foods, singing
karaoke, or lounging the afternoon away on a hammock over
the Mekong River. I go to the Wat (pagoda) every chance I get,
and have invested in a traditional Khmer outfit so I no longer
have to borrow those of my shorter, smaller-framed friends. In
the evenings I can be found chatting with neighbors or exchang-
ing a quick English lesson with the tuk-tuk drivers for some tips
on Khmer. I’ve prioritized learning Khmer; both speaking as well
as reading and writing, which, if I may say so myself, is no small
feat! I’ve always believed speaking to people in their first language
is tantamount to facilitating communication and attempting to
counteract historical and cultural inequalities. I find this to be es-
pecially true in my work; people trust me more when I try to
speak to them in Khmer; even if it’s not perfect. With 33 consos-
nants, 32 subscripts, 24 dependent vowels (each producing 2 or 3
sounds), 12 independent vowels, and a slew of diacritical symbols,
Khmer has one of (if not the) largest alphabets in the world. For
this reason, and many others, I am so grateful for the opportunity
to immerse myself in the language and culture for an entire year.