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Princeton-in-Asia (PiA) is an independent, not-for-profit organization that aims to foster mutual appreciation and cultural understanding between the U.S. and Asia by connecting service-minded graduates and partner organizations in Asia through immersive work experiences that transform perspectives, cultivate long-lasting relationships and benefit local and global communities.
Welcome to the beginning.

We are incredibly excited to present our first issue of PiARTS, a creative arts journal written and edited by Princeton-in-Asia fellows.

Over the course of our upcoming year in Asia, the arts will be a vital part of how we individually come to understand our experiences. But art is also a collective experience, and as part of a community, art can take on a special type of shared life, begin to breathe in a new way, inspire new creations.

We envision this journal being a source of refuge and inspiration for you. As you go through these pages, perhaps you'll hear narratives that remind you of your own, or perhaps you'll realize just how big and different the world can be.

Whatever it makes you feel, we hope that these beautiful creations can help you on your way to whatever direction you're going next.
editor's note

Néih hóu and Nǐ hǎo from our desks in the beautiful cities of Beijing and Hong Kong!

We are extremely excited about the first issue of PiARTS and very honored to serve as its inaugural pair of rotating editors. We hope that this magazine -- a collection of the artistic expressions of PiA experiences across cities and posts -- gives each of us a glimpse of what we see, who we serve, how we feel, and everything in between. Through the excited lens of our passion and varying degrees of creative prowess, we attempt to explore a variety of themes. What’s first? Directions.

As in where you’re headed, how to get there, what to do in the meantime, and who to ask. Our debut issue focuses on making sense of it all as we each start to settle into our new posts. For every one of us, this year is a time to reflect, build relationships, and most of all pursue dreams and avenues of life seemingly unimaginable before this. In this month’s journal we wanted to allow a space for inquiring minds to see where we are and where we think we might be going.

The pieces that we received were all unique. They run the gamut -- thoughtful, artistic, hilarious, and pragmatic, and each brilliant in its own right. After reviewing these works, we saw them take shape under four interpretations of the overarching theme: Who, How, Where, and What.

The first is “Who”. This chapter recounts tales of the different people we have met, how they have shaped us, and how we have seen ourselves reflected in them. The second section, “How,” outlines techniques for surviving when the universe toys with you or when you just don’t know what to say or write. “Where” showcases pieces that venture into the heart of living in the present and finding home by getting lost. “What”, our last section, displays struggles and reflections surrounding expectations, reassurance in being present, and steps taken to leave a positive mark.

Why? Because some of us were too lazy to start our own blogs. Because we all needed an excuse to learn more about what the other cool kids are doing. Because we want to share our growth and learn from the experiences of our fellow comrades. Because we want a cultured (read: not social media) platform to whine and boast. Because we want to draw attention to the things that mark us. Because we hope to be challenged to look beyond the surface. #PrettyIncrediblyAwesome.

We hope you enjoy this first issue of PiARTS!
Annie and Emmanuella
who

RELATIONSHIPS & ENCOUNTERS

Photograph by Emily Skovran, Phang Nga, Thailand
Author's Introduction:

What follows is a poem I wrote in honor of the foreign domestic workers I met while working at the non-profit organization Aidha in Singapore this summer (Aidha: www.aidha.org). These women have faced numerous challenges in their lives and yet continue to work hard towards their entrepreneurial goals in the hope of a better life for themselves and their families. I hope that as I move forward in my life, I might better appreciate the resilience and humanity of women like these everywhere, who live in a world that does not appreciate their power and strength.

Mountain Woman

Annamaria Andolino Watson
(Penang, Malaysia)

Underneath the emptiness of rock and boulder there is a life, a world of lives.
A mountain is not barren,
It is bearing, filled to the brim with organisms, teeming with terrestrial life.

A woman is not barren,
she is teeming with celestial life. More lives than could fit on a mountain,
fit inside of a woman.
More worlds,
More lives,
More depth.
Teacher

Sam Corey
(Sóc Trăng, Vietnam)

At around 5pm, the city begins to come alive. Lights, scattered everywhere about the town, dance off streets that are strewn with kids, couples, and newlyweds enjoying a small taste of freedom. Riding closer to the city’s center, one is met with a barrage of people, gliding on roller blades in 30 Thang Tu park while hanging out under red and green bulbs that only illuminate places in America during Christmas. Loud dance music juts intrusively from cell phone and computer stores - some of the liveliest places in Soc Trang City.

This is the place where I rest; this is the place where I study the internal and external phenomena; the place where I try to speak with symbols unknown to me only a few months prior. This is the place where I teach English to students that otherwise wouldn’t have the opportunity to practice it. This is the place where I drink beer and eat Hieu Tieu Mi with new friends.

This is the place where my direction lies.

The town’s streets are strewn with the demands of those that live here. Concentrated in very close quarters, one can’t drive - or even walk - five minutes without confronting a café, can tin, hair parlor or beauty salon, karaoke bar, internet game room, clothing store, cell phone shop of some kind, helmet store, shoe store, or billiards club. In short, anything your consumerist heart desires is seldom far.

Today, as with most days, rain is pouring down in buckets beside the canteen where I sit slurping noodles and teaching my friends a handful of English words - words that remain relevant only for brief moments. My new circle of friends - which seems to change, expanding and contracting, on a daily basis - inquires about my life in America and how it compares to life here. They want to know - ban co vui lam? Ban lam viec bao nhieu? Ban goi voi gia dinh?

I tell them I’m happy here. I don’t work that much so my days become filled with learning Vietnamese, reading, and often talking with my family. Reciprocally, I inquire about their days, their work, and the basic joys and disappointments that organically become the epicenter of our everyday lives. And so it typically goes at Chi An’s can tin, I help clean up, sweeping the floors and preparing the dishes for cleaning, and head to the campus next door to sleep.
(Teacher, cont.)

On other days, I head to a friend’s house. Tonight, the road is wide but quiet, undisturbed by the motorists that typically frequent these parts. Indulging in the work of light machinery, moving efficiently – if not dangerously – from point A to B, I take note of my surroundings. To my left, just beyond the median, a group of soldiers march in step like ants move toward their colony. At their sight, I feel no apprehension or intimidation, anguish or uncertainty. The soldiers don’t question why the twenty-something-year-old American on motorbike is speeding past them. Today, a uniform isn’t meant to distinguish from foreigners, only locals.

The wind whips itself around me while I peer down, noting any potholes or dents in the pavement below me. Moving past the overpass that allows a small river to run below it, past the bus station that goes throughout southern Vietnam, and past the innumerable restaurants lining the street, I finally reach Co Ut’s nha. After being welcomed with a hug and warm smile, I sit down to eat some rice, beef, and an assortment of vegetables with the family.

Co Ut asks for an update on my girlfriend situation. I ask her how life at home is, and eventually play games with her son while teaching him English. Co Ut always takes note of my Americaness as she hopes her kids will one day go and marry an American to possibly increase her wealth. She asks about the prices of cars, clothes, dinners, homes, whether we eat the same foods, shop for similar items or if we generally lead similar lives. I do my best to inform her of what I know about the ins and outs of America’s microeconomics, and tell her that if I know an American coming here in search of a wife or husband, I’ll let her know.

Invariably, Co Ut asks – nay, begs – for me to sleep over. I kindly respond that I have more work to do, and take the long road back home. Driving faster than I should, I try to lose myself in the ride; I try to stand out of my own way and let myself just be – be present, be alive, and be mindful of the only direction in which I’m supposed to be headed. Dropping all the control I feel I should have, I try letting go of the fear of increasing the speed on my motorbike. I relinquish the struggle of learning a new language and I give up the attempted grasping for any sort of ego that only gets in the way of realizing that we are all intricately connected to one another. In this tumult of release, I understand that my direction is intricately linked with that of everyone else.
Winter

Alex Decorrevont
(Chiang Rai, Thailand)

back before the snow fell
I was cold and
you kept me

inside
the space between the ash
and the forest
began with silence
a deep
inhaling light
watching broken branches
dancing
in the wind
that taught my dust to breathe

the rain has always felt
like rebirth
alone

blueblack and mine

where little holes ripple
with little hopes
a little

slower

between the ash and the forest
I follow footsteps in broken circles
and curse the soft wrinkles
that you left behind

I trace these shapes into perfect crystal
shards
litter glittering
in the grass
a little
colder

I fall too.

free
and clear
and petrified

and let go.
"The red women danced the night away, forgetting yesterday's woeful blues.

Teej is a holiday that typically occurs during late August or early September. It is a holiday that ushers in the monsoon season and to celebrate, women fast the day of Teej, wear red, worship, dance and sing in the streets. I had just started my World Education post so I felt out of place dancing besides my co-workers. All my female coworkers, dressed in red, all gathered around me, pulling me from side to side to teach me how to properly flick my wrists to the beat. These eleven words are about my co-workers, all the women who celebrated Teej, and envying how my co-workers could forget their stresses while I still felt very lost.

"Swirling dust filled passengers’ lungs; they coughed and spat black muck.

Kathmandu is a dusty city especially after monsoon season when there are no rains to flush the dust away. It is hard to escape when it fills your lungs, hides in every crevice and cakes the floors. I wrote this eleven-word essay after watching someone cough black spit up in a microbus after sitting in dusty traffic for an hour, and thinking to myself this could happen to me too, but I am in a different position or trajectory as a foreigner, as I can leave this place, but many cannot, and suffer the consequences.

"They called her wild child. Little did they know what she was.

These words are about feeling scattered. There are days when I feel all over the place. I feel silly or feel my quirkiness is out of control. Sometimes there are days where I am not sure I am being my full self abroad and worry that strangers will perceive my scattered thoughts as wild or crazy, so I wanted to express this feeling.
HOW
Navigating Difficult Territory

Photograph by Jesse Brooks, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Steps for Dealing with Distance

Lena Sun
(Singapore)

(one) you know you belong to more than just yourself
you fill things, empty rooms with cracks in the walls
you take whatever shape you need to be
like water

two) he says he cannot hold you

(three) you run across oceans to find yourself whole
and soon, you take turns sleeping
him rising as
you fall

(four) you live half-lives meeting each other half-way
you say you can feel the miles between you
he says he cannot feel you at all

(five) he says there’s someone he’s waiting for
he has seen her before, in you
like a reflection in your waters
he tries to pick her up
but you can never stop filling, expanding until you become
too heavy
ungraspable
too overbearing to love

(six) his body becomes your structure and
soon you stop knocking, stop taking off your shoes
stepping across his soft body
like he could forget your footsteps

(seven) but he is clay and you stay vengeful
a river tearing through his careful forests

(eight) he breaks and hardens
begs you to stop, wordlessly

(nine) he tells you he cannot love you anymore
finally, you are empty

(ten) you can stop filling now
Straight Up Directions: When the Universe Experiments with You
(A guide for Verizon Samsung Galaxy LTE Smartphones users in China)

Annie Wang
(Beijing, China)

When I first arrived in Beijing this July, my phone situation was a disaster. In 2014 I studied abroad in Beijing and, as a loyal Verizon LTE Samsung user, I knew that my phone should be unlocked and ready for use with a Chinese SIM. While this was true in 2014, it proved to be a cruel and egregious falsity this time around. When I landed, not only was my phone not ready to use with a Chinese SIM, I ended up returning to the store three times before the gates of Tech Heaven opened and allowed Uncle Xi’s censored data to flow free. In an attempt to bring meaning to my suffering and hopefully help a lost soul, here is my quick guide to problem solving phone issues for Verizon travelers in China. (Note: this guide is for post-2013 Verizon Samsung Galaxy LTE Smartphones. The process might work for others, but it was built for my poor, shabby Galaxy S4 phone and ones like it).

Problem 1: If your phone does not allow you to use data when a Chinese SIM is initially inserted.

Verizon users should use China Unicom. It provides Verizon LTE users with 3G-4G data speeds while the other two providers cap at 3G (when I tried China Mobile it only allowed me on the E network..E!). If your phone does not allow you to use the data on a Unicom SIM that has data on it, your phone may not be on the right mobile network. How do you fix this?

1. Insert the SIM, turn on your phone, and go to ‘Settings’
   a. Note: You must have a SIM in your phone to be able to access the ‘Mobile Networks’
   b. Advised: When figuring out how to use your phone in China, always use another user’s SIM to test that the steps work before buying a SIM
2. Once in ‘Settings’ go to ‘More Networks’ and then ‘Mobile Networks’
3. Click on ‘Network Mode’
4. Set your ‘Network Mode’ to ‘LTE/GSM/UMTS’ – this allows your phone to work on the same wireless standard as your desired carrier (in this case Unicom)
   a. Since I’ve been here, my phone has changed to ‘Global Mode’ on its own and is working perfectly fine so it may be that either works

Problem 2: If you changed your Network Mode but still can’t use data.

At this point in your life, after trying and failing to save your phone, you might be feeling like the Universe’s guinea pig. I definitely did. But then after another half a day of scouring the internet I stumbled across a thing called the Access Point Names (APN). The APN basically creates a wireless antenna that allows your phone to pick up a mobile carrier’s network and internet networks. So, to the good stuff:

1. Just as in the previous scenario, insert a Unicom SIM that has data on it and go to your phone’s ‘Mobile Networks’
2. Once in ‘Mobile Networks’, choose ‘Access Point Names’ and click on the ‘+’ to add a new APN
3. Each carrier has a different APN, but Unicom’s is shown below
4. Enter the information exactly as shown. Every period, space, capitalization, etc. should be entered exactly. The places that say 'Not Set' simply leave blank.
5. After adding your APN, make sure that your Network Mode is on LTE/GMS/UMTS and that you’ve selected your newly added APN
6. At this point, your phone should be working!
   a. Note: You may need to restart your phone after changing your Network Mode and selecting your newly added APN

If your phone is still not working after these steps, you will most likely need to buy a new phone. But on the bright side, at least you know the Universe is paying attention.
50 Reasons I Haven't Turned in My Three Month Report

Spencer Whittaker
(Vientiane, Laos)

1. I had diarrhea.
2. Time is a Western construct.
3. I felt more inspired to write my six month report.
4. “Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence.”
5. My flight was delayed.
6. I’m in mourning.
7. I’m not a morning person.
8. I’m not a report-writing person.
9. I joined the wrong tour group at Angkor Wat and they accepted me as one of their own but now I’m in too deep.
10. I outsourced it but they haven’t gotten back to me since the wire transfer.
11. A tree fell in the woods and is impeding my journey.
12. I found myself.
13. I lost my laptop.
14. Thank you for your message. I am currently out of the office, with no email access. I will be returning on (Date of Return). If you need immediate assistance before then, you may reach me on my cell phone – (Mobile Number).
15. I have been abducted by aliens.
16. I am abducting some aliens and I don’t know if I’ll ever get another opportunity like this.
17. I had a thing.
18. Someone’s got my nose.
19. I’m still trying to negotiate cab fare from the airport.
20. I joined a pack of stray dogs.
21. A stray dog ate my hands.
22. A stray dog broke my heart.
23. I’m pretty confident that I have rabies, but I also don’t trust the doctor near me so who knows.
24. It’s #borninthePIA, not #reportinthePIA.
25. I’m blackout right now.
26. My mom called.
27. Your mom called.
28. It’s been really bright out since the rainy season ended and I can’t see my computer screen because of the glare.
29. I just found out that I ate dogmeat, so I’ve been dealing with that.
30. I accidentally changed my computer to Lao and now I don’t know how to change it back.
31. I gave up introspection for Buddhist Lent.
32. A three month report doesn’t get you likes on Instagram.
33. Filling out an arrival card at the airport is taking longer than expected.
34. Busy searching for emotional fulfillment on Tinder.
35. I sold my laptop to pay for my Japanese Encephalitis shot.
36. Mars is in the Eighth house and we all know what that means.
37. There’s a visiting fellow in my house and I can’t get him to leave.
38. I’m saving my report for marriage.
39. I got stuck in a rainstorm and have been hiding underneath a bus stop overhang. It hasn’t stopped in three months. Things aren’t going so hot right now.
40. My coworkers don’t meet deadlines so why should I?
41. I just got nominated for the ice bucket challenge and need to do that first.
42. Life begins at forty.
43. I’m actually not a fellow and I don’t know how I got on this email listserv.
44. I’m jetlagged.
45. I’m catching up on sleep that I lost when jetlagged.
46. I bruised my pelvis during badminton practice.
47. I’m having an existential crisis.
48. I keep rewatching the Sandra Bullock movie ‘Our Brand is Crisis’.
49. I’ve spent the last three months at political rallies and I’m not sure how to tell that to PIA.
50. I literally have no idea what you are talking about.
where

Discovering Balance, Finding Peace
Directions to Citizenship

Simon Shieh
(Beijing, China)

In this country, where the day will never tell you how hot it will be, I’m walking on a dirt road, drenched in my last name. The sweat not yet dripping from my eyelashes, I had wandered so long I could taste the reason God made water. Above me, a tree stump lonely as a leg lost to a storm from another country. Sometimes, my tongue is a country unto itself. Its people are small but draped in sanctimony. Its rivers run quicker than the space in between two well-wrapped goodbyes on a sidewalk. You reaching for your suitcase as if you know I’ll take it from you. You’re right. America taught me to be nervous but I still don’t know how. And although it is everywhere it is only now coming to the mouth of the boy, bent under the hour, asking his teacher for the words sugarcane, money, and sunrise.
Oh how I love the politics of the tongue.
If our speech was music, I’d scrape a stick against a sandy rock so you’d hear politics. Water would be a nun rustling the leaves in her pink robes, plucking petals from jasmine flowers. I’ve never regretted tenderness.
Not the flag keeping vigil on the shoreline nor the wound disappearing beneath it.
Even a man spitting out the bones of a fish can fall into a river.
In this country, where everything is wet, the rain doesn’t know what to call me. Somewhere, this is exile. This country — where everything is ours and I’m lost in it.
Four Right Turns

Andrew Nachemson
(Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

He hopped on his motorbike, pulled on his helmet, flipped open the visor, lit a cigarette, and stuck it in his mouth. He breathed in deeply, the heat searing his lungs. As the red flames ate away at the paper, he exhaled, and watched the stream of smoke fly off like an ashy river.

He liked to smoke when he was anxious, and he was always anxious in Phnom Penh. Particularly while driving. But in order to smoke and drive he would have to take one or two hands off his handlebars – which was unforgivably reckless. He would also have to either open his visor – blinding himself with the glaring sun and leaving his face uncovered in the event of an accident – or close the visor and let his helmet fill with smoke. Both were unacceptable. After a couple puffs he spit out his cigarette and eased out of the garage.

He turned left, honking to alert any driver lurking around the corner. He drove through one intersection, slowing down and glancing around as he passed through: left-right, left-right, left-right. At the next intersection, he reached for the brakes as another motorcycle heedlessly blasted by. The car behind him honked and he spasmed, throttling the clutch and lurching forward. His bike and body rattled as he rumbled over one of many potholes that represented the eternal disintegration and simultaneous reconstruction of the city. He weaved through a couple cars, coming to a stop beneath a dangling red light that drivers obeyed or disobeyed according to their whims. His palms were so sweaty they slipped off the handlebars.

When taking to the road in America, we put our faith in the sanctity of symbols. We believe that rules will be obeyed, even when the cost of such obedience could be our lives. Red light means stop. Green means go. Yellow means slow down (read: speed up). We trust that a blinking light on a car’s headlights means it is turning. We see these symbols as laws of the universe akin to gravity and the conservation of energy, but they are not. Symbols are only powerful when the people consent to be governed by them. In Phnom Penh, there is no such consent.

So he waited at the light as a small but steady trickle of drivers took their chances in the chaotic maelstrom that was a major intersection. He glanced at one of his mirrors and saw a man behind him with a black and red helmet with a dark visor. He could not see the man’s face. He wore long sleeves, gloves, and long pants. He could not see any of him.

The light turned green and he turned right into a thunderous river of swerving cars, speeding motorbikes, glaring horns, haphazardly parked vehicles, encroaching street vendors, and daring pedestrians. The man-in-the-black-and-red-helmet turned too. He drove a couple more blocks, before a police officer walked out into the frenzied turmoil pointing a baton with the casual air of an unconcerned authority that expected to be obeyed but refused to put in significant effort to ensure it. He instinctively slowed. The officer grabbed his handlebar, and again instinctively, he revved the engine and jolted past him.
(Four Right Turns, cont.)

Panicking, he sped down three more blocks before taking a right turn down a side street. He slowed down, feeling the adrenaline ebb and flow through his veins while he tried to catch his breath and regain his balance. His hands trembled, his toes clenched, he felt disoriented. He wanted a cigarette. He rolled slowly, mechanically down the road, until he noticed the man-in-the-black-and-red helmet nonchalantly gliding behind him.

He had once seen a meme on the Internet suggesting that you should take four turns in a row if suspicious that another car is following you. The four turns would effectively form a circle and nobody would purposefully drive in a circle unless he or she were in pursuit of somebody else. Or if he or she were also trying to determine whether or not another driver was pursuing him or her, of course. He had never taken instructions from a stranger on the Internet who posted block text over a picture of a parrot before, but there had also been a time when he had never smoked a cigarette or driven a motorbike before. There is a first time for everything. He had already turned right twice and the man-in-the-black-and-red helmet had followed, twice. He flicked his blinker and turned right.

He turned onto a narrow, almost empty street. One motorbike sped by him with an entire family on board. Two young children sat in front while their father straddled them, reaching over their heads to steer. A toddler stood up on the seat behind his father, hands on his father’s shoulders. The mother kept the child’s balance for him by holding onto his waist.

The man-in-the-black-and-red-helmet followed slowly behind. He could hear the constant humming and hammering of construction. He drove down the streets – no longer slowing down at intersections – passed scattered trash and chain smoking tuktuk drivers. Random boutique restaurants sprouted out of cracks in the pavement next to slapdash piles of rubble and the flattened corpses of rats.

He knew he still had to turn once more, but felt that that final turn would bring about an inevitable confrontation. It might confirm to the man-in-the-black-and-red-helmet that he knew he was being followed (assuming he was familiar with the four turns rule), thus forcing his stalker’s hand. Just so long as he didn’t turn, this realization would never come and he would never have to die.

He turned right. The man-in-the-black-and-red-helmet turned right. He closed his eyes and drifted over to the side of the road, putting his feet down on either side of the motorbike, coming to a final stop. The man-in-the-black-and-red-helmet revved his engine and roared by.

He killed the motor. He took off his helmet, tears mingling with sweat. The sound of construction began to vibrate through him. Every drill, every hammer, every crack, crumble, blast, and screech was more than just sound. The sound of metal on rock was the only reality, the only transformation, the only form of creation and destruction. There was a deafening crash and then sudden, unnerving silence. He looked up.

A slab of concrete fell from the building above, exploding against the sidewalk in a puff of white dust that clung to his sweat-covered skin.
Home

Brittney Woodrum (Yangon, Myanmar)

Author's Introduction:

Home is a story that was never intended for anyone else's eyes. It was originally written as mere entertainment between two friends and as a source of language practice between English and Burmese. As we were writing it, however, it transformed into more of a personal catharsis, and it very much reflects much of my first month in Myanmar.

Keeping this in mind, I hope you will forgive the inconsistencies in illustration and rather drab storyline. I have never taken a single art class, so what you see is a lot of trial and error. Enjoy!

The next page is an adaption of the book into a cartoon. For the book in all of its beauty, click here!
Author’s Introduction:

I’ve been thinking a lot about the difference between going somewhere and being somewhere, as I’m sure many of us have. ‘Going’ and ‘being’ abroad are totally different. Living abroad certainly keeps us busy - acclimating, adapting, and fulfilling our posts. Compared to traveling, living abroad has me feeling like a spinning top. A spinning top does not move side to side very far, but it certainly moves, constantly moving and working to hold its balance. Just like that, I feel that now that I am no longer traveling, my energy is spent in place, moving gently from side to side, like a top. Plus, I am reminded of the movie, Inception, where the spinning top at the end leaves the entire crowd guessing what is going to happen in the end. Much like us.

I wrote this poem because, leading up to the fellowship, all I could think about was the direction we were heading. Expectation ruled; everything pointed forward. Now that I’m actually here and well-settled, my direction doesn’t point me forward or in disparate directions, but rather straight down on the earth below my feet. And that’s weird. So recently it’s really hit me that my attention was pointing me in a perpetual and new direction. Like a top, we can spin on familiar grounds with momentum, slight deviation, and the possibility of anything happening at anytime.

Spinning Around the World

Michael Augustine
(Can Tho, Vietnam)

Let me spin,
left, right, and upside-down.

Watch me spin
left, right, and upside-down.
for un/expectant thrills alike.
living out the stories I’ll mis/remember of my youth,
like there is no other way

I might just spin
left, right, and upside-down
maybe through Hanoi, Kalampur, Bishkek, and Hong Kong
wide-eyed, jaw ajar, with my pen trying to keep up

And until then I’ll spin
left, right, and upside-down
along well-worn paths with well-worn and well-soaked sandals
spurred by coffee shop comradery
going nowhere anytime fast with no complaints

Because- it seems- these days we spin
unsure what’s next and how it’s all gonna end
without going anywhere specific
rather enjoying the whirls, wobbles, and tilts

Round and round we go
Spirited Away in Nara, Japan

Furitiye Smiles in Cambodia

Aily Zhang (Beijing, China)
What
MANAGING EXPECTATIONS, ESTABLISHING LEGACIES
A Vientiane Heirloom

Maddy Dahm, Zach Schweitzer, Catalina Ta
(Vientiane, Laos)

These photos are of a lovely project that the Doghouse (me, Zach, and Catalina’s humble residence at the end of a bumpy dirt road teeming with territorial mutts) is finishing up. We are building a table from some scrap wood we found in the yard. We have adorned this rich mahogany piece with a hand-crafted, hand-painted Lao flag, juxtaposed with some mainland Southeast Asia countries (because everyone loves maps), the word’s "DOGHOUSE" in case someone needs to know where they are, and, of course, our PiA pride. Since Vientiane has such a strong legacy of fellows (rolling 8 deep right now), we figured we would start a Vientiane PiA Fellow heirloom that gets passed from troop to troop as the years go on, and each fellow will sign it along with a memory. How cool would that be in just a few years? How cool is it now? Come see for yourself! The possibilities for this table are boundless.
A Pomegranate Flavored Mess

Emmanuella Bonga
(Hong Kong)

A couple of weeks ago, as a healthier-eating and money-saving strategy, I went grocery shopping. I had (have?) all these ambitious plans about how I was gonna work out 3-5 times a week in Asia, eat home cooked meals on the weekdays, and then splurge when the weekend and special occasions came around. I also have a pretty ridiculous travel wish-list (especially ludicrous given that I get very little time off), but I wanted to make sure that I would be able to hit some of those places while I was on the continent.

So around the aisles I went. I really like pomegranate flavored things, and in the spirit of freshness and adventure, I decided to buy a pomegranate, because that is the logical progression. Right? Except, no one told me that you needed a skills course to eat one. I excitedly brought my pomegranate and a homemade salad to work on Wednesday, feeling kinda good about my #adulting level. And then came lunch time.

And let me tell you: the pinkish mess that was the break room (thank God no one was there to witness the shenanigans) and the lack of much substance in those seeds had me on the verge of a breakdown, I kid you not. I mean, it took like an HOUR to eat the whole thing! Part of what made this incident so dramatic was my insistence that there had to be a better way to eat/enjoy pomegranates, and I was just too foolish to know it. Yup. For real.

Pomegranate gate, however silly, pretty much reflects my feelings about my work thus far, and Hong Kong in general. I’m in love with the city, am excited about its many nooks and crannies, and honestly floured and awed by my post. Based on the massive amount I’ve learned in this one month, I can already see all that I will learn by the end of this year.

However, I feel like a complete fool half of the time, and on some days the simplest things can have me preoccupied for hours. Seeing as I am possibly the slowest reader on the planet in a speedy information processing industry, I am learning how to get out of my head, especially when deadlines depend on it. Mistakes have been, and will inevitably be made but the key is to produce work that is as excellent as I can get it to be, and to make great relationships along the way.

So what direction am I heading? FAR away from pomegranates! More to the point though, I think I’m moving up/forward but at breakneck speed, and I’m still trying to figure out where my seatbelt is with half a cheek barely secured in the seat. Thankfully, there really couldn’t be any place for me to go from here but up. I think of it as shooting my own Devil Wears Prada sequel in Hong Kong. If the dynamic and intense world of journalism doesn’t swallow me up, I may just come out of this a force of knowledge. Only time will tell, but in the meantime, come visit!
Sweet Like Cinnamon

Abhinav Veerina
(Penang, Malaysia)

In a particularly angsty state of mind, I describe my PiA path thus far through a spoken journal entry, in which I look for the silver lining of the pitfalls I have encountered so far. I guess you could say this is a snapshot of the moment I felt most “lost” during my experience thus far. I think it exemplifies how, although it’s easier to complain, it feels better to be thankful. Shout out to Bon Iver and Lana Del Rey for the intro and exit tunes.