Christopher Murphy is a role model for international and language education and where those experiences can lead you. He speaks five languages (English, French, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish) and has visited nearly 20 different countries during his travels and for study abroad. And now, having earned a BA in Chinese with a minor in French from Michigan State University, Murphy is continuing his education overseas as a Yenching Scholar.
The recent graduate received the highly competitive Yenching Scholarship to pursue his master’s degree in International Relations and Public Policy at the Yenching Academy of Peking University in China. On August 31, he traveled to China, where he will study for an entire year, with plans to return to the United States after completing his master’s degree.

“I was really nervous during the interview for the Yenching Scholarship because I was competing against the world’s greatest and most clever students,” Murphy said. “Never in my wildest dreams did I think little ol’ me from Monroe, Michigan, someone who was once too shy to even speak to people, would ever be able to score a spot in the second cohort of one of the world’s most competitive scholarships.”

As a Yenching Scholar, all Murphy’s tuition and fees are waived, and he is provided accommodations, a stipend, and round-trip airfare. Out of 3,000 applicants worldwide, only 150 were chosen for this prestigious award.

This isn’t the first time Murphy has received a national scholarship for yearlong study abroad. In 2014, he was awarded the Boren Scholarship, which is dedicated to funding students studying languages critical to U.S. national security. The Boren Scholarship allowed Murphy to travel to China for the entire 2014-2015 academic year for intensive study in Chinese language and culture at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China.

In addition, Murphy received the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, William Davidson Award, and two MSU Study Abroad scholarships, which allowed him to study in Harbin, China, during the summer of 2014.

“These scholarships are the main reason why I’ve been able to acquire this education,” said Murphy, adding that “an investment in me is an investment in the future of America.”

Truly passionate about international education, when asked why someone should study abroad, Murphy answered, “Who wouldn’t want to open their mind to different ways of thinking, different possibilities, learning a different language? Studying abroad prepares you for independence; the independence of leaving your family and everything you know. These are essential tools for life.”

For Murphy, it was the study abroad programs, diversity of the campus, and the language studies that drew him to Michigan State University. With MSU being one of the top study abroad universities in the nation, he felt right at home.

“When you study abroad and learn a different language, you learn a different way of thinking, a different way of communicating with people,” he said. “I want to introduce the world to the importance of learning different cultures and different languages.”

After graduation in May, Murphy originally planned to join the Peace Corps and travel to Mozambique, Africa, but when he received word of the Yenching Scholarship, he chose to postpone the Peace Corps by two years.

“As a Boren Scholar, I have a one-year service requirement to fulfill in the federal government. I decided to supplement this requirement by joining the Peace Corps, just in case I wasn’t accepted into Yenching Academy,” Murphy said. “After my studies are completed at Peking University, I will pursue my original plan of traveling to Mozambique to serve in the Peace Corps as a high school English professor for two years.”

Teaching languages abroad is something Murphy has experience with. When he traveled to China as a Boren Scholar, he taught English as a second language, and this past spring break, he taught high school Spanish at Sacred Heart in San Ignacio, Belize.

With a particular interest in international diplomacy, Murphy hopes to one day become a diplomat representing America and building bridges abroad.