



To: Whom It May Concern / Awards and Selection Committees
From: Dr. Liying Sun, Associate Professor
Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research
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Beijing, China

I am pleased to recommend Veronica Tan, a Year 11 student at Sydney Girls High School. I am an Associate Professor at the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, where I supervise graduate students and carry out research in physical geography and ecosystem science. I have worked with Veronica both in the field and on formal research projects over the past few years, and she is one of the most capable and self-motivated high school students I have supervised.

Veronica joined my team in 2023 and has since been working closely with us on field investigations and formal research projects. Over this period, I have been consistently impressed by her initiative, independence, and willingness to take on increasingly demanding research work. She first joined us for fieldwork in China, where she participated in soil sampling and ecosystem monitoring alongside our graduate students and showed a genuine interest in understanding the scientific significance behind the work.

When she returned to China in July 2025, still only a Year 10 student, she took on a much more substantial role. She worked on a manuscript titled “*Quantifying the ecosystem service benefits of soil and water conservation in citrus orchards: A case study in the red soil hilly region of Southern China.*” Her contribution was substantial: she helped organise the literature and datasets, took part in the data analysis, and was responsible for editing the manuscript. The subject matter — including soil erosion mechanisms and ecosystem service trade-offs — is not simple, but she was soon able to connect it to the aims of our study in a way I do not often see at this level. As such, I have recommended her to solo-present this on behalf of the institute at the upcoming National Soil Science Conference in Perth, November 2026.

After she returned to Sydney due to school commitments, we kept the project moving through online meetings across the time difference. She was consistent about preparing for these, responded well to feedback on her drafts, and met our deadlines despite a full school workload. Our manuscript has been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal — a genuinely uncommon achievement for a student still in high school.



More recently, Veronica told me about a project of her own based in Sydney, titled “*Modelling Urban Heat Island Risk using Mathematical Models in High-Density Transit-Oriented Developments*.” What is notable is that she has moved beyond assisting me with existing research questions to independently formulating her own, deploying sophisticated statistical tools – such as Ordinary Least Squares regression, Residual analysis, and ANOVA. She told me she has shared it with her local politician, using her research to inform environmental policy. That kind of independence usually comes later, if it comes at all.

Outside of the research itself, she is punctual, reliable, and consistent in how she treats everyone on the team regardless of seniority. She is ambitious about a future in environmental policy, and to her credit, she is also genuinely open to being corrected: she takes feedback on her drafts seriously rather than defensively, which is not something I can say for every student I have supervised.

I recommend Veronica Tan with confidence. She has shown a level of initiative and follow-through in scientific work that is unusual at her stage of education, and I believe she has real potential in environmental policy, geography, or quantitative research going forward.

Please contact me directly if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

Siyi Sun

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