

Experience Report

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Application phase

The application phase both at the first stage in Munich as well as the second stage for PKU went without difficulties. It is crucial, however, to follow all steps without leaving out certain documents. It is also helpful to read a lot, one should always have in mind though that especially in China processes change and whatever former exchange students indicate may not be the case anymore. This includes remarks in my own report. During the application Phase I can only recommend to gather documents quickly, communicate any questions, and apply common sense when it comes to documents which the Chinese side may require from other exchange students but not the TUM selected ones.

Preparation

my exchange semester was online so the preparation was very limited. I received a scholarship from the Chinese government and was hoping to get a visa despite the restrictions. The Chinese embassy in Brussels and PKU did not find a way to make this work though. The scholarship had also provided me with housing but unfortunately, I was not able to take advantage of this. I can recommend at least trying to get a scholarship though since specially for going to China there are comparatively generous ones available. From a past internship in China I can still recommend a few options for housing: there are English language platforms for searching flatmates and English language agencies offering. Of course, these options normally are not the cheapest. To avoid a lot of hassle and disappointment due to cultural and language barriers, I would still go this path though (and did for that internship). I personally survived very well without knowing Chinese except for very superficial basics, but in my eyes, it is more fun to be in China if you are interested in learning a few signs and are sensitive about the Chinese language particularities. I did not attempt to transfer credits so I cannot recommend anything on this. However, it is worth considering the course selection options in the fall versus spring term since they differ.

Arrival

Pku hosted a virtual welcome event with an interactive component. We learned a few signs and it was a fun start. Since it was an online semester I cannot provide any insights on this apart from my internship in China. I highly recommend downloading a translator vocabulary beforehand sends many western sites, including Google services, Are blocked in China. There exist very good alternatives. Moreover, I recommend getting a bank account as soon as possible in order to use payment options in Chinese apps. Life in China is very enjoyable and convenient if one knows how to take advantage of all the helpful online and offline resources out there. Regarding arrival issues I can furthermore recommend expectation management. Some things are overwhelming and what appears to us to be disorganized has an underlying reasoning that we foreigners take time to recognize. It takes time and in some cases the perspective of Chinese with experience abroad or expats in China to help one understand why some things are the way they are in China.

Studies, online teaching, online exams

I attended three courses in the virtual setting and had interesting worthwhile takeaways. However, despite the course selection offering of light variety of choices, I experienced the organization and coordination of courses in the online setting to be generally bad. There was no central teaching platform used across the board, the virtual rooms we were listed in a poorly updated word document which was not even centrally hosted, and staff was without knowledge how to find or enter some of the virtual rooms. Since I was not able to attend all courses on each of the appointments and coordination of courses and lectures was most inadequate, I did not take any exams. I am sure the on-site study environment is amazing, and likely the virtual one will improve as well, however, I recommend waiting until the on-site setting is back.

Student life and cultural experience

When it comes to cultural experience of course some basic prior knowledge about the Chinese culture is helpful in order not to attract negative attention. Showing sensitivity of local particularities, especially local differences within China, is something that Chinese people tend to appreciate and do not take for granted. During my past internship in China I learned to enjoy the Chinese kitchen with its huge variety. For example, Sichuan food tends to be very spicy but also has some options which aren't so. A few years ago, not sure if they still do, the city of Shenzhen had an emoji system to indicate hygiene standards of

restaurants. I normally went where the “normal” locals went; the restaurants with the red sad/angry emoji, and never had any issues. I took this as a simple way to blend in, and can only highly recommend going to the places where you see no foreigners. Try to make local friends, for example by participating in a sports event (eg badminton or running) or being communicative to locals in restaurants. Chinese are (as most other nationalities) very friendly and tend to be curious, so they are easy to talk to, even if you only talk in gestures. I always enjoyed that a lot and made some very fulfilling connections that way. In my perception the cost of living in China can vary greatly depending on choices on apartment size/ standard/ location, leisure time (many expensive high-end bars and restaurants available and highly frequented by some parts of Chinese young society), and mobility.

Other important issues and recommendations

PKU offers some great ad-hoc events which I can highly recommend. It is worth paying attention to what is currently going on at the university and what researchers are visiting.

Below some impressions from my internship in 2017. I selected a few that hopefully boost your curiosity.

Tea ceremony in a construction site container:



Why are newly planted trees wasting precious construction site space? As a safety measure protecting from falling façade parts.



People being street-smart, here one random peak



Chinese High-speed trains are worth checking out – great way to see the country too



If you like construction, China is a paradise



Warfare channel as standard background entertainment in a nice middle-class restaurant somewhat distracts from some amazing food



Texting with strangers using the translator function in wechat



And later as time passes quickly...

