

Experience Report – Online Exchange Semester 2022 at Fudan University

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Introduction

During the fall term 2022 I got to complete an exchange semester at the Fudan University in Shanghai, China. Due to an ongoing entry restriction to the Chinese mainland, all classes were offered online, and the semester could be completed remotely.

After applying for the exchange program in January 2022 at our international office, I got the notice of nomination for the Fudan University in early March. Consequently, our coordinator in Frankfurt will reach out to the guest university to confirm the nomination and initiate further steps. Later that month I was contacted by my exchange coordinator at Fudan and got informed that an entry to the country currently, due to the ongoing travel restrictions, was not possible and I had the choice of either postponing the semester to the summer or take classes online. Due to uncertainty, I decided on the latter option. The coordinator initiated the registration process and after submitting a formal application sheet, I officially became a student at Fudan.

Course Registration and Online Lectures

Prior to the official semester start in mid-September, we received a course list including all offered online courses with the respective syllabus. Furthermore, before the official start, all exchange students got to join a meeting and our coordinator explained all important details and procedures. For better coordination WeChat, the Chinese equivalent to WhatsApp was used. Specific group chats for each class were created to further communicate important information such as deadlines or tasks throughout the whole semester.

The course registration takes place within the first lecture week. After the final deadline courses could neither be dropped nor changed. Due to the inconvenient time difference for many international students, some professors offered to record and upload the lectures to the e-learning platform. Since attendance is of high importance, this needs prior to be communicated with the teaching assistant to be considered in the grading of the class. Since all performance records had to be done online, the grading of the courses consists of multiple factors throughout the entirety of the semester: attendance checks, presentations, assignments, and one big final paper each class.

Before finally registering for the courses, you should get in contact with our examination office and file a learning agreement. This will ensure a simple crediting of grades once the semester is finished. The classes started in mid-September and ended mid-December, with final essays due up to

Christmas. A 3 CP class in China equals the workload of a 6 ECTS elective at the Goethe University. I decided to take the following four classes in my online exchange semester:

1. Chinese Economy (3 CP)

This class covered a broad range of topics regarding the economic, societal, cultural, and historical characteristics of the country. Overall, the course for me personally was of high importance to further understand reform China and the following rapid economic growth and represented a basic and good background to learning more about the country. Especially, the huge discrepancy between rural and urban areas within the country were thoroughly discussed, as this represents one of the biggest ongoing problems in China. Professor Li was eager to show us the differences in Western and East Asian perception of China which was at times thought provoking. This was one of the larger classes I attended (around 30 students) and it was interesting hearing from other international students about their opinions and insights on the topics. During the semester there were multiple smaller assignments and additionally one mid- and final-term essay. The workload was appropriate, and I highly recommend taking this class if you lack in knowledge of the Chinese development and upcoming over the last 40 years.

2. Financial Institutions and Markets (3 CP)

This finance class was designed to introduce various types of financial markets and institutions with focus on the Chinese financial system. We discussed basic concepts and models in the finance field and more detailed learned about both depository and non-depository institutions and the structures of different markets. Some topics were already covered in bachelor and master classes and might be repetitive for some students. However, Professor Jiajun made sure to always relate relevant topics to the Chinese financial markets and institutions. For this class all lectures were recorded, still it was expected to at least attend one of the two zoom classes during the week. Over the semester some smaller tasks and finally a group presentation and final term essay were assigned.

3. China's Taxation System and Fiscal Policy (3 CP)

This course introduced the Chinese taxation system and fiscal policy in its entirety. It covered China's tax revenue and intergovernmental revenue sharing, tax legislation system and tax collection and administration. A broad part of the class focused on the major tax reforms since 1994 and their effect on the tax structure. Furthermore, we discussed the different types of taxes in detail and compared them to those of other major economies. Personally, I perceived this course as very intensive as it was my first ever taxation class. Overall, we had to hold two presentations and write two papers, including empirical research on a high level for the final essay. As the Chinese taxation

system is rather complex, I would recommend this class to people who already have first experience with taxation law and systems of some kind.

4. Social Security System and It's Reform in China (2 CP)

This class covered the basic concepts of the social security system in China, including relevant theories and formations. Furthermore, we discussed the establishment, development, reform, and reconstruction of the Chinese urban and rural social security system. The geographical coverage of basic social securities, such as unemployment or medical insurance differs highly, leading to a large inequality between rural and urban areas. The class focused on this issue and Professor Ding critically evaluated conducted changes of the system. The professor used to teach in Germany, thus studied the German social security system and often compared both systems to give a better understanding. The workload was little, the final grade consisted of one presentation and a final written exam. I mostly took this class out of personal interest, as it was only credited with 4 ECTS, which does not make up one full elective. However, it was an interesting class and Professor Ding has a lot of experience in the field, which contributed to a pleasant learning atmosphere.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to experience this exchange semester in person, which of course would generate a more in depth perspective. During the semester, many international long-term students were able to enter the country and move into their dormitory. Even though at this time it is still uncertain, I strongly believe that exchange students this year will be able to enter Shanghai and take on campus classes.

Due to me not being present, I only had classes with international students and no direct contact with Chinese students, which was very unfortunate. However, the classes helped me to deepen my understanding of the Chinese economy and the change it experienced, how it was influenced by the political and societal reforms and China's position in the international context. I value this newly gained knowledge and I believe it helped me to think more critically.

If you are thinking about studying at Fudan University, I would highly encourage you to do so. It is one of the top universities in the country and even though I never got the chance to visit in person, my experience was very smooth and positive. I hope on campus classes are possible again soon and future exchange students will be able to complete their exchange semester in Shanghai.