

Report of my semester exchange WS 17/18

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Exchange at University of Tokyo

I arrived in Tokyo the first of September 2017; I travelled around until the 15th of September. The 25th of September I started studying at the faculty of Economics at the University of Tokyo. They first organized a math camp to review the advanced math concepts pre-requisites of the core Economics courses (Macro-, Microeconomics and Econometrics).

I then was welcomed by the international office, which organized only a trip for international students and nothing more. In general, they have been extremely helpful, able to solve all my problems and promptly clarify my doubts.

I was assigned a cheap (150 euro monthly) single dorm room, which had a private bathroom and private kitchen. The building is called Shirokanedai International Lodge C and it was a bit old but had the necessary furniture. You could host your family but nobody else overnight. That dorm hosted only international students. It is located in Shirokanedai, close to two metro stations (40 minutes to reach the university) and was placed in Minato, an amazing area. The district is very expensive and fancy. There are many supermarkets around (which is difficult to find in Tokyo) but not any cheap place to drink the evening. I got a scholarship from the Japanese government of 600 euro per month.

The public transportation works wonderfully, I advise everybody to download google maps and google translate to survive. Tokyo in general is liveable without knowing any word of Japanese because of many signs translated in English. Even though locals are shy to speak English, they can understand if you speak slowly and simple enough. The transportation will be the highest expenditure you will have (if you are not in a dorm room, because rent prices are insane). There is no monthly ticket and each time you take the metro or the train you will pay more than one Euro. Take a PASMO or SUICA card, as it will make your life much easier and take a commuter ticket once you have your address on your Japanese ID and your student ID to have a discount on the ticket for your way to the university.

Food can be quite expensive, especially for German standard, but eating out has a reasonable price, you can expect not to spend more than 10 euro every time, most of the time I was good with 5-7 euro.

The student life is somehow limited if you are not Japanese because there are not many international students around. However, this does not mean you cannot meet them and cannot hang out in the usual district for nightlife (Roppongi, Shibuya, Shinjuku). Typically, most international students study at Waseda or Keio and so, you should look for events organized by those two universities. Beware that the metro stops running at midnight, so you need either to sleep somewhere else during the night or catch the first train on the next morning.

You cannot have SIM cards that can call because you do not have a Japanese credit card so you should look for SIM data-only.

At Tokyo University, there are many clubs where you might want to get informed if they open registration to exchange students. The sport facilities are cheap and pretty good. To find cheap

sport opportunities look at the district sport centre, in Minato there was one charging 4 euro per entry to the gym or swimming pool and 2 euro per entry to any course.

There is many nice events in the city and I advise you to look at Facebook pages or online in general to be sure not to miss too much out of the many cultural events they hold. My favourite website was Tokyocheapo.

Following, I will describe what I did for my six courses I attended there (each course was worth five ECTS). I was in class with few students every time and the contact with the professor was frequent and helpful.

Economics of the Family: In this course, we were required to read once a week an article published on a top journal about family economics. Topics touched were marriage market (matching), children development, fertility policies, wage and social penalties of childbearing. The professor explained the methodology, the background and the results of the papers in great detail. He required us to intervene in class and engage in discussion, as it was the main mean of evaluation. At the end of the course, he asked us to prepare a referee report of a paper published in a top Economics journal. I chose to do a report on a paper that studied whether the potential extension of job opportunities for young women could affect their fertility and education behavior.

Population Aging and the Generational Economy: In this course, we studied the demographic effects on national economics. We discussed about demographic dividends and efficient fiscal structure. We framed all these concepts mainly in Asia, discussing every country position in this regard. At the end of the course, I wrote a term paper 10 pages long. I took the Italian household expenditure survey time series and I plotted the Italian families' fertility trend and analysed the external fertility margin across region, time and family characteristics.

Labor Economics 2: Labor Supply: In this course, we studied theory and applications of labour supply in the economy and its determinants. Part of the courses included Heckman correction, dynamic discrete model, intertemporal elasticity of labor supply, educational programs impact evaluation, and skill biased technical change. We also held a laboratory where we were required to hand a data analysis exercise on the Current Population Survey (CPS) data with R language. At the end of the course, I held a presentation on a paper concerning labor supply of women and a referee report on a forthcoming paper on Journal of Labor Economics about characteristics of migrants in northern and southern Italy.

Labor Market Fluctuations and Wage Dispersion: In this course, we studied models of search theory applied to macroeconomics. To do this, we analysed milestone papers on Mincerian Wage Specification and Ben-Porath Model, Partial Equilibrium Search Model, Optimal Unemployment Insurance, and General Equilibrium Matching Model. The class presented the theory behind these important papers and the math derivation of the results and models. For the final evaluation of the class, I held a presentation on the productivity gains of migrations facilitations in China. I kept in touch with the professor; he pushed me and another student to publish together a paper. We worked on it while I was there but we failed to produce a satisfactory final output.

Personnel and Organizational Economic: In this course, we studied the personnel management in the field of industrial and organizational Economics. The topics touched were human capital theory, job assignment, tournament theory, incentive contracts, performance measures, teams,

hiring, hierarchical organization, and gender gap. We were required to read relevant chapter in the book and an article at every class. Everyone was supposed to participate in class and present the day's article at least once. I did a presentation on an experimental paper on team Incentive reversal in teams. At the end of the course, either one could choose to prepare a research proposal in a topic related to the class or do a literature review of a related topic. I chose the latter and did a review of complementarity between old and young workers in organizations.

Search theory: In this course, we studied models of search theory applied to microeconomics. We studied different models of searching and matching in the context of labor market in the first part of the class and other models in the context of consumer search. We had to complete four related assignments on the solving and comment of models seen in class but enriched with additional assumptions.

I finished my exchange semester and went back home the 15.02.2018, the international office made the exmatriculation and the farewell smooth and simple.

Everything taken into account, it was an enriching and formative experience. I had the pleasure to experience some Asian culture and in particular Japanese. The life and the customs there are so different that this experience really helped me having a better idea of the world in the east.

The university pushes students to produce excellent research and promotes deep understanding of specific topics. For this reason, I found extremely helpful to do this exchange in my third semester of my master because it gave me good ideas in specific fields where I can write my thesis in.