

Exchange Semester Report

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Zhejiang University was my first choice when applying for a semester abroad. I wanted to make the most out of this wonderful opportunity to experience a different country, a different culture, and I thought China was almost as different as it gets, while still providing the comfort of a modern country. Besides, China has a fast-growing economy and rapidly developing business environment, which I certainly appreciate as an international management student. Finally, Chinese education has a reputation of being very demanding, and that was a challenge and opportunity I could not let pass. Zhejiang University is one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in China, ranked consistently as one of the top 5 universities in the management field, it was the only logical choice I could make. In addition, I could see a tentative list of courses with descriptions, and they seemed to be extremely interesting, and relevant for my future career as well. As a bonus, the campus looked beautiful on the pictures.



After the nomination from my home university, the formal application procedure was quite simple; I received timely and clear instructions from the coordinator at Zhejiang University. I had to email a standard set of documents needed for requesting a visa from their side. It included a physical examination form to be signed by the doctor, according to the instructions, however, I was having an internship in South Korea at that time, and the regulations for that country demanded me to go through the standard medical checkup procedure in one of the hospitals authorized by Chinese government. It was very easy and fast, considering how big and comprehensive the resulting report was, only a bit costly. I also had to fill out an online application at the university website, relatively short and very straightforward. The university then issued an admission letter and mailed the documents I needed to apply for the actual visa. The process was smooth and went exactly as described on the website of visa application center. One surprise was that my visa was single entry only, making exploring any of the neighboring countries and even Hong Kong very difficult, basically out of question.

Zhejiang University offered student dormitories to all international students for a very modest price. Program coordinator was ready to answer any questions I had, and every exchange student had a student buddy assigned to help through the first days. My arrival therefore was virtually worry-free. Generally, the only worries in my life that semester were related to studies. Everything I needed, from dining to hairdresser and shoe-repair shop, I could find on campus. Living expenses in China are low, especially when you mostly stay on university territory. The campus where I studied was not centrally located, going to the city center was time-consuming, so I did it very rarely. I happily lived in the bubble of the local community, which consisted of



international students and Chinese personnel. In general, foreign and domestic students did not spend much time together, with the rare exception of a lucky match with a buddy who then becomes a friend. There is a language barrier as well as lifestyle differences, we do not have fun in the same way. However, there are so many international students from both exchange and degree programs living together that there is no feeling of isolation.

As a country and culture, China was very much the way I imagined. All the things people who never want to go back there tell are absolutely true, but they did not bother me much. There were no traditions or customs I would have to get used to in my daily life, except the ultimate convenience of using a phone app to pay for everything. At the university, I could see the culture was different, but I just witnessed it, watched interactions between students and professors being very different from those in Europe. I was not expected to act the same way, I could relax and observe.

The campus really is as nice as the pictures show. Hangzhou, the city where it is located, has a very beautiful historical center, a perfect harmony of nature and architecture, a very peaceful place. The climate turned out to be warm, similar to Southern Europe. The mild weather of September and October was perfect for enjoying the sites and the scenery. The vibrant Shanghai is only an hour away by train (it used to take me more time to get to the train station than from there to Shanghai). I did not travel that much, but of course visited Beijing and had a short lovely vacation on Hainan island.



My study schedule allowed more travelling than that. I did not have classes every day of the week and the workload was not crushing. Even though attendance was a part of the grade for all courses, it was only taken on three of the regular Master classes I had. I liked that the final grade for the course always considered at least attendance in addition to the final exam or essay, and usually included some homework, tests and/or presentations. It allowed to track the progress and left room for improvement if one of the tasks was not performed as well as it could be.

Many of my expectations for classes in China were not met. I am glad that was the case for some of them, and disappointed about the other. I did not have to sacrifice my social life, leisure time or sleep to get good grades, that definitely was a good thing. Some courses did require significant self-study efforts, which is only fair. On the other hand, almost none of the classes were as captivating as their curriculum led me to believe. I have to say, the percentage of truly good teachers among professors seemed to be lower than that of my previous universities. In some cases, the English skills could be at fault: not the language per se, all instructors were easy enough to understand, but sometimes very hard to follow, as their lack of confidence robbed the lectures of any tone or pace variations, even logical links sometimes, and the interaction with students was quite poor as questions obviously stressed them out. In other cases, the professor just was not a good teacher or presenter. The outstanding exceptions were MBA courses. MBA classes I took totally exceeded all expectations. The lecturers were amazing, great public speakers, very experienced and engaging.



R Language and Data Analysis

This course introduced students to R language and how it can be used to analyze and present data. Serves a good starting point, knowledge acquired there is relevant for further data science classes, academic research and professional career in some business areas.

Intermediate Econometrics

This course covered all the same topics I studied in Fundamentals of Econometrics of my home university, but was a lot more practice-oriented. It did not explain the econometric theory very well, but was a great way to familiarize oneself with STATA.

Data Mining

This was a truly challenging yet captivating course. It introduces various data mining techniques with real life business examples.

Human Resource Management

This PhD course discussed development of HRM over the last century through academic papers and business reports, focusing mainly on the current transition into the digital era.

Technology and Innovation Strategy

The professor presented numerous case studies, demonstrating the role of technological innovation in business and strategic decisions that led companies to rise with innovation or fail to keep up with it.

Logistics and Supply Chain Management

Students were introduced to logistics and SCM theory and terminology, highly relevant for career in logistics.

Operations Management

This PhD course described various aspects of production and service operations, especially those where specific theories and quantitative methods can be used.

Financial Accounting

This MBA course showed students how to read and understand company's financial statement, how to draw conclusions based on firm's demonstrated behavior, and use accounting principles binding suppliers or customers to one's own benefit. It was fascinating indeed.

Organizational Behavior

This MBA course had less practical relevance, though it certainly had some, especially for managers. It introduced several theories about behavior of individuals and groups, and how individual behavior changes in groups. The professor demonstrated science behind them, and lack thereof behind other very popular theories, concepts and tests.



Overall, an exchange semester in China was a great experience. Studying there did not go quite the way I imagined, but I learned a lot, and will benefit from it when I start my career. My life in China was fun and worry-free, I became friends with people I would have never met otherwise, tried some new things, enjoyed the food and shopping experience. I had a chance to see a different culture and travel around the country a bit. I would like to thank Banco Santander for making it possible. I am very grateful for the support I received, my experience certainly would not have been as diverse and fulfilling without the scholarship.