Exchange semester at Tongji University – School of economics and management (SEM)

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Exchange semester: WS 19/20
Length of stay: 5 months (end of August – end of January)
Exchange program: TUM SOMex
TUM Program: TUM BWL Bachelor

Application phase
The application deadline for the semester abroad via TUM SOMex was early January 2019. The required documents I had to hand in were a high school certificate, a transcript of my current studies, a CV and an English certificate (DAAD was sufficient). In addition, you can participate in the housing exchange to gain an advantage in the application process, which I did. I received the nomination from TUM in February. After accepting you have to apply directly at Tongji University. The documents needed are the same already needed for TUM, the exchange coordinator there sent all the important documents so that we could take care of our Visa.
Preparation

**Visa:** After receiving the final positive response from Tongji as well as the Documents needed, you can and should take care of the Visa application. All information and required documents are listed online, on the webpage of the Chinese Consulate. There also is a Chinese visa application Center in Munich, close to the ‘S-Bahn’ station ‘Laim’, where you can hand in all the documents. Usually it’s a pretty easy and uncomplicated process, how my friends, that were also going to Shanghai told me. For me it was a little complicated, since there were problems with one document Tongji sent to me, so they had to resent it and I needed to go to the application center various times, which was quite annoying. For one exchange semester you can only apply for the X2 visa, the small student visa, which is valid for 180 days from the first entry into China. A disadvantage is that the visa is only valid for single entry, which means that it was not possible to leave China during the semester. The only way to leave China for travelling is by applying at the University for a special exit and reentry. Tongji university does this only one time for every student, so you are limited to one trip.

**Arrival:** My flight was an Air China flight no stop from Frankfurt to Shanghai Pudong International Airport. It took around 11 hours and cost around 600€. Fortunately, I was picked up at the airport by friends and we took a taxi to the city center and to Tongji. There are various possibilities to get into the city center, which is around 1h drive from the airport. In my opinion going by taxi is the most convenient one, since it is very cheap compared to Germany. The ride will cost you around 20€, but you have to take care that the taxi driver turns on the taximeter and does not try to rip you off. This is actually one of the most different things you will encounter in Shanghai. There are no fixed prices, everything is dependent on your bargaining skills so do not let anyone scam you.

**Apartments:** It is actually quite easy to find an apartment in Shanghai, since there are numerous Expat and Housing groups on WeChat. You can just text an agent in these housing groups and they will show you what they have. I personally took a look at three flats in one day and could move into the one I chose on the day after, so it really was pretty easy. Prices are comparable to Munich. I lived in a shared flat at the bund, but since I was living in the master, I had my own private bathroom. The total cost for my room was about 600/650€ per month. Most of the time the agents only do long term renting, which means that you have to find a replacement for the flat after you moved out to get the deposit back. I just talked to my agent and for 200RMB more per month (around 25€) I could get a short-term contract without the need of finding a replacement to get my deposit back. As I mentioned above, really everything in Shanghai is negotiable so just try.
Arrival at Tongji
The registration at Tongji is done very fast, it only takes a few minutes. The first week of the semester is the so-called orientation week, where you can take a look into all the different courses and get to know all the other students. Since the courses you can take are exclusively for international students, it is not that easy to get into contact with Chinese students at Tongji. There are also welcome ceremonies and campus tours. For us there was even a city tour organized to show us Shanghai.

Studies
Course Selection: In the beginning of the semester you can register online for the courses you want to attend. I recommend to just register for every course possible, since you can deregister after the orientation week. If you register for every course, you have a safe place and you can just choose the courses you liked the most in orientation week.

Courses:
Chinese basic: My Chinese class was every Monday and Wednesday from 7pm to 9:30pm. Our teacher was very kind and really tried to make the course as entertaining as possible since the attentiveness of most students was already pretty low due to the time. Strategic Management in China: It is a typical management course and starts with a review of general management, marketing, and finance/accounting tools. Most of the time strategic-management concepts and techniques are studied, which should enable us to make objective strategic decisions.

Management in China/Digital Business Transformation: This course aims to introduce the concepts of management strategies and techniques in organizations, with a particular focus on digital business in China. Topics of the course include evolution of management thought, managing in global environment, overview of digital business in China, and Manager as a planner and strategist for digital business.

Financial Markets in China: This course introduces the basic knowledge, evolution and recent development of the Chinese financial market, covering that of banking, stocks, bonds etc.

Academic Lectures & Seminars: This course consists of different guest lectures, with different speakers in every lecture. It covers totally different themes, like problems in the world (e.g. illegal trafficking in organs) or renewable energy.
Survey of China: In this course everything considering the Chinese geography, history and culture was addressed.

Exams: The first thing to mention is that the exam itself is way less important than it is at TUM. Most of the time it is only about 20-40% of your final grade. The reason for this is that you have to hand in reports and case studies and hold presentations during the semester, which are most of the time more important than the final exam. In addition, every single exam I had to take was open book, which also reduced the time I actually needed to study for exams. In any case preparation time, I needed for the final exams was way shorter than it used to be in Munich.

Life at Tongji & in Shanghai

Since Tongji University is a little far from downtown most of the time we have only been on campus when we needed to attend courses or when we needed to study for exams. In addition, most of my friends also lived downtown so this was the place where we spend the most time. Shanghai is full of nice restaurants and there are always special deals. Two recommendations would be Bar Centrale with the best pizza in shanghai and 2 for 1 every Sunday and Fat cow with 2 for 1 Burgers every Monday.

There are also numerous bars, worth a visit in Shanghai. If you arrive in late summer and it’s still warm outside the first thing to check out are all the amazing rooftop bars from which you have a stunning view over the city. My personal favorite is the BVLGARI rooftop, which is located at the top of BVLGARI hotel close to the bund and which overlooks the whole city, since it’s the 50th floor or something. Some other highlights are Flair, which is located at the top of the Ritz Carlton in Pudong and the rooftop bar at the top of the Hyatt at the Bund. The last one even has a whirlpool on the rooftop. A drink is around 100-160 RMB which is around 15-20€. If you are looking for bars that are a bit cheaper and thus better to just have fun with friends, I would recommend La Bamba (close to Tongji) or Windows scoreboard (downtown). It gets as cheap as 5RMB for a shot and a beer, which is not even 1€.

If you want to go partying you can basically do it every day, even Sunday and Monday. The saying that every day is Saturday is totally true when it comes to partying in Shanghai. There are a lot of promotors and you will probably already be in 3 different promoting groups after your first week so you do not have to worry about entrance or drinks since most of the time there is free entrance and free drinks, but you have to take care of ‘fake alcohol’, especially when it is free. Some recommendations are: Le Baron, Ninja, Celia, M1NT, Bar Rouge.
Travels

Since I only had the X2 visa with single entry I couldn’t easily leave the country and get back in, so we focused our travels on China itself. There are numerous nice places, which are all totally different. One of the best trips was definitely our trip to Hainan, which is an island in the south of China. Basically, it’s like vacation on any tropical island. I can definitely recommend it and there are a lot of nice Airbnb villas to rent with a few friends.

If you like hiking and beautiful views I would definitely recommend going to Huangshan and to hike in the Yellow mountains. You should hike up in the morning and stay the night in one of the two hotels up in the mountains so you can see the sunset and the sunrise, which is really an amazing experience.

Another place worth a visit is Beijing and the wall of China. It is pretty nice to hike up to the wall at a place that is not that crowded, since it really can get crowded there. We camped on top of the wall to see the sunrise, which did not work out that well because of the weather, but if it’s possible to see the sun it’s a great experience I was told.
Figure 2: Sunset in the Yellow mountains