

Exchange Semester at Tongji University



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Exchange semester:
Length of Stay:
Exchange Program:
TUM Program:

WiSe 18/19
5 Months (September - January)
TUM SOMex
TUM MMT Master and Master in Management

Application phase

In January 2018, we applied for an exchange semester at Tongji University within the program of TUM School of Management. The required documents were the High School and Bachelor certificate, a CV, an English certificate (IELTS, DAAD), and a transcript of records. In addition, you can participate in the housing exchange that gives you bonus points. In mid-February, we received an e-mail that we were nominated. We accepted our exchange nomination and the next step was to apply directly to Tongji University. We received an e-mail from our Chinese coordinator listing all the required documents. The documents were the same as those for the application in January. You just have to re-upload everything to Tongji's application portal. Basically, there are no complications as soon as you have been nominated by TUM. At the end of June, we received the final positive response from Tongji and we were very excited. Finally, we could start preparing for China.

Preparation

1. Visa

The visa is really easy to get. All information and required documents are listed on the website of the Chinese Consulate. In Munich, there is a Chinese visa application center, where you can go to and apply for it very easily. The visa is issued within 3-5 days for 125 €. For an exchange semester we are only allowed to apply for the X2-Visa, which is valid for 180 days from the first entry into China and only one entry is possible.

Until last year it was possible to convert the X2 visa into a residence permit. This visa allows you unlimited entries and exits during your stay. The situation here was a bit unclear. People at the consulate said it was forbidden now and our coordinators at Tongji did not really know the right answer, but there was a tendency to no. As far as we know fellow students in other cities have received the residence permit.

However, even with the X2-visa there is a possibility to exit China 1-3 times depending on the university. The university issues a special entry card and you can travel abroad. Tongji University issues this document only once, whereas other universities twice or even three times. Nonetheless, China is such a huge country and there are so many cities, villages, and landscapes to visit that are so different from one another that we did not have the desire to leave the country.

2. Health insurance

Although you must have a local health insurance in China (you get one at the registration day at Tongji for 300 RMB), you should, due to limited benefits, issue a foreign health insurance in Germany. There are different companies that offer various services for rising prices. One thing that you should note is that the runtime should be longer than your expected overseas stay. As soon as you are back in Germany you can apply for a reimbursement, but an extension abroad could be very expensive.

If you, like Anastasia, are no longer insured by your parents, we have to inform you here unfortunately, that you still have to pay your contributions in Germany. The TU demands an enrollment in Munich, which implies a legal compulsory insurance - this applies also for a vacation semester.

3. Vaccinations

For Shanghai itself only the usual vaccinations for Germany are needed. However, if you plan to travel around Asia, you should also think about Rabies, Typhoid fever, Cholera, and Japanese encephalitis. You can get advice at the Tropical Institute of the LMU.

4. Flights and luggage

There are several airlines flying to Shanghai with prices ranging from 500 to 700€. We flew with Air China and Air France with two suitcases for about 630€.

If you are planning to travel after the semester and get back to China with a Transit-Visa to get your luggage, be aware that your flight back to Europe **must not** have a layover in any other Chinese city.

Do not forget to pack the following things:

- Medicine: In general, western medicines are not easily found in Shanghai; mostly the Chinese version of them. Thus, you should bring medicine from Germany like headache- and sore throat tablets, antidiarrheal medicines, as well as Malarone (for malaria in case you need it in southeast Asia), and mosquito spray.
- Winter jacket: From November on it is getting really cold in Shanghai. You will definitely need a winter jacket.

5. Language course

If you think that Shanghai is a very western city and you are going to be able to communicate in English, we have to disappoint you. The small local Chinese restaurants do not even offer an English menu, so that you either have to tell what you want in Chinese or order food from some photos.

In any case, Chinese language skills are beneficial. We took a basic Chinese course A1.1 before our semester abroad. However, do not expect to be able to make yourself understood since the pronunciation in Chinese must be absolutely correct for the people to understand you, what is very difficult for beginners.

However, Tongji also offers Chinese language courses for beginners to advanced speakers.

6. Apartments

First of all, you have to decide whether you want to live on- or off-campus. Since you need to share a small room with a random student on campus, we both decided to search for an apartment on our own.

Finding an apartment in Shanghai is easy compared with Munich, you can either find one through Smartshanghai, WeChat groups or searching on-site. The prices for a whole flat are quite high, so a room in a shared flat is the best option. During my stay the prices were, depending on the location, between 400 and 600 € for a room. The utility costs are obtained monthly by the provider and you can pay them through WeChat.

I found my room through WeChat a few weeks before my arrival in Shanghai. To get your deposit at the end of the semester most of the times you will have to find a new tenant for your room. So, there are many housing-groups with people looking for new tenants. Photos of the rooms and flats are posted and you can easily contact the people. Our flat was in Hongkou area, at the metro station Hailun Road (L10, L4), which was in the middle between university and city center. Also Rainbow city, where many students live, is about 10 min on foot.

Lorenz found his room after he arrived in town. For this, you should arrive 1-2 weeks prior to the semester beginning and stay at a hostel or an airbnb. There you will get to know other students and you can search together for a flat. There are plenty of agents that speak English and you can contact them through WeChat and arrange viewing appointments. Lorenz' agent name is Ethan Tsang and his WeChat ID is: xuesongzeng. This is pretty straightforward and within some hours you usually have the answer and can visit the apartment. In addition, some

agents require a commission, however, it is not common in Shanghai. Tongji also suggests some housing agencies. From what we have heard, most of the students who tried to find a flat through them did not have good experiences.

7. Internet and apps

As all of you might know, Internet in China is censored. All the google services and apps like Facebook and WhatsApp are not freely accessible. Thus, you will definitely need a VPN-App that you will need to install prior to your arrival in China. We both had the ExpressVPN App (costs about 9€/month) and we were satisfied from the service provided. In general, Internet via VPN is slower than without, so be patient! Highly recommended is the freely accessible through the TU-ID AnyConnect VPN-App from Cisco as well.

WeChat is definitely a MUST! It is the Chinese WhatsApp-version and everyone uses it. If you open a Chinese bank account, which is free of charge and available on every bank, you can use WeChat as a mean of payment. By scanning the QR-code you can pay everything from the supermarket and bills to train tickets. You can also get or transfer money from/ to other users.

AliPay is also an App used for payments. You will need a Chinese bank account for this as well.

Another important App is “Didi”, which is the Chinese counterpart to Uber. You can launch Didi from WeChat or Alipay (it is then in Chinese) but it is better to download its app. You can either connect it to your credit card or to your WeChat/ AliPay. With Didi you can save a lot of time and money on taxis and you can even communicate with the drivers through the internal messenger as it translates their messages to you and your messages to them automatically.

Baidu maps are great and irreplaceable in China. It is in Chinese and do not work offline, but you can download the route in advance. They provide very detailed information up to a certain store location in a shopping mall.

Additional Apps: SmartShanghai, Trip.com, Ofo, Mobike, exploremetro, Sherpa’s, Ele.me, Meituan Waimai, Taobao, Global Times, Google Translate.

Arrival

1. Airport

There are two airports in Shanghai, Hongqiao in the west of the city and Pudong in the south east. In the latter arrive the international flights. Leaving the airport by metro is the easiest and cheapest (1€) option. The Metro operates between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. You can also enjoy the transrapid-Maglev experience, which is the fastest commercial high-speed electric train that brings you to another metro station in the outskirts of central Pudong, from where you

should interchange to the metro. If you arrive after 10 p.m. there is a night-bus that brings you to the city center for 3€. Of course, you can take a taxi that brings you to the university for 25-30 € at any time.

2. Tongji – University

The orientation week takes place in the first semester week. If you plan to arrive later, it is important to make them aware of this, so that they can give you a “permission”. The registration at Tongji was done very fast within some minutes; we did not even need passport-photos (as it was written under the required documents). After this, you must get a local insurance for 300 RMB. Everyone is really kind and helpful with everything you might need.

A campus tour and welcome ceremonies also take place, but you are not going to miss anything important if you decide not to go. Apart from the official part, in the first week you get to know all the other new students, which is a good way to make new friends. There is also a buddy-program, in which you can join during your registration. It is a nice way to get in touch with fellow Chinese students. The Chinese buddies are very friendly and they organize trips and small gatherings for us.

Studies

1. Course Selection

In the beginning of the semester you register online for your personal choice of courses. Please note that this is done by First Come First Serve (FCFS) as places in some courses are limited. There is quite a broad selection of courses (~10-20) and you get enough information via emails beforehand. We would recommend to register for as many courses as possible in the first place and to check them out in class within the first 2 weeks. Within that time you can still make changes in your course registration.

2. Courses

Since we took a holiday semester for our semester abroad we decided to go for 20 ECTS as this is the maximum amount you can get transferred back to your home university. We signed up for 4 courses, namely Academic Lectures and Seminars, Econometrics, Financial Management in China (only Lorenz), Management Information Systems (MIS), and Marketing in China (only Anastasia), which equal 20 ECTS plus the Chinese basic language course for postgraduates.

After some weeks we decided to drop the Chinese language course. It always took place late in the evening, every Monday and Wednesday. We did not really like the course as there was no structure, no textbook, or any other additional material unless the teacher and the whiteboard. As we already gained some basics from the Chinese A1.1 course in Munich, we decided to occasionally study and practice online/ via applications.

Academic Lectures and Seminars consists of guest lectures in which each deals with a different topic, e.g. leadership, entrepreneurship or renewable energy etc. Depending on the topic and guest lecturer it is a quite interesting and refreshing course compared with other

courses at Tongji SEM. After every guest lecture you have about one week to write an essay about the topic presented in the last class (up to 500 words). In the end, your grade is 100% based on these assignments that you uploaded during the semester.

Econometrics is an advanced statistics course which deals with some basic principles in the beginning but becomes quite sophisticated later on. The lecturer of this course was personally one of the best with really good language skills as he taught in Vancouver before. The grading was based on an individual project, a midterm, and a final exam. Even though the final exam was quite tough, the overall grades are still good to very good and you can really learn something new in this class.

Financial Management in China is a typical finance class covering topics like cost of debt, cost of equity, WACC, etc. Furthermore, we examined some examples and cases in class. The grading was based on personal attendance, a group project where you do a valuation for a company and present your calculations in class, and an individual assignment.

Management Information Systems (MIS) is the only course that is somehow linked with IT among the other courses at Tongji SEM for international students. The grading is based on two individual assignments (SAP + strategic case), and a written group assignment (no presentation). Personal attendance was not required in this course. The workload for this course is pretty low and it is a good opportunity to achieve very good grades.

Marketing in China focuses on the marketing environment in China and covers a variety of topics from consumer behavior and market segmentation to brand equity and pricing strategy. We had two class presentations in groups examining case studies, we had to write a review of two articles and present one of them, and the final group project was an analysis of a company's marketing strategy. There is no exam for this class but personal attendance is required. The workload is quite a lot, but the grading is not strict.

Overall the academic level might not be as high as at TUM, however, assignments or presentations, and the fact that many lecturers require personal attendance, keeps you quite busy during the semester. If you just do 20 ECTS or even more and choose the right courses, you still have plenty of free time to party, travel etc. With the aforementioned courses that we selected, we did not have any class on Thursday and Friday.

3. Course Recognition

If you want credits from Tongji to be recognized at TUM, you need to check for each course whether there is a similar course at TUM. You can also find a database of courses which were already recognized one-to-one with another course at TUM before. If this is not the case, you need to file a recognition with the respective chair at TUM. However, for Management & Technology Master students we can recognize any Business or Engineering & Natural Science course within the Electives section (no Chinese language course!). For further information please refer to the TUM SOMex website.

Life at University and in Shanghai

1. Life at Tongji

Even though Tongji is quite far away from downtown, you can still conveniently commute there by metro line 10. In general, public transportation in Shanghai is cheap, reliable, and always on time. If the metro is not running anymore late in the evening, the best way to get from A to B is using Didi. It is very convenient and cheaper than regular taxis. Another option is to buy an electric scooter for your entire stay and sell it in the end of the semester. For shorter trips you can use shared bicycles from providers such as Ofo or Mobike. Their bicycles are literally everywhere.

The Tongji SEM building is right at the metro station and also one of the newest buildings. There is a small but fully equipped library on the 15th floor. The only disadvantage is that it closes at 5 PM already. However, you can also just check for empty lecture halls late in the evening. Another big and modern library with longer opening hours is the German library from the CDHK.

If you are looking for cheap coffee your best bet is at FamilyMart or on the 3rd floor of Tongji SEM building. The cafeteria of the university offers very cheap and decent food (5-20 yuan). At Tongji Plaza (opposite of Tongji SEM building) there is also a broad variety of restaurants where you pay around 20-70 yuan. For snacks and other commodities there are various 24/7 shops at almost every corner in town (Family Mart, Lawson, etc.).

2. Restaurants

For Chinese fine dining visiting Din Tai Fung and Haidilao is definitely a must-do. They are both chains with several restaurants across town. Another great place for dinner is Lost Heaven, located right at the bund. With respect to international food, we can recommend Fat Cow (2 for 1 on Mondays), Bar Centrale (2 for 1 on Sundays), Zeitgeist, The Fellas, and Wagas. If you don't feel like going out for food you can still order something on the food delivery apps such as Ele.me or Meituan Waimai.

3. SIM Card

The best deals are offered in two mobile stores inside the Tongji campus at the beginning of the semester. SIM Cards are quite cheap in China. Try to avoid buying them at the airport as it is way more expensive.

4. Gym

You can find a gym nearby the place you live or you sign up for the one at the university. As we did not live on campus we found gyms next to our apartments. The best deals have Physical. However, be prepared that some gyms might try to rip you off while negotiating your short-term membership. The longer you stay in Shanghai the better the deals they offer you. Something around 20-30€ per month is still feasible for a 6-months contract.

5. Nightlife

Shanghai's nightlife has a lot to offer and is full of choices. You can party every day (yes even on Sundays or Mondays if you wish) and there are basically two options you need to differentiate between as a foreigner. Firstly, you join the massive Chinese clubs where you get free entrance and free drinks as promoters on WeChat invite you to go there. However, be prepared that the alcohol you are drinking there is not the actual alcohol that it is supposed to be as stated on the bottle ('fake alcohol'). Anyway, you can still go to the regular bar section in these clubs and pay for real drinks. As we did not really like the music and atmosphere in these clubs, we rather focused on international clubs for the rest of the semester. In the following we would like to list some places that we can recommend.

Chinese bars: Perry's, Helen's (very cheap, fun atmosphere, and playing with dices).

International bars: Baraco, Windows scoreboard (beer pong table), Windows garage, Vue Bar (rooftop at the bund), Flair (rooftop at the financial district), several bars at Found 158.

Clubs: Revolucion, The Mansion (unfortunately closed now), Dada, M1nt, Bar Rouge (Ladies Night on Thursdays), Le Baron, Afterhours: Celia, Hollywood.

6. Culture

Chinese are generally nice, talkative, and generous. Since China is part of Asia you will be asked to take pictures together many times. Food is very important to them and they like to share food while sitting together at a round table that is rotatable. They might also offer food to you for free and ask you how you like it. Don't take it personal or impolite if they spit on the ground, cough without covering their mouth, or burp in public. Furthermore, they might ask you whether you have a (Chinese) girlfriend/ boyfriend and/ or whether you are married already as second or third question. However, this is typical as family in general plays a very focal role in China. Chinese take very much care of elder people and thus it is very common to offer your seat to them in public transportations. Even if communication barriers might often be an obstacle to socialize with them, just try your best or use an application to translate. If you stay open-minded during the semester, you will definitely have a great time and experience so many new things. To conclude, we also share the impression (as many exchange students before) that Shanghai is by far the best/ most convenient city in China to live in.

Travels

You should definitely use the time at the beginning of the semester for travelling and getting to know China. The workload in the first weeks is very limited and the weather in September/October is still warm and appropriate for travels in particular to the north. Distances in China are not short but the airplane tickets are cheap, even if you book them a few days before your trip. We used to book both our train and flight tickets on Trip.com. You can organize incredible trips over the weekends to other Chinese cities like Xi'an, Chengdu, and to the remote Shengsi Islands in the east of Shanghai. Day trips to Hangzhou and Suzhou are also recommended.

Consider travelling to the north at the beginning of the semester as it is getting really cold in winter (-15° C in Beijing in December). Beijing is an absolute must-do. All the important historic attractions are there: The Forbidden City, the Great Wall, The Summer Palace of Beijing.

During the Golden Week (Chinese national holidays) every destination in China is overcrowded. Anastasia visited Guilin and Zhangjiajie during that time, which turned out to be an awesome trip. Yangshuo, a small city close to Guilin, is famous for its karst mountains and the bamboo-rafting on the Li-river. A trip to the Longji rice terraces is very recommended as well. Zhangjiajie is home to the famous Wulingyuan Scenic Area. There are many different hiking trails in this national park and the view of the so-called "Avatar Mountains" is breathtaking. Lorenz travelled to Inner Mongolia during the holidays, an autonomous region of Northern China that combines green steppe and arid desert. Camping in the steppe and riding camels is definitely an unforgettable experience. It was early October and it was already pretty cool at night. So, if you plan to travel there, do it soon enough.

China is huge and there are really many worth seeing destinations. One semester is definitely not enough to explore the whole country.

For both of us this semester in China was a unique experience. Living in a culture that is very different from the German was educating and exciting. Shanghai is not comparable with any other German city, which makes everything even more inspiring and fun. In addition, we met new people from China and all over the world who we can call friends after this amazing time that we shared!

If you have any questions, you can send us an e-mail.

Anastasia and Lorenz