



Technische Universität München
TUM School of Management

Experience Report Exchange Semester

Fall Semester 2019/2020

Beijing Institute of Technology
School of Economics and Management



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1. Application phase

The application for an exchange semester at TUM-SOMEx is very straight forward. The necessary steps are clearly and comprehensively outlined in the guidelines and on TUM-SOMEx website. Throughout the entire process you are excellently accompanied by Mrs. Helfers and her team, who will happily help and support you all along the way. After being nominated by TUM School of Management you will have to apply at Beijing Institute of Technology's (BIT) again, which is rather a pro-forma application and has so far never resulted in a rejection by the host university. We had to hand-in a letter of recommendation by one of our professors, which requires quite a bit of time to acquire. We advise you to reach out to a suitable professor as early as possible, after you are aware that your application requires one. As the drafting of one of our letters of recommendation was delayed, Beijing Institute of Technology was very flexible to extend the deadline on request. Detailed instructions will be forwarded by TUM School of Management international office.

2. Preparation

2.1 VISA

You will receive the visa documents sent by Beijing Institute of Technology via TUM School of Management (Jw202 and Admission Letter). Don't panic, you will have enough time to get the visa. You can apply for the X2 visa at the Chinese Visa Application Centre in Laim (S-Bahn station). Please note, that non-German citizens are required to bring an enrolment certificate from TUM. The visa costs about 150 € and was issued within a couple of days. The website of the Chinese VISA application centre in Munich provides helpful information.

2.2 Journey

Lufthansa and Air China offer direct flights between Munich and Beijing, which is the most convenient way to reach Beijing. Cost amount to roughly 600€ to 650€ return. Whether or not you already want to book a return ticket is up to you, flexible return date might be a pricy but valuable option. Stop-over flights to Beijing exists as well, I thought the British Airways service via Heathrow to be an offer of great value, approximately 150€ less for additional three hours. Other ways include Polish Lot, via Warsaw, Etihad Airways via Abu Dhabi and Russian Aeroflot via Moscow. The flight times range between 13 and 17 hours and cost around 350 Euro. Once arrived at the Beijing Airport, one can reach campus by subway (about 1 -1.5 hours) or Taxi (1 hour), Taxi is strongly recommended. Going by subway is allot cheaper and tickets can be bought by cash. The taxi will be around 10 – 20 Euro depending on the traffic. Be sure to take a real taxi at the official taxi stand and don't react to random at the airport

offering you a taxi ride (fake taxis) which cost three to five times the price. The trans-Siberian train from Moscow to Beijing may also be considered, indeed a lengthy travel, but surely a great experience.

2.3 Recognitions of credits

Be aware that one credit at BIT counts as two credits at TUM. One course at BIT normally has two credits (4ECTS at TUM). You will receive an email with all possible courses for the respective semester. BIT provide a sufficiently large set of modules to choose from. Make sure to sign a learning agreement with TUM to avoid conflicts. Furthermore, choose more courses than you actually are planning to visit in case one of them gets cancelled last minute, which seems to happen regularly. Dropping out of the courses in the first lecture week didn't cause trouble at BIT. Within your Electives pool of your curriculum, both Bachelor and Master, all modules usually are recognised by TUM. Be advised that TUM SOM recommends do 20 ECTS during your exchange semester.

2.4 Language Preparation

TUM offers beginners Chinese courses which can help you learn the most essential sentences used in daily life in China. Be aware that most of the people in Beijing don't speak any English. If the course is not enough for you, you can use Chinese learning apps such as 'Pleco', 'ANKI' and 'HelloChinese'. We highly recommend learning as much Chinese as possible since it will make life allot easier. Chinese people also highly appreciated your efforts in learning their language and will show a much greater degree of sympathy towards you (even when you talk solely in English to them).

2.5. Student Life

It is very easy to stay within the International community at BIT, but we strongly recommend you doing just the opposite. Mingle with your Chinese classmates for lunch and dinner, they are more than happy to get to know foreign people. This truly pays off. Make sure you don't miss this.



Figure 1: Dinner with some Chinese class mates

3 Arrival at Beijing Institute of Technology

3.1 Greeting/Staff Support

The arrival at the university went down as a series of two “Welcome-Days”. During those days we as exchange-students got our student IDs as well as an additional insurance for our stay in China. The insurance was about 400 Yuan and it was mandatory to pay for it, it does not matter if you already bought an international one. After having our pictures taken for our Student-ID we got a little tour of the quite large campus. Afterwards we had some time to get to know each other or just to familiarize ourselves with the area. There were a few restaurants other than the cafeterias just outside of the campus. On campus there were, additionally to the extensive number of canteens and cafeterias, there are multiple mini marts that offered a wide range of snacks and stationeries to fulfil all students’ needs.



Figure 2: Main Entrance Beijing Institute of Technology

3.2 Contact Persons

As an exchange-student of BIT you don’t have to worry about a lack of support by the institution. During the “Welcome-Days” we got to know both Summer and Hannah, the “supervisors” of the exchange-students. You will get their WeChat contacts and are welcome to contact them with any problems that might arise during your stay at BIT. They are both very helpful with each and every difficulty you are facing and even if it might take one or two days, they will most likely find a solution fitted to your needs.

3.3 Accommodation

Even though none of us stayed in the dormitory, we still had the chance to get a good look at the living facilities. The rooms were four-bed rooms, which were usually shared by either three or four

students. The design of the room consisted of the two bunkbeds on one wall and a mixture of desks and a wardrobe on the other side of the room. The passage in which it was possible to walk was rather narrow, as were the beds. The rooms in general were rather small (less than 20 square meter) and had two toilets and showers for two four-bed rooms. One thing to consider when choosing to live either in the dormitory or off-campus is the curfew. During the week the curfew was from 12:00am to 6:00am and on the weekend in between 2:00am and 6:00am. If you disregard this curfew and arrive during the curfew you would get one strike and after three strikes you would have to move out of the dormitory, no mercy whatsoever. This would also happen if you would violate the dormitories rules multiple times. The monthly lease is a mere 50€.

The other option is to live off campus, what all of us did, and what we would recommend you to do as well. The monthly lease in Beijing is roughly the same in Munich. Contracts are only possible for six months and the agent has entitled to its fee (one month's rent), which, averaged out on a single month, sums up to 700€. We can recommend you to live in Wu Dao Kou, a perfect location to live if you study at BIT. Short distance to the campus, lively bars, shopping malls and great restaurants. I can recommend you the agent Kathy (WeChat ID: 'wudaokouflat8', just add her on WeChat), she is fluent in English and very helpful. I moved into my flat within 24h after I first contacted her. Kathy surely won't scam you and since I got to know many of her international clients, offers the rooms for reasonable prices. If asked, international room mates should be preferred over only-Chinese room mates. Beijing's high-rises mostly lag their western equivalents' quality, but not as bad as you might imagine.

4 Education at Beijing Institute of Technology

4.1 Choosing study-courses:

The course choice was handled both via E-Mail and WeChat by a form in which you had to insert your preferred courses. Beforehand an E-Mail was sent out containing all courses offered, their schedules and a brief overview of their curriculum. You can either choose to take MBA courses (even as a bachelor-student) or to simply take the bachelor courses. It was even possible to participate in both courses of studies and mix your courses. The bachelor courses had one disadvantage, that almost all took place on the BIT's second campus, which is quite far off in Beijing's southwest. Commuting was told to be quite cumbersome. The MBA courses on the other hand almost solemnly on the weekends or rarely in the late afternoons during the week. This gives you the chance to see a little more of China and take little 'holidays' during weekdays.

4.2 Courses and Exams:

As I only had an insight on the MBA courses, I will only present my opinion and a general overview of the courses. The courses were usually in blocks of 4 hours on mostly Saturday and Sunday starting at 8 in the morning and sometimes going till as late as 10:30pm. During those 4 hour blocks you usually had multiple breaks varying between 5 to 25 minutes. The courses were usually quite interactive in such a matter that the professors asked questions that could be answered by the students, or that discussions often were an integral part of the lecture. Those discussions and the general participation in the course usually make about 25-50% of the final grade. Most courses also have a mandatory group presentation that also takes up in between 10-20% of the grade. Furthermore, every class also has a final exam that usually is around 50% of the final grade. The general workload of the Chinese MBA courses is rather lower than the workload of a normal TUM course. For the courses you usually get 4ECTS per course in China and 1:1 recognition, most MBA-courses are not suitable. Concerning the exams what has to be mentioned is, that they were in contrast to TUM-exams usually open-book. Their duration was either 90 or 120 minutes and rules about silence and distance in seating were a lot looser than at TUM. Their general difficulty also differed quite a bit from the difficulty at TUM. Furthermore, a Chinese language course for beginners is offered, which is highly recommended. It involves three 1 1/2h hours sessions during the week and done by lovely and caring teacher.

5 Life in Beijing and China & Important Advice

5.1 Nightlife in Beijing

Going out in Beijing is truly great as a foreigner as you rarely pay for drinks or entrance. The venue usually invites you including free-drinks all night. This is usually arranged by so-called promoters on WeChat. The clubs are pretty posh and designed for show, often including dance acts, a prominent DJ line-up (e.g. Martin Garrix) and a hyped crowd – you will love it. Going out on weekdays is preferred over weekends.

5.2 Digital Essentials

The so-called 'Great Chinese Firewall', China's heavily censored internet does not allow you to use any Social Media platform from Google or Facebook, neither accessing the websites of western news outlets. Your solution is a VPN. Make sure you download several VPN apps before entering China, you have to try which one works best on your phone and operating system. Common providers are ExpressVPN, NordVPN, SecureVPN, TUM's customised version of Cisco VPN among others.

In China you foremost use Chinese applications. Make sure you have the following installed as soon as possible:

- WeChat (must have, comparable to WhatsApp, Instagram and PayPal in the same App – setting the in-app language is recommended as it has more features)
- Didi Chuxing (China's UBER)
- A bike sharing App (e.g. MoBike)
- AliPay (Payment App)
- AMap (Map provider, Google Maps is useless in China, Apple Maps works comparably well)
- TaoBao (China's Amazon, B2C platform of the Alibaba conglomerate)
- Trip.com (international app, very helpful for booking flights and trains in China)
- Chinese Learning Apps (HelloChinese, Pleco, Google Translate)
- MetroBeijing and MetroChina (includes Metro timetables in all major cities)

5.3 Advice on your financial matters

Most of the mentioned applications need to be connected to a wallet or your bank account. You therefore have to open a bank account, which you are entitled to as a student. We recommend you to do this with the China Merchants Bank branch just outside the campus (between the campus main entrance and the entrance of Weigongcun metro station). They know what you need as foreign exchange student and have some English-speaking staff. Most of the exchange students had their bank accounts with China Merchants Bank. Be aware that the Bank only opens five accounts a, so go there as soon as possible to 'get your slot' for the next days. The laggards had to wait roughly two weeks to get their slots. To get money onto our accounts, we usually withdrew money with credits card and deposited the physical cash into the Chinese account (by far the lowest fees involved).

I would recommend you to bring two credit cards of two different credit institutions to China, many people had problems with their credit card sooner or later. Running out of money is not funny so far from home.

5.4 Public Transport and Mobility

Public transport is very efficient and reliable in Beijing and China as a whole. Trips are payed per journey with either cash (single journey card) or a prepaid metro card, which can be bought in most of the station during office hours. Half-year, week-tickets or any type of subscription ticket do not exist. Single journeys cost between three and seven yuan. Be aware that the metro shuts after 11pm. Since a couple of years there is Didi Chuxing, a ride hailing service similar to what we have known as UBER. The fares are even cheaper than for taxis, approx. 7€ for a 30 minutes' drive, a very

competitive price. You furthermore need an application for bike-sharing offered by several companies. Hundreds of thousand of shared bikes are placed in and around Beijing. It is especially useful on campus.

The first choice to travel between cities in China is the high-speed railway with its eyewatering speed and coverage. For some routes a flight may come in handy as well.

5.5 Chinese Cuisine

After living a longer period in China, one has to admit that the Chinese cuisine is probably the world's best, given its variety and complexity. Be curious and try the local food, even if might involve uncomfortable experiences, some restaurants neither have pictures of the food, nor an English menu. It nonetheless pays off to be brave. The degree of spice depends on the province the food comes from. People who can't take spice will surely miss out but can still choose from a variety of dishes. Going out for dinner is less than half the price than in Munich.



Figure 3: The beef depicted is said to be chairman Mao's favourite meal

5.6 Safety and Security

Especially among its peers of developing countries, China is a very safe country. In Beijing you literally always have a policemen or security guard within site, not mentioning municipal staff ensuring public order. Above all, almost every square meter of public space is monitored by the countless CCTV cameras running around the clock. You can walk the street any time during day and night without fear, women and men. This of course comes at the cost of a higher and more comprehensive surveillance by the state in contrast to what we are used to in central Europe.

5.7 Travel Advice

You won't be able to travel all of China during your exchange, but it's worth trying. Please make sure you don't miss out the great things to do and visit in Beijing itself. Travel the north soon before it gets uncomfortably cold, while China's south as enjoys mild temperatures for much longer far, and the very south hardly experiencing any day with lower than 20 degrees Celsius. Lovely cities/counties in China worth seeing include:

- Chongqing (Must see)
- Xi'an
- Chengdu
- Shanghai
- Guangzhou
- Hangzhou
- Guilin & Yangshou
- Inner Mongolia

Be advised that Hong Kong and Macau legally constitute as exiting Chinese territory. Exchange students generally only have a single-entry VISA and applying for further entries involves filing documents with the university's international office and Beijing's municipal police.



Figure 4: Playing table tennis against a buddhist monk in Chengdu, Sichuan province

Most important, travel China alone! You will have a much more enriching time when going around alone. I never done that in Europe, but I would undoubtedly have had experienced China way less when I would have been accompanied by international friends!

There are undoubtedly many seductive destinations outside China within close reach, but I would wait for after the exams to flee the cold winter in Beijing for South East Asia. Japan and Korea are best visited before December.

5.8 Events in Beijing and on campus

You should not miss the celebrations of German National Day on October 3rd in the Federal Embassy Beijing. The German embassy invites all German citizens to attend the celebrations, which turned out to be a huge garden party within several hundred people attending. German food and drinks are served to German music being played by a band. The event is for free of course. Check the embassy's website for further details.

I furthermore had the chance to join one event organised by the university's international office. We visited NOBO Automotive in Baoding, Hebei province, a former business unit of Great Wall Automotive, a Chinese OEM and BMW's current joint venture partner in China. Some people of our group reportedly return to NOBO for an internship.



Figure 5: BIT students at a NOBO production site in Baoding, Hebei province

Probably one of the best days during our time in Beijing was the University's Intercultural festival, a day of international friendship with great performance on stage and dozens of nations representing their country's history, culture, food and drinks. A day to remember.



Figure 6: Group pictured of the 2019 Intercultural Festival at BIT

6. Conclusion

We highly encourage future exchange students to try to meet some new people which doesn't always turn out to be easy since some of the Chinese are sometimes a little shy. Once the ice is broken however, you are able to make friends for a lifetime and get a much deeper insight into China. Learning some basic Chinese before or while your stay turned out to be helpful. Furthermore, we recommend traveling inner China. Although not always convenient to access due to language barriers and different customs, China has a lot to offer and who knows when you will ever have the time and possibility to explore it again. Stay open minded and don't think too much. Just go with it and try new things. Embrace the marvellous adventures waiting for you in China, it will be the time of your life, and you will truly feel alive!



Figure 8: Shanghai Bund



Figure 10: Taorantig Park, Beijing



Figure 9: The Great Wall at Badaling



Figure 7: Sun and Moon Pagode, Guilin, Guangxi province