

Living at the other side of the world...

In the 3rd year of my bachelor Econometrics & Operations Research I chose to go on exchange. I was lucky to get appointed my first choice: Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (SUFU). I was really happy with my choice and therefore I can recommend going on exchange to Shanghai, China! As almost every Chinese city is a metropole compared to Dutch (or even European) cities, Shanghai is immense since it is the biggest of them. However, since it is also a very safe city, it felt immediately like home to me. The traffic can be a little crowded and messy though. If you decide to go Shanghai, the first thing you should do is download WeChat. All China's social networking takes place in this app (it's kind of Whatsapp and Facebook combined) and you'll need it to find housing or keep in touch with your classmates. At least, this is true at the time of writing. I want to warn you for the speed of China's development, some things in this report could already have been changed in one or two years. I experienced the same with the reports I read during my preparation.

I went to Shanghai together with four other students from the Erasmus School of Economics (ESE). We were split into two universities: Fudan and SUFE. We all decided not to live on campus and rather find an apartment in the city center. We heard some bad stories about campus accommodation, but students who did live there, said the dormitory for foreign students was pretty good after all. As we didn't have anything before we moved to China, we stayed the first 10 days in a hostel. In the very last days of our hostel stay we found an apartment near Nanjing Road, the most famous shopping street of the city. It was quite a hassle to find an apartment, since some of the real estate agents try to scam foreigners. After experiencing some bad ones, we found a good agent from America, whom I can recommend. Also, the housing prices appeared to be a lot higher than the rents I read about in the student reports of previous years. So we ended up paying a little more than my intended budget, but it was still a proper deal, because we had a really big apartment for 5 people (215 m²) at the top floor. Location was also really good, we had a nice food street with restaurants at a 7-minute walk and a great view. I ate outside almost every day, because that's a lot cheaper than in The Netherlands (and not more expensive than cooking at home in Shanghai).

After you get selected, you have to send some forms and some documents to Shanghai. For all of the SUFE students, it took a really long time to hear about the approval, which was around midway June. You will also need a visa, which you can arrange at the Visa for China Center in The Hague (you will already need your plane ticket and some address for accommodation). The arrival at the university was well organized, though it was quite hard to find the right buildings on campus, because I didn't know any Chinese at the time. SUFE has two campuses, Guoding Road Campus and Zhongshan Beiye Road Campus. Subscription day was at Zhongshan Campus and apart from that all other official activities too. At the subscription day you have to decide whether you want to apply for a residence permit, which allows you multiple entries into China. Otherwise you have to stay in China for your entire exchange. I decided not take the residence permit, because added up it would have cost me 200 euro's to get the permit plus the necessary health check. Travelling through China was also really great! All my classes were at Guoding Campus. The Zhongshan Campus has the more intensive language courses and the Guoding Campus hosts the beginner level Chinese courses. The Guoding Campus is also right next to Fudan Campus. Fudan is one of the most famous universities in Asia, SUFE has also a little fame in China itself (but only if you mention the Chinese name: Shanghai Cailing Daxue, 上海财经大学). Since I lived together with both students of SUFE and Fudan, we compared and the ones from Fudan had more spare time in a typical week. I thought it was an advantage to be more at campus (still not a lot), because I used the time to meet my fellow exchange students from all over the world. But that's certainly something to consider when making a choice. I even made some Chinese friends, who are a little more introvert than the foreign students at SUFE. Together

with two roommates, we did some typical Chinese activities for going out with them, like eating Hot Pot and going to karaoke (KTV).

My courses

The overall level of the economics courses in SUFE is lower than in Rotterdam, but that's not something that's restricted to China. The level of the Chinese language courses was good. I learned a lot, since I was an absolute beginner to start with. It was mandatory to attend 2/3 of the lessons of the economics courses and 60% of the language courses. The economics courses were taught in English and the classes consist of mainly Chinese students and about 30% exchange students.

Chinese Listening & Speaking level I (9 ECTS)

The teacher of this course (Ms. 董, Dong) was really adorable, therefore the lessons were quite fun to attend. Every single lesson she took typical Chinese food and let us have a taste. In this class she once took us to a local market, which was pretty fun. We also went for dinner with the whole class and the teacher. We studied basic Chinese language from a book from Beijing (which only has some slight differences from the general Mandarin). Almost everyone in this course scored above 80/100. We actually learned to read more characters than in the Reading & Writing Course. We learned a lot in this course, but the exam was rather easy. Classes are scheduled in the evening from 18:00-20:30 twice a week. Thanks to the Chinese classes I could really apply some daily life Chinese during the exchange!

Chinese Reading & Writing level I (4,5 ECTS)

This course was pretty weird, because it was basically the same as Listening & Speaking. It taught less characters than the other course. We didn't learn any writing. The teacher's ability to understand English was not so good, which caused a lot of weird situations in class (a lot of times the teacher didn't understand a question and started to explain something completely random). She was very kind though and her intention was really good. Don't worry: SUFE has a lot of Reading & Writing teachers and she was nice though. The exam of this one was harder than the exam of the other Chinese course, but still okay. Classes take place in the evening 18:00-20:30 once a week.

Corporate Finance (4,5 ECTS)

This class was taught by a really good foreign teacher from Singapore (Lee Yen Teik). Even though they used the same book as in Corporate Finance in Erasmus I still learned a lot of new stuff. It started off easy, but I think the exam was a little harder as the one in Erasmus in the end. The focus is a little more on the time value of money in this course. Because the teacher worked at major Asian banks before, he had a lot of stories from the real financial world. Classes were nice to attend.

Game Theory (4,5 ECTS)

This course was really annoying in the beginning, because the teacher translated every sentence to Chinese afterwards. But after a few weeks the classes were solely in English. The course started off really easy and remained quite easy over time, but the final exam was hard, because the class scored (too) good results at the mid-term.

Property Investment (3 ECTS)

This course was really bad and taught by a foreign teacher (UK). You didn't really learn anything if you already had some basic Corporate Finance and what you learned, was just facts. The teacher made quite a lot of mistakes and if people said something about it, he became mad at them for not paying attention. I took this course to be able to travel during the weekends. This course was only 3 weeks long, but pretty intensive regarding class hours in these weeks. Due to this course I had class from 8:00 – 20:30 thrice a week, but starting the 4th week I had a great schedule for travelling.

Finances

Inflation in China is high and house prices in Shanghai are growing sky high. Whereas apartment rental prices in 2013 were about Dutch level, Shanghai is now a lot more expensive (my agent told me 10% growth per year). Still, what I paid in Shanghai was still okay if you compare it to Singapore or Hong Kong. I paid 500 euro's a month for the first two months and 530 euro's for the last two (due to exchange rate fluctuations). To get this price at such a prime location as Nanjing Road area was only possible because I could share a room with my girlfriend (we stayed with 5 people in a big 4 bedroom apartment and split rent equal). Also, in China you will find yourself eating out for dinner a lot, because it's so cheap compared to back home. The exchange life in general is really good, so you'll spend more anyway. Roughly this is what I spent (in euros):

Flight	700
Housing (incl. hostels)	2250
WiFi, electricity, gas and water	175
Food	1800
In-house necessities	200
Public transport	100
Visa	70
SIM-card	50
WiFi	25
Unforeseen costs	500
Total	5870
Extra: travelling	2000

Daily life

Daily life in Shanghai was really good. From the 4th week onwards the university took only a little time and I could spend the rest of my time for going out to restaurants or clubbing. Clubbing in Shanghai is really great, because if you're a foreigner and know the password of a promoter you get free entrance and free drinks in a lot of clubs. Also, you could go out every single day of the week. The only thing you have to pay when you go clubbing is the taxi, which is cheap in Shanghai. Don't worry about a password, the promoters will find you as soon as you arrive in Shanghai. To avoid the busy metro in Shanghai, I bought an electric scooter, which is THE way to go in the city for expats. They're really fast and relatively cheap (I paid 200 euros). Before I went back home, I was able to sell mine without any losses on smartshanghai.com. Best of all: you don't need any driver's license or helmet. But be sure to watch out in the city's busy traffic. Crossing a 4-lane highway like road is a typical situation. The website smartshanghai.com is really great, you can find almost everything on it. Advice for going out, for dinner, deals, events; it has it all and it's completely in English. It even has a housing page, where you can rent apartments and it has a marktplaats.nl like feature. Public transport in Shanghai is also quite good and it's expanding really fast. The metro has 14 lines now, they built 3 new lines in the time I was in the city. For comparison: in 2001 the Shanghai Metro featured only 2 lines... I considered the speed of the development a really cool thing about China.

One of the other reasons I went to Shanghai, is for travelling through China. I've made a lot of trips with different combinations of my roommates. I've seen the beautiful West Lake in Hangzhou, the Avatar Mountains in Zhangjiajie and the idyllic landscapes of Yangshuo, Guilin. Of course I went to the capitol, Beijing. When I was there, the Great Wall was captured in snow, which was really special. The most beautiful thing I saw, was the sunrise above the rice terraces in Yuanyang, Yunnan. These trips made my exchange great. I really liked China and will definitely go back there. But before I do that, I will continue to study Chinese at CSA in Rotterdam.

In conclusion, I can really recommend going on exchange to Shanghai. You will never be bored in this city of 24 million people. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me!

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