

Exchange Report Peking University

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1. Preparation

After being selected by the ESE to go on exchange to Peking University (hereafter referred to as PKU) it was also additionally required to go through almost the entire application procedure at PKU itself. This meant that before even being able to go on exchange we had to fill in our online application forms and send a package to the university with many physical, original and signed documents from our university such as printed and filled out application forms, official certificate of highest education, official transcripts (signed), physical copy of passport and two original letters of recommendation (also signed). It took quite some time to get everything in order, especially the two recommendation letters from professors, as contact between students and professors is in general not as personal as it is in China or at least at Peking University. This all takes time to get in order and I sincerely advise you to start with this as soon as possible, since the package has to arrive in China before a set date, so you have to take postage time into account. After this you will receive (via post again) a package with all sorts of documents you will need for your visa application. Since visa application for China isn't that difficult for Dutch citizens this should not be the cause of any stress, you will most likely have the required documents in time for your visa application. As a student staying less than 180 days, you will apply for an X2 visa, you need the original acceptance letter from PKU and a special visa form they have made and stamped for you for this, don't forget to bring them and double check on the site of the Chinese Visa office what you need to bring. One of the downsides here is that this visa does not allow multiple entries, this means that once you get into China, you won't get to leave again for your entire stay. So travelling outside China is off the table, unless you go through the process of changing your visa through the uni, which is possible if you want to be able leave and come back to China to up to 2 times (you also have to pay for this obviously). It is also possible to arrange accommodation beforehand. This will be in the international dormitory of the university; the global village. Even though it's quite expensive (3000RMB/month) and you have to live in dorms (although quite luxurious) this is apparently quite the popular option. Because of this popularity it'll require you to sit behind the application site at an ungodly hour and hope that you clicked fast enough to be allowed to stay there. Because of this and other reasons I opted out of this option, but do know that the possibility exists. It is an advantage that you don't have to arrange housing after you've arrived; many other options of arranging housing beforehand are limited, since not many landlords accept housing contracts without multiple months of rent paid forward in cash.

2. Arrival

Arranging housing, if you haven't already, should be your number one priority in those first couple of days. Apart from the introduction day where you need to be to formalise your enrolment at PKU you will have some free days until the start of the classes. Use these. If you want to go about it the same

way as I did you should make sure that you have booked a hotel for the first week at least, just to make sure you have a place to stay. Also make sure that this hotel is as near the university as possible, Beijing is a very big city and some friends had to travel at least 40 minutes every time they had to go to the university or to the general neighbourhood around the university to look for an apartment. This is a big waste of time and effort and especially if you're totally new to China is just not something you want to be dealing with while trying to get settled. Finding an apartment was not that difficult for me, I called some Chinese friends in Beijing and asked them if they could help me. You may not have this luck and finding an apartment might be frustrating as a result. In the area around PKU called Wudaokou, since there are many internationals living here, there are some real estate agents that can speak English and will take you to look at some apartments. Their fees are always exorbitantly high for what they actually do (1 month of rent most of the time for only showing you around) but there is just no way around this, just don't be surprised if you suddenly have to pay multiple months of rent in advance, plus a deposit plus this broker fee which in total may amount to a cash payment of over €2000. You may also need to pay an extra month of rent since many landowners are very anal about renting out only 4-5 months (the time you will probably actually stay there) until January since not many new students will arrive then (the fall semester in China hasn't finished yet at that time). You can try to bargain, my experience is that regarding housing this will probably not have any effect. I did arrange a limited discount and some other things but this was because I was there with a Chinese person that could translate exactly what I said and helped me out in general. Don't count on it. Like mentioned before, the only other important activity from the university around arrival was the introduction day. Try to be there and be early so you don't have to stand in line that long. This was very well arranged and the PKU students helped you step by step in officially enrolling by physical registration and registering for a sim card, a student pass, visa details, insurance and all manner of other necessities. This was all very clear and useful. Apart from that, until the actual start of our classes, there were no other activities for us as exchange students at the School of Economics. Many other faculties at PKU that have longer standing and well-established exchanges with more international students did seem to have many introductory activities and services for their new exchange students. It was a shame that at the School of economics nothing of the sort was arranged for the international exchange students. The Western Student Union of the university did arrange some activities such as an introduction party and board meetings that were great for meeting the internationals studying at the other faculties of PKU. It is very advisable to go to as many of the events arranged by the Western Student Union as possible, it's a great way to meet new friends and get to know people.

3. Courses

Choosing courses and the subsequent conversion to ECTS was a complete and utter train wreck, both from the side of PKU as from the EUR/ESE. It seemed as if both universities had just agreed on the exchange but had never looked into the details and arrangements regarding possible courses and study point conversion at all. It was a disaster that took us an entire month of uncertainty whether we were even able to achieve enough ECTS during our exchange to not be delayed in finishing our bachelor and calling/mailling/writing letters, visiting PKU and having to resort to our (limited) abilities in speaking/understanding Chinese (which was of course completely coincidental that we both even could speak some Chinese) to finally get the confirmation of the EUR examination board that the only four courses we could potentially pick (since no other courses were available to us at the School of Economics at PKU and were given in English there) would together give us the equivalent of 24

ECTS (= first two ESE semesters/minor requirement) and thus allow us to finish our bachelor without delay (since we wanted to fill in our elective minor with this exchange). I will not elaborate on this matter further, since hopefully students after us will not have to deal with this problem anymore. We have hopefully remedied the problem by being the first on exchange from the ESE with the PKU School of Economics, and hope at least this has been resolved for all future exchange students there. If you do want more details you can of course e-mail me. Fact of the matter was still that the choice of courses was extremely limited and we had to pick all of the courses that were available to us. These were: labour economics, applied econometrics, corporate finance and introduction to behavioural finance (together 24 ECTS). Even finding and applying for these courses was a hassle because we got sent a link to a Chinese page. Without any knowledge of Chinese, you'll most likely need help to find the available courses in English in that database and the same goes for registering for them as well. The content and level of the courses was quite high, way higher than I expected from hearing accounts from other international exchange students at other faculties at PKU with many international students. Here there are enough internationals that they are often more in classes with almost only international students. For us at the School of Economics this wasn't the case, and in many instances we would be in a class with mostly Chinese students (all of our lessons were in relatively small classrooms). This gave us an opportunity to work with the brightest Chinese students (PKU being the best university of China with the lowest acceptance rate in the world) and learned us of their incredible work ethic. This is however necessary, since many courses focus in their grading on class-participation and require the writing of many research papers/essays, their tests/exams seemed to be of a very high level as well. Of the 4 courses we had for example our final assignments were: one research proposal with presentation of half an hour for Labour Economics, one essay of 4000-5000 words for Introduction to Behavioural Finance, an econometric research paper of 5000-6000 words for Applied Econometrics and a difficult exam for Corporate Finance. And this does not include the midterm assignments for all these courses. A short description of the courses; Labour Economics could just as well have been called healthcare economics since it was mostly about the healthcare market and its participants. It elaborated on the American healthcare system, particularly Obamacare, and the Chinese healthcare system plus it explained the underlying basic economic principles of the healthcare market in general so that we could propose and present our own healthcare research plan in the end. Applied Econometrics was by far the hardest course. It focused mainly on important econometric theory for writing a research paper (which was also the final assignment). Very complicated mathematical theory and its application in your own research plus the fact that you had to build your own research, find and transform your own data made this course hard work. Corporate Finance had a very mathematical approach, most of the lectures were just copying whatever formulas the professor wrote on the blackboard and focused on being able to calculate many financial factors such as portfolio rates under many different circumstances. The final exam was thus also only about financial calculations. Introduction to Behavioural Finance showed an overlap in subject matter of its fundamentals with behavioural economics, but later focused on many research papers that specifically targeted these principles as applied in the field of finance. We had to pick our own subject within this field to write an essay about as final assignment.

4. Finances

A short overview of costs during my stay.

Visa: around 100 euros (+50 if changing/extending)

Housing: Probably around 450 euros each month (could just as well be higher) + 1 months' rent for the brokerage fee

Travelling/Outings: Depends on what plans you have. If you really want to see something of other parts of China, do try to budget at least 400 euros per month for this.

Food/Living: Quite cheap, think about 15 euros per day. It is often just as cheap, easier and more fun to eat dinner outside the door (there is almost always a restaurant with meals for 2-3 euros within walking distance, you do have to find them though)

Mobile Phone: They should have a special student deal at the introduction day of PKU where you can get a half year subscription plan with calls and internet for only 25 euros. Very cheap, however the internet for many people worked sporadically at best.

Flight: If booked at the right time you can get a return AMS-PEK for around 500-600 euros

Transport: Very cheap, depends on where you go of course. I bought a bike for 6 euros and used that to get to and from uni, and to get around the neighbourhood. This is very dangerous though, so if you don't have confidence in your biking skills, stick to the other cheap options of taxis (starts at 2 euros to 5/6 for a ride of a little less than half an hour) and the metro (max 0.5 euros per ride).

5. Daily life

China is a huge country, and when you arrive in its capital this becomes impressively clear. It is just incomparable to anything Europe or even America has to offer in regards to the sheer amounts of people and the facilities and infrastructure necessary to hold them. Chinese culture is something you will have to get used to, there are many instances where Chinese people would seem rude; that's not the case. The best advice here is to just roll with it; 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'. If you get pushed and shoved at the metro, just push and shove back, no one really cares. If you want attention of the waiter in a restaurant you will get ignored if you wait for them to come to you. Just cry for the waiter like you see other Chinese people do. It might take some getting used to, but it works because it's just normal. Do keep in mind that when dealing with Chinese authorities playing the dumb but nice westerner that doesn't understand any Chinese is almost always the most advisable. At least make sure to respect them, don't get angry or frustrated or be rude to them even though the most unreasonable thing has just happened or you've already been waiting for 4 hours. You cannot count on the Chinese system of law working in your favour in any way so prevent any (negative) contact with these authorities. If you do, just be as patient and nice as you can possibly be and everything will get sorted out eventually; never try to make a fuss (even though 'it wasn't your fault').

Everything in China is extremely well organised (even though it's sometimes a little bureaucratic), public transport is amazing and cheap. Do make use of this while travelling around China trains and buses are cheap and comfortable. It is also very convenient that you are able to buy train tickets at the university campus. Do try to learn some Chinese as well while you're there, some basic phrases make all the differences. Even though Chinese people may seem quite distant socially most of the time this is due to them not being able to speak (good) English. When you approach them with your (limited) Chinese many doors will suddenly open for you. Apart from that the campus is very beautiful and quite small if you take the amount of people that actually live in China into account. It has a lake and a pagoda. It is always extremely busy at the campus. They are very helpful and you can

try asking them for help if you need it to find a building for example, their English may not be that great though. In conclusion, I would sincerely advise you to go on exchange to PKU. Especially if you've never been to China before, but even if you have, it is an amazing experience that will teach you a great deal about the country and its people and the skills to live and get around this environment by yourself.