

## Exchange Report – China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL)

### Study Programme

Exchange students can choose from a great variety of courses, which have one, two or three Chinese Credits (1 Chinese Credit = 2,3 ECTS). The list of courses changes every year. The courses, which we were offered during our exchange included International Public Law, International Trade Law, International Investment Law, Legal Research and Writing, International Air and Space Law, International Human Rights Law, Chinese Law and Society, Chinese Constitutional Law and Administrative Law, Chinese Civil Law, and Chinese Civil Procedure Law. Throughout the term, some more courses were offered, which took place on a weekend, such as Arbitration Law and China's Foreign Trade Law. Furthermore, it was also possible to take free Chinese classes; however, it was very hard to follow these courses as they usually overlapped with the law courses.

I took the courses International Investment Law, International Air and Space Law, International Human Rights Law, Chinese Law and Society, Chinese Constitutional Law, Chinese Civil Law, Arbitration Law and China's Foreign Trade Law. I can recommend all of these courses as they are very interesting and the professors are very nice. The only course I would not recommend is International Trade Law. I chose this course at the beginning of the term, but the professor's English was very bad, he was unprofessional and demanded a lot, so I dropped the course directly after the first few lectures.

The level of study is quite difficult to assess. Except for the International Human Rights Law course, which featured a final open-book exam (laptops with internet access were permitted), all other courses required a final paper. This paper was supposed to be about a topic, which was not discussed during the lectures. Therefore, the level of study during the term was low, while all the work had to be done at the end of the semester by writing a paper for each course, which required a length of 4.000 to 8.000 words. Usually longer essays were graded better than shorter ones.

All in all, it is possible to obtain good grades without putting too much effort in it during the semester because the grades only depend on your final papers, which you will have to write in November and December. However, every course lasts between three and four hours per week and attendance of 100% is required, otherwise you lose 10% in the grade for every time you miss (no excuses!), and after the third time you are out. Therefore, it is necessary to choose your courses wisely and make sure that you can attend them (thus, no long weekends and travelling when you have courses on Friday and Monday).

### Language/ Language Preparation

Before I arrived in China, I took a Chinese Language Course in the Confucius Institute in Groningen. I only learned the very basics, but it was surprisingly useful because nobody speaks English in Beijing. In my experience, it is impossible to obtain a working knowledge of Chinese within 4 months because all Chinese Language courses at CUPL take place during the law courses and Mandarin is a very hard language that requires intensive study. Nevertheless, I would recommend you to take a beginners course in Groningen in order to be able to bargain on the markets, to introduce yourself and to understand the lunch menu in the cafeteria.

### Finances and General Matters

China is a very cheap country. I lived in the dormitory, which I can really recommend because all exchange students live there and it is on the campus (5 minutes walk to the university). Furthermore, rents in China are rather expensive 400-500 Euro, while living in the dormitory is unbelievably cheap and costs only 8 Euro per month. The cafeteria, which offers breakfast, lunch and dinner provides meals for only 0,80 Euro. Therefore, if you have the same budget as you have available in Groningen, you will enjoy your life in China a lot and even have money to travel around, receive massages or get your nails done every now and then.

Concerning the visa, I had a lot of troubles, which involved a lot of costs. However, it is not the rule and usually you only pay the student visa, which you have to apply for before you enter China and then transfer it into a residence permit as soon as you arrive.

## Preparation and Contact with the Faculty Abroad

The communication with CUPL was extremely bad. It became a lot better after I got to know my study advisor, April, because I could add her on Wechat (this is the Chinese version of Whatsapp) and write her day and night, and receive answers to my questions. When I went to China, it was the first time that the exchange took place. Therefore, everything was extremely unorganised and I did not even have the Chinese address of the university when I arrived in Beijing. As soon as I arrived at CUPL, everything eventually turned out to be just fine (this is what I learnt after my first big troubles). Furthermore, there are other exchange students from all over the world, especially from Germany and Italy, who are very helpful and which is like a big family during your stay abroad. All students, whether they study Chinese or follow bachelor, master or Phd courses, are basically on the same page. They all follow the very same courses and live together, so in the end, we were a very mixed group with people from all over the world and had a lot of fun together.

Another very important thing, which you should not forget is to buy or organize yourself a VPN. As you might know, China has restricted the population's access to the Internet, so it is impossible to visit, for instance, Facebook, Youtube or Google. Especially Google will be important for you because your student email account is Google Mail and without a so-called VPN, you will not have access to it. Unfortunately, you cannot organize this after your arrival in China and, therefore, you need to think of this in advance.

## Housing

As I mentioned before, the rent is 8 Euro per month. Electricity, shower and laundry cards have to be paid separately, but even if you use them a lot, you will never pay more than 2 Euro a month extra. While Chinese students need to share their rooms with up to 8 other students, international students enjoy the privilege to share their room with only one other student, most commonly a student from the same country. However, if you have any problems with your roommate and you explain your problems to the responsible person, it is usually also possible to live alone.

The dormitory is in a nice neighbourhood called Haidian District. The student and foreigner district Wudaokou is only two stops with the subway (the subway costs 0,25 Euro per ride to any destination in Beijing) and, all in all, it is very central. The only drawback of the dormitory is that students have a curfew from 12am to 6am. Nevertheless, during the cold winter they usually leave the driveway open in case you are really late and if not, there will always be a way to get in, but you will find out when you are there. In addition to this, the showers and the shower rooms were criticized by many foreign students because the water sometimes went cold or Chinese students, who were not permitted to use the showers on the international floors, blocked the showers. However, I did not have any problems.

## Guidance/ Reception at Host University

Unfortunately, CUPL does not offer any introduction programme. However, due to the fact that most of the students live in the dormitory, it is very easy to get to know everybody and usually you start to organize events yourself. For instance, after the first couple of days we already planned our first trips and went to the Great Wall altogether in order to explore Beijing and get to know each other. Throughout the semester, more and more events and courses were then organized by the international office, such as a Tai-ji course, cooking classes and parties. Furthermore, we also received the chance to teach Chinese students our culture and native language, which enabled us to get in touch with some Chinese students.

At the beginning, it was not very clear what opportunities we had and how the whole system works, but the study advisors are incredibly nice and they try everything to make your exchange semester as interesting and fruitful as possible. The concept of exchange, however, seems to be a relatively new concept, so when I was there, we were involved in developing new ideas and organising events for foreign students. This is very nice because you can actively help to shape the international programme. Furthermore, I recently received another email from my Chinese supervisor who asked me about information regarding my original study and the system at our home university in order to enable future students to receive financial aid during their study abroad. As you see, the university continuously makes progress and, even though I can write down everything I experienced, I am sure that by the time the next students arrived, the organisation and opportunities for them will have doubled.

## Other

I really enjoyed my time in China and, so far, it was the most exciting and also the most challenging time of my life. It is important to understand the cultural implications of this exchange and to realize that this will not be a typical Erasmus semester. There are many inspiring people and also exchange students, but it is sometimes hard to get into touch with the locals. Therefore, it is important to be very open-minded and prepared for a possibly life-changing experience. I am glad I did this exchange because I could prove that I am able to live anywhere in this world and I appreciate all the challenges I came across.

If you plan to apply for an exchange semester in Beijing, you should be an open and adventurous person. Since the semester usually starts in September and classes are finished in the end of November or the beginning of December, you will have a lot of time to travel through Asia and also during your studies, there are plenty of possibilities to explore the country. However, do not forget that Beijing is a huge city and China's capital, which has to offer you a lot.

All in all, I can say that I had a great time, and even though everything seemed quite chaotic when I arrived, it turned out to be just alright. I promise you that you will face several challenges, but nothing you will not be able to manage.