Contents

1. Preparing for the exchange ................................................................. 2
   1.1 Arrival in Beijing ................................................................. 2

2. Exchange studies ........................................................................ 3
   2.1 Course Offering ................................................................. 3
   2.2 My Courses at Tsinghua ...................................................... 5

3. Free time and other information .................................................. 7
   3.1 Cost of Living and Transportation ......................................... 7
   3.2 Getting to know other students and free time ...................... 8
   3.3 General information Of Tsinghua and Beijing ....................... 8
   3.4 Traveling During and after Exchange in China .................... 9
   3.5 Good to know / useful information ....................................... 9
      3.5.1 VPN ........................................................................ 9
      3.5.2 Language learning...................................................... 9
      3.5.3 Pollution ................................................................ 10
      3.5.4 Vaccinations ............................................................ 10

4. Final Comments ........................................................................ 11


1. Preparing for the exchange

The preparing for the exchange at Tsinghua University in Beijing was probably more complex than for many other countries. Yet still completely manageable. I needed to get some vaccinations, a new passport (because the old one would expire before finishing the exchange) and finally a student visa to China. To get the visa was surprisingly fast (only a few days), but I recommend applying it quite early, perhaps one month or more before traveling to China. I lived abroad in Germany the months before my exchange semester in China started. This made things a bit more complex for me.

Tsinghua required many different documents already before arriving in China, such as:

1. The completed Foreigner’s Application Form of Admission to the Advanced Study Program of Tsinghua University.
2. Passport size picture pasted on the printed application form
3. Original or certificate true copy of your university transcript
4. A photocopy of your passport with the photo page
5. Curriculum Vitae within 2 pages.

Documents had to be sent physically to China. Application deadlines were designed so that I had to send my documents with an expensive DHL service (about 70€) to ensure they would arrive at Tsinghua on time.

In addition, the courses had to be selected already in the summer before the exchange. I also applied a dorm room on campus but did not get it. After that I found from a Facebook group of incoming Tsinghua exchange students a Swiss student already in Beijing looking for a flatmate if he would find an apartment. I was interested. He later found and rented an apartment and we spent the whole time in Beijing as flatmates.

Incoming MBA exchange students were each appointed a “buddy”, a Chinese degree student who would help you at the beginning in Beijing and at Tsinghua. My buddy Kelly had been an exchange student at Aalto School of Business in 2014! She contacted me in the summer and we added each other to WeChat (messaging app widely used in China). We started messaging and she for example helped me to decide a Chinese name for me (useful in China).

1.1 Arrival in Beijing

I arrived at the airport in Beijing at about 11pm on September 6th. I ended up taking a black taxi that spoke English but cost me 250RMB. First I had to go to the gate of Peking University, wait a couple of minutes to get my apartment keys (from a friend of the girlfriend of the flatmate I had never met) and then continue to my apartment. Everything went well and I quickly found my apartment.

After I arrived in Beijing, Kelly helped me a lot during my first couple of weeks. Together we bought me a bike, (Internet) contract for both my phone and apartment, registered at the police station, bought and charged a public transport card, opened a Chinese bank account, withdrew money and even went to a university gym before I had my own student card or membership. If you are appointed a Chinese “buddy”, I recommend utilizing her/him. If you don’t have a buddy it may be wise to ask help from some other Chinese people you know or buddies of your friends.
2. Exchange studies

The orientation started on Wednesday 9th September and the lectures the following week, starting on Monday 14th. Even though at Aalto I was a “regular” master-level business student, at Tsinghua I studied at MBA program taking mainly MBA business courses. My department was the famous Tsinghua SEM (School of Economics and Management) where many high-profile people such as Mark Zuckerberg, Tim Cook and Elon Musk visited during my exchange (see Picture 1 taken by my friend).

2.1 Course Offering

Many MBA courses lasted only the first 8 weeks, ending after the first week of November. Some offered courses were during weeks 1-12 (ending at the beginning of December), 1-16 (ending mid-January) and 9-16.
I tried to pick mainly courses lasting only weeks 1-8 so that I could better focus on traveling and other activities in the latter half of my exchange.

The selection of MBA courses offered and marketed for us was relatively narrow (Picture 2). There were only 10 different courses from which exchange students at Tsinghua MBA program primarily selected their studies. All of these courses were taught in English and all were MBA-business courses except one Chinese language course (Elementary Chinese). Most of the courses were 2 Tsinghua credits (1 local credit = 2 Aalto ECTS, thus the required workload for Aalto undergraduate students 15 Tsinghua credits and for graduate students 12cr) which is 4 Aalto ECTS credits. In other words, about six courses had to be taken to fulfill 24ECTS (I was graduate student) requirement of Aalto School of Business. Courses offered to undergraduate students were mostly different from graduate courses and I do not know much about them.

Moreover, all courses were initially chosen through online course selection system in the summer. This system was based on bidding points meaning that all students were assigned 1000 bidding points to select
courses and the students with the high enough number of bidding points allocated to a specific course were allowed to take that course. Yet, the seats available for each course changed (increased) for many courses meaning that it was actually easy to be selected to most if not all courses. Also, during the first 2 weeks there was a “drop/add”-period during which students were allowed to change their initial course selection. I changed one course during this period.

In addition, a few other MBA or business courses taught in English were more or less available for us to select. The information related to their availability for us was unclear. People interested in selecting those courses had to independently find information about them and discuss with MBA office or course staff whether or not they are allowed to take them. The majority of business courses at Tsinghua seemed to be taught in Chinese, which practically excluded almost all exchange students from attending them. Most MBA exchange students including me chose (almost) all their courses from the courses presented in the picture 2.

2.2 My Courses at Tsinghua

Lecture attendance was compulsory in every course of mine. In other words missing more than 1-2 lectures was not allowed or at least resulted in less points in course grade evaluation. None of my business courses had an exam. Lectures were usually over 3 hours long and once a week. I completed the following six courses of which the first four were graduate level (MBA) courses and the last two targeted for students of all levels (UG, G, MBA, PhD):

**Chinese Institutions and the Innovations in Business Models (4ECTS), courseID 80516022:**
This course gave some perspective on the Chinese systems and regulations related to government and business. In addition, the purpose of the course was to not only be aware of these systems but to innovatively utilize them when doing China-related business. The teacher relied a lot on student presentations: students combined presented maybe more than the teacher herself. Assignments were mostly presentations or Powerpoint-slates. Both the workload and usefulness of this course were moderate.

**Business Performance and Sustainability (4ECTS), courseID 80515382:**
Each lecture was mainly given by a visiting guest lecturer (a company representative, sometimes the founder himself) and was focused on a certain company (mainly Chinese companies) and topics related to it. Before each guest lecture students were given about 10 pages long case material about that company to read and to answer 2 questions and write 1-2 questions to the lecturer. In addition there were a group project that contained a report and a presentation. There were no exam. The company my team selected for the group project was Foxconn. Course professors were good. Most visiting lecturers spoke in Chinese but each student had an ear-plug with real-time English translation so language was not a problem.

Course focused on corporate sustainability and (social) responsibility and their connection to business performance (profitability). The course tried to find examples of how socially responsible business models and activities can increase profitability. The cases and guest lectures were about companies that were good examples of socially responsible and profitable business models.

Course was good and useful for me and other people who want to gain general understanding of or get new ideas related to CSR (corporate sustainability reporting) and socially responsible business models or corporate activities. I recommend this course.

**Strategic Alliance and Cooperative Strategy (4ECTS), courseID 80514802:**
The course consisted of lectures, case reading materials and class discussions, one individual assignment (comparison of 5 alliances in a specific industry) and one group assignment (presentation, analysis of one
strategic alliance). Lectures were moderately interesting. The lecturer was a Chinese female professor who helped us to understand also the Chinese perspective on the topic of the course.

The course was a strategy course about alliances and cooperation between companies/organizations. The course contents were a good combination of relevant (academic) theory and real-world alliance cases between well-known companies. For me the course was useful. It gave me better understanding of how and when to utilize different kinds of alliances as a manager. The workload of this course was heavier than on most other courses. I recommend this course.

Technology Driven Business Innovation (4ECTS), courseID 80515462:
This course consisted of compulsory lectures and one individual essay. Most of the lectures were interesting, useful and high-quality. The workload of this course was perhaps the lowest of all my courses, since all you had to do was to attend the lectures and write one essay.

The contents of the course seemed to be designed to give business students a general idea of many different technology related topics that can be relevant in modern businesses. As more technology oriented than most business students, I was already familiar with a significant portion of the course contents. However, course still offered interesting new contents and knowledge for me too. All in all, it was a good set of different perspectives on innovation with the help of technology when doing business. I recommend this course.

Elementary Chinese (4ECTS), courseID 60610162:
This course had two simultaneous groups. I ended up in the more advanced of these groups, where most students knew at least a bit Chinese beforehand. However, I was disappointed on the focus, contents and effectiveness of our teacher. The lecture slides were often lacking tones of pinyin and English translations. We spent lots of time memorizing three Chinese poems and singing one Chinese song. Our exam was oral and reciting these poems and the song was a big part of it.

Although we spent some time on learning useful words and sentences, I would have liked to focus more intensively on the most useful and practical words, sentences and aspects of Chinese language. I think the other teacher had much better focus and course contents. Nevertheless, I recommend taking a Chinese language course when living in China.

Leadership in a New Era (McKinsey Global Leadership Course) (4ECTS), courseID 80515182:
This course had almost 200 students. It consisted of lectures, learning diaries of each lecture, one investment case done in a group and one group essay. Lecturers were high-ranked managers of McKinsey and many other companies. For example, the first lecture was held by the Global Managing Director (practically CEO) of McKinsey Dominic Barton. Lectures consisted of presentation by lecturers and then Q&A sessions where students asked questions from the lecturers.

Most of the lectures were interesting and more or less useful. The name of the course referred to a “leadership” course, but actually it contained much more than classical “leadership” content. The lecture topics were such as: Global future trends, (modern) organizational structures, technological disruption, operations, the investor perspective, company transformation and corporate finance. The course had strong focus on current and future issues and trends in business. Group size for team assignments was six students which seemed unpractically large for writing an essay. All in all, I the course was interesting and I recommend this course.
3. Free time and other information

3.1 Cost of Living and Transportation

Some things are very cheap in Beijing and yet other things more expensive than in Finland. The monthly rent of student dorms was about 350€ whereas my rent (2 bedrooms + living room, shared with a Swiss exchange student) was about 500€. My apartment had an excellent location near Tsinghua campus, lots of restaurants, stores and other services and Wudaokou subway station. Rents in Wudaokou are high but otherwise I recommend the location. You can easily get lower rents by choosing different location.

The only one of my courses requiring a book was the Chinese language course. The book cost about 8€. There are lots of many kinds of restaurants in Beijing, Wudaokou and on Tsinghua campus. Restaurants are usually significantly cheaper than in Finland. A simple restaurant dish from a cheap place may cost only 2€. In a “real”
restaurant having several dishes together with one friend will cost approximately 6-14€ per person. Student canteens are quite cheap and there are lots of them. A basic student meal costs usually 1-3€. Tsinghua’s campus is said to be the biggest in China and has more canteens/restaurants than Aalto’s campuses together.

China’s supermarkets have significantly different selection compared to a western supermarket. Some product categories are similar, but some very different. Product information is often only in Chinese. Dairy products and bread are less popular in China and their selection are worse than in Europe. Unhealthy processed sugary products (sugary drinks, cookies...) are cheap and easily available. Strong alcohol is very cheap, beer quite cheap and wine as expensive as in Finland.

Public transport is cheap and usually works well even though subway is often crowded and buses may be slow. For me subway was the most common method of transport (when moving long distances). A relatively long subway ride may be only 0,5€. Buses are also very cheap. Taxis are very cheap compared to Finland: 30-40min taxi ride to the other side of Beijing costs about 8€. By using Uber instead of regular taxi you can usually reduce the price by maybe 30%. There are also many “black taxis” which are usually more expensive. I recommend using black taxis only if it’s the only option and to negotiate the price. For example from the airport to Wudaokou the black taxi may ask up to 600RMB (about 85€) whereas real taxi costs about 100RMB (14€).

Also a bicycle is very useful. The campus is so big that even when moving only inside the campus bicycle is useful. You can buy (a new!) bicycle very cheaply inside the campus or just outside it. My new bicycle cost 220RMB (about 30€). The price included a lock and initially adjusting the bicycle to be suitable for me.

3.2 Getting to know other students and free time
On campus there are less student parties or drinking than at Aalto or in Germany (I spent one semester in Karlsruhe, Germany). However, in total there are many events, possibilities and activities for students and also generally in Beijing. The number of opportunities can be overwhelming: there are lots of great and interesting people, events, parties and business and learning opportunities in Beijing but not enough time to participate on most of them.

Eating together at restaurants is very common way to spend time together in Beijing. Many foreign students like to go to local bars and nightclubs and drink there. Students interested in “nightlife” can easily find other people with whom to go to bars at Wudaokou or other bar areas like Sanlitun.

Tsinghua offers good sport facilities. You can easily and quite cheaply train at a gym, play basketball, football, volleyball, badminton, tennis or table tennis, swim and so on. Sometimes it is crowded or hard to book a court though. I bought a gym membership at the university gym and also played badminton and table tennis a few times.

3.3 General information Of Tsinghua and Beijing
Tsinghua University is located in Beijing, the capital of China. Beijing is the political and partly cultural center of China. Its population is about 22 million (more than Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland combined). It has also many of the best universities of China, including Tsinghua University which is often considered the best university in China. In the QS University Ranking it was ranked as 25th best university in the world in 2015 (http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2015 ). In or near Beijing there are many great attractions worth visiting such as The Forbidden City, Summer Palace or Great Wall of China.
In Beijing I lived in Wudaokou (五道口) which is located next to Tsinghua University campus. Many universities are located nearby and many foreign students live either in or near Wudaokou. Wudaokou has its own subway station and subway is often the best way to travel inside Beijing.

The average annual temperature in Beijing (11.8°C) is higher than in Helsinki (5.9°C). Summer in Beijing is a lot warmer than in Helsinki, whereas winter is approximately equally cold. The precipitation (amount of rain) is in Beijing very uneven between different months. During July and August it rains a lot more than in Helsinki, whereas during winter it rains much less.

3.4 Traveling During and after Exchange in China

Many people in China travel during the national holiday week in early October. I don’t necessarily recommend traveling then since many attractions are then crowded and flight/train ticket prices are very high then (even more than twice as high as some other times). For example, I traveled with a German friend (also exchange student at Tsinghua) to Shanghai. The one way flight cost only about 60€ because it was not a holiday season. We came back with a high-speed train (about 300km/h) costing about 80€. I recommend visiting Shanghai. Compared to Beijing it is warmer and more international. It is also a big financial and business center in China.

During or after exchange semester in Beijing is also a good opportunity to travel in other parts of China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asian countries like Malesia, Singapore, Philippines and Thailand. I permanently left Beijing during the Christmas day morning and travelled 33 days before going back to Finland. I flew to Chongqing and then Shenzhen in South China. Then I crossed the border into Hong Kong, from where I eventually flew to Manila, Philippines. From Manila I flew to Singapore and then to Bangkok and from there back to Finland. My flights inside Asia cost maybe 100€/flight on average. I mostly lived in hostels that I booked mostly through Hostelworld-website/app. Typically a night in a good hostel costs 10-20€ in those Asian cities.

3.5 Good to know / useful information

3.5.1 VPN

In China many Western websites (Google, gmail, youtube, facebook…) are blocked. I can recommend buying ExpressVPN (https://www.expressvpn.com/) for 6 months for about 60USD. With that you can go around these blocks with all your machines (laptop, mobile…). I have heard that Aalto also has some free VPN service for students but I do not know more about that and have understood that you can’t use it on your phone.

3.5.2 Language learning

In Beijing most people don’t speak much or even any English. Therefore knowing Chinese is useful. I recommend starting to learn Chinese already before traveling to China. I started to learn Chinese independently about 5 months before coming to China. I recommend first learning how pinyin and different tones work. After that you can start learning the most common characters, words and sentences.

I recommend the following mobile apps or web services to learn Chinese (I have personally used all of them):

- **Pleco** (the best dictionary between English and Chinese, free mobile app)
- **ChineseSkill** (good language learning app, free mobile app)
  - Also “Pinyin” and “Survival Kit” apps from the same producer are good
- **Anki** (Free flashcard program/mobile app for memorizing words/characters. Can be used to learn any language)
3.5.3 Pollution
Air pollution is a big issue in Beijing. The air pollution level in Beijing (and different parts of it) varies a lot daily and weekly. Usually windy days make air cleaner whereas without wind the pollution stays inside the city. I recommend downloading some mobile app such as “Asia Air Quality” to monitor daily/hourly air pollution levels. During the worst days in 2015 the air pollution level (AQI=Air Quality Index) in Beijing was about 700, which is outrageously bad. However during best days the air pollution level was about 20, which is similar to some times and locations in Helsinki. I personally used a breathing mask often when outside if the pollution level was more than 100.

Generally perhaps about 15-20% of people on the streets were wearing a mask so you don’t need to worry about being the only one. At least 3M masks with a valve are good and reliable. You can buy them already before arriving in China or at 7-Eleven or many other stores in China. Even inside the air pollution is sometimes bad. I had a Blueair 203 air purifier (I bought it from my Finnish friend in Beijing before arriving) in my room to keep the air of my room clean.

The tap water is not safe to drink in Beijing, at least if not boiled. Personally I consumed a lot bottled water. I mostly bought 4 liter cans of water. They cost about 7RMB(1€) each at a supermarket or a bit more at small stores. I also avoided eating seafood since I had read they might contain lots of toxins from water pollution.

3.5.4 Vaccinations
I recommend finding out early what vaccinations are needed/recommended in China. I personally took Twinrix vaccination against hepatitis A and B. Also Japanese encephalitis (Japanin aivokuume) vaccine might be useful especially if you travel in South China or Southeast Asia. It is quite expensive though. Additionally some vaccinations that Finns usually already have taken may be necessary/beneficial in China.
4. Final Comments

I would recommend Tsinghua University as a destination for an exchange semester. It is likely the best university in China and located in maybe the most important city of China. China is huge and important and its importance and economy continues to grow. Spending a semester in Beijing and especially at Tsinghua can give you understanding of China, perhaps better than Shanghai that is more international.

I am happy that I chose Tsinghua as my exchange destination and would choose it again if I had not already been here. Just before this exchange semester, I did my first semester abroad in Germany. I felt like Germany is in many ways quite similar to Finland and wanted to experience something more different this time. I feel like my semester in China made me understand China, Chinese language, Asia and the whole world a little bit better. It gave also some perspective how Europe or the whole “Western” world can look from elsewhere.

During my time in China it started to feel like the Western media sometimes paints a very black and white picture of China. It every so often has a tendency to look at China through its own values and norms and see different systems automatically as a problem. Differing governmental system that tries to flexibly implement policies that would improve the country might be referred as “communistic” (even though that’s not the whole truth) and therefore automatically dismissed as unreasonable, despite the fact that the Chinese economy has grown much faster than western ones during the last two decades. Environmental problems and population control policies might be criticized in a same sentence without acknowledging that pollution could be much worse without the population control or that we are the ones that consume the products creating much of that pollution. The Western way of doing things may have been relatively successful during the past centuries, but it may not mean that the current Western systems or way of life are the best possible way. Europe and USA may succeed better if they are willing and capable of flexibly adapting instead of growing complacent because of their past success.

However, in many ways China felt surprisingly similar to Europe and Finland. Maybe I ended up interacting more with “internationally oriented” and educated Chinese people than with people presenting deep, “true” or “traditional” Chinese culture. It seems like China has been influenced a lot by the Western culture, systems and technology. People in subway or bus use smartphones just like in Finland. They buy things online maybe even more than in Finland. The delivery of packages ordered from online is much cheaper, effective and often faster than in Finland. People talk about innovation and developing mobile apps and startup-companies. Of course things are different in rural areas compared to Beijing though. In this increasingly globalized world today’s young people may be more children of our global culture than the heirs of their grandparents’ traditions. During these times of global change the gap between generations may be wider than the difference between countries or continents.