

SHANGHAI

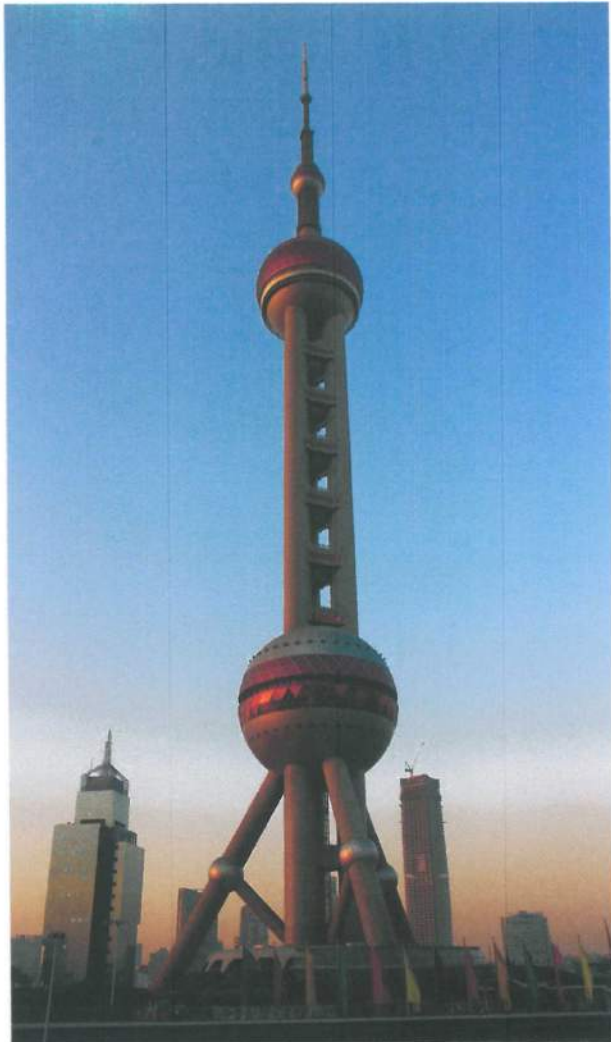
Report by Pascal Meer



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The reason of going to China

The People's Republic of China - an emergent country with about 1.3 billion residents in the Far East. Although I did not know a lot about this roughly 9.6 million square kilometre large country, it immediately caught my attention after I was looking through the list of partner-universities we had from the University of Liechtenstein. My decision was quickly made and therefore I applied at the Tongji University in the metropolis of Shanghai - my preferable destination for my obligatory exchange semester.

The reason of choosing this place was mainly because I wanted to experience „differences“. I did not want to spend my time in another European surrounding, where I can travel to on weekends if I would like to, but rather wanted to be thrown into a totally new context. To switch for once from landscape to cityscape and from the quiet to the noisy surrounding - this was my aim. The semester abroad should - in my opinion - be a challenge for each student in terms of living, organising, studying, and so on, because the personal output will be much more beneficial.

Before my departure I did not know a lot about Shanghai or China in general, but was still fascinated about the booming and emergent country with a different lifestyle and of course different and yet unknown language.

This is mainly why I went to the People's Republic of China

without many expectations, because I wanted to experience unusual situations and to get involved with a so different culture. Especially I was looking forward to live for once in such a megacity and to see if it would be a suitable situation for me.

But it is not all about the city; it is also because of the sheer size of the country and its various regions itself. Furthermore we all know, that China has a very rich history, which also made me curious to go there. This was also the reason why I planned to travel a lot in the country and to meet other people on my way and also to find places worth visiting and especially find the roots and relicts of traditional China.

Finally, I also have to say, as an architecture-student I was fascinated from the very beginning, what was going on in the booming city of Shanghai, where skyscrapers in Pudong try to beat each other in height and on the other hand some typical old buildings enrich the image of the city. It is a place, where new buildings pop up so quickly, that it changes its face every day. For sure, an interesting spot for architects and another reason of choosing this destination.

I was looking forward to gain as many experiences as possible, but I also expected a certain visual satisfaction from the Far East. This should help me to develop new ideas for my future work back home as an architect.

Preparation and first days in Shanghai

Due to the fact that our admission notice from the Tongji University appeared very late at our University, it was a rush to organise last things, because I wanted to leave with Andrea from the same University already in early August, in order to have enough time to travel through China and find a suitable apartment. This is the reason, why we prepared all the documents and bookings beforehand in order to just give the final okay and to ensure the bookings.

Suddenly the day came, when it was time to fly to Shanghai Pudong Airport. The first week was mainly considered to find an apartment in the right neighbourhood. We thought it is better to see apartments on site, rather than booking them online in advance. We prepared though a list of apartments we have seen online and got in touch with a real-estate-agent from Shanghai, who we met on site. Within three or four days we found a nice flat. August seemed to be the right time to look for a flat, because most students, who look for a flat, will arrive in September, shortly before university starts.

The rest of the time we had to complete some – in my opinion – unnecessary paper work, as well as the registration at the police station. This was also the first big challenge after our arrival in August, because nobody in the local police station could speak English.

University and student-life

After Andrea and I travelled for four weeks through the country, we already got involved into the very different lifestyle and culture. I think in architectural terms, it is important to see Chinese traditional buildings before starting the lectures, in order to understand the building-style. From time to time we met people, who taught us the first words in Chinese. At least we could have been ordering apples, bananas and so on. That is actually how we started with this so difficult language.

On September 23rd, it was time to register at the Tongji University. Due to the fact, that we visited the university in our first week, we already knew where the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) was located and where we have to go.

Although the university is with approximately 70'000 students huge, you do not feel like you are just a number. The amount of students in one lecture was approx. between 5 and 50. Overall, I have to say, that the lectures were interesting and mostly well organised. And some professors could speak English very well.

Twice a week (Monday and Thursday) we attended the Chinese Band 1 course, where we learned the different tongues and the most important words and phrases. Although the speed of the course was quick, you can communicate in a very simple way with the local people at the





end, which puts always a smile on their face.

To be honest, the level was not as high as in our home-university, but still because of the different environment not less interesting. But I think you learn the most when you are travelling to places and get in touch directly. That is maybe also why the Tongji University organizes a lot of trips within the lectures, which is great for foreign-students. For example with our architecture-studio, which was held twice a week, we spent three days travelling in the area around Taihu-lake. And the nice thing was, that the University paid accomodation and transportation.

The campus-life is great. You will not only find parks and different sport-grounds inside the campus, but also supermarkets, cafes, canteens and so on. They have even an own 24-hour shop for model making, which was great for architecture-students. If you do not have enough choice inside the campus, you can also hit the streets outside, where restaurants and cafes in the close neighbourhood are located. There is even Street-Food right outside the south gate, which offers great food for the hungry students in the evening.

If there are any problems, the International office helps you most of the time. It is even possible to contact them via smart phone and the International-Students-Group on Wechat, which is basically a combination of Facebook and Whatsapp.

Daily life in Shanghai and places worth to visit

The first thing, you will notice, is that living in China is much cheaper compared to Switzerland or Liechtenstein. We lived in a flat on the 38th floor in the famous Rainbow-City, where mostly other students or expats from all over the world are living. The metro-station is right next doors and the whole compound is 24/7 supervised. But actually I felt very safe in Shanghai most of the time.

Although most things are written in Chinese, you will always find what you need. It just takes some time. This is something, which I really did not like. It does not matter what you have to do, but everything takes so much valuable time. In one shop you have to explain about three times what you want and in a post-office for instance they have to find someone, who speaks English first. On the contrary, that is how you learn to be patient, which is the positive affect of it.

Another thing to mention is, that you sometimes have to be very careful about prices. Especially in Shanghai the range of prices are extreme. For example you can eat street-food for roughly 7RMB (1 Euro), but also you can easily spend 140RMB (20Euro) for a pizza in a normal restaurant. To demand a menu before you entering and to check the prices for food and drinks is recommended.

Shanghai offers a lot of different attractions and for sure you won't have the time to visit really everything. The gre-

at alleys of Tianzifang were great for strolling around and to check out souvenirs, the Moganshan Lu 50 (M50) was the perfect place to get in touch with local artists and the last slaughterhouse on earth is just a breathtaking architectural masterpiece back from 1933. When you are there do not forget to check out the view from one of the skyscrapers in Pudong, where you can see the endless city on a clear day.

The well-developed public transport system - especially the Metro - will bring you to all the places in less than 1 hour. You can even reach some traditional water towns by Metro from the city-centre. On the other hand you can also stop a taxi, which is also a cheap and a surprisingly quick way to get to your preferred destination.

The food in China is different to the one sold in Europe. You will find a lot of meat in the dishes and it is mostly an oily cuisine. The most famous dish is Hotpot, which is similar to Fondue Chinoise. Specialities such as turtles, squid, bullfrog, chicken feet, eel and duck-blood is totally normal. But be aware, when ordering a chicken. It is likely possible that it comes as a chopped version with all the bones and even the feet and head in the dish. So, just be sure what you eat and enjoy the Chinese cuisine, which is really delicious and offers a huge variety.

As you can see, daily life in Shanghai is an exciting adventure and not comparable to our surrounding. At every corner there are new things to discover. Enjoy it.

Travelling in China

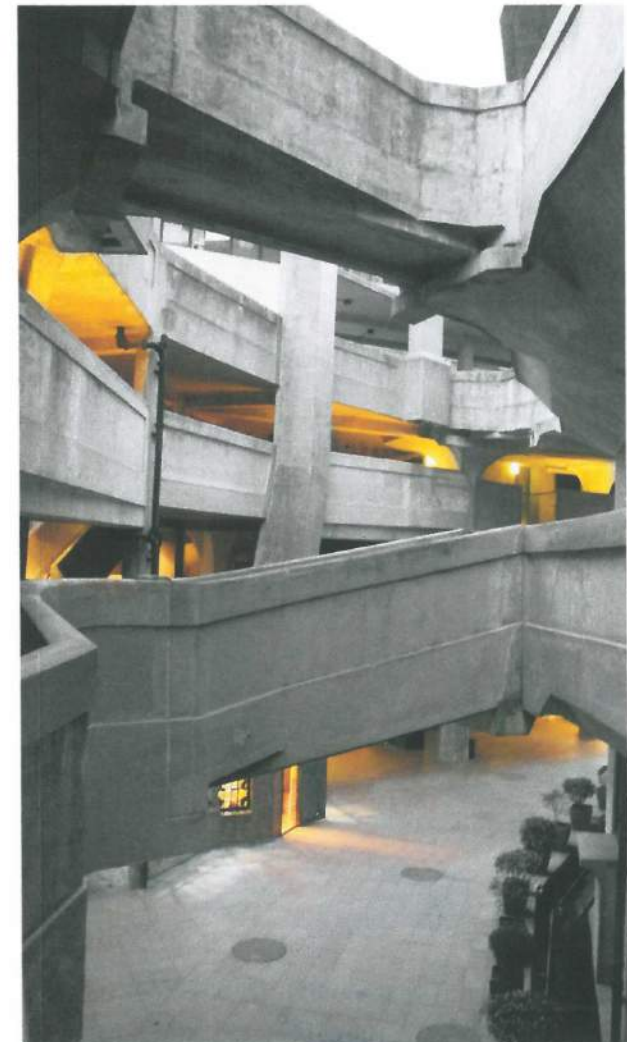
Shanghai is a great starting-point to travel through China and you will have a lot of options to visit different places. The most convenient way of travelling is the high-speed-train, which connects the major big cities with each other.

On a weekend you have the chance to visit Hangzhou, Suzhou or Nanjing, because these cities are not too far away. Our trip to Suzhou and its famous gardens took us for instance just one day.

Actually, we split up the travel-route into two parts. The first one before University had started, the second one after finishing it.

As mentioned before the train is a really quick and convenient way to travel from one place to another and they offer as well enough space for the legs. That is also why we have chosen mostly this transport-system for our trips through the beautiful country, especially because you could see as well the in some cases the „real“ and unpolished conditions by looking outside the window. An impressive figure in my opinion is, that the train will hit the rails in sometimes even with 350km/h.

The tickets for the trip should be purchased about 3 days in advance in order to ensure a seat. In most cases, the train stations are really well organized and remind more to an airport. It is no coincidence going through a secu-





rity-check and hear that you have to go to a „gate“ and „board“ your train, which you won't see when entering the railway station.

Furthermore I have to say you easily get in touch with the people, especially when you take the „worst“ class from the normal trains, which is recommended for short trips and a really great experience.

On our trip through China, we met a lot of nice foreign and local people, with whom we spent a lot of time with. We have seen many different towns, cities, landscapes and attractions, which we mostly also really liked. It was worth visiting all the places, because they are so different and cannot be compared at all with each other.

The second part of our travel was after we successfully submitted our last papers, which we had to do for university. It was time to heading south towards Hong Kong, where I was flying back home to Zurich in the beginning of February.

It was a great experience to see so many Asian cities, its architectures and cultures and the very beautiful landscapes. From the Great Wall, to the Forbidden City and the mighty Yangtze-River, to very nice temples and monasteries, we have experienced so many different situations.

Conclusion

Personally, I have to admit, that the decision of going to China, more specific Shanghai was right and worth it. After spending half a year in that amazing city and country I was definitely overwhelmed, when I was going back. Shanghai is a great place for students. Not only because you are in a totally different surrounding, but also because you get a lot more for your money and furthermore you will benefit indirectly from the new and unusual situations. For me personally, Shanghai is a city, where I would stay just temporary and not forever, although the city is great. That is maybe one reason, why the city changes every day its face and is never sleeping.

I experienced a lot of „differences“ - as it was my goal, as already mentioned at the very beginning of my report. I was thrown into a totally new context and it was sometimes really tough to organise things there, but it worked out every time, which was great.

I noticed as well, that you appreciate a lot of things back home, such as the preciseness, the punctuality and how different systems work. Invisible things, which become suddenly important after a certain time abroad.

To conclude this report, I would like to say that the experiences I made during this time were just amazing. And I would recommend students to take the chance to travel to this megacity and experience the lifestyle by themselves.

Suggestions and Links

- Find an apartment early enough (August)
- Register at the local police station within 24 hours, if you do not stay in a hotel, otherwise you will be fined.
- Be prepared that a lot of people do not understand you! Less people speak English, than expected! Prepare therefore the most important things in Chinese
- A lot of Chinese people want to take photographs with you, do not be afraid, but still take care.
- Be aware that your visa is maybe just a single-entry -visa with 180 days! You can change it to a residence-permit on site and get multiple entries.
- The Tongji does not except every physical examination from back home and therefore you have to go through the procedure once again.
- Travel in China, rather to fly to other places! It offers a huge variety on landscapes, cities and attractions!
- Download the app „SmartShanghai“ or check it out online: www.smartshanghai.com
- Book train-tickets at least 3 days ahead and check the times online: www.chinahighlights.com
- Be early enough at the train-station! In Beijing I stood for 2 hours in a queue, although I had my ticket ready.
- College of Architecture and Urban Planning (CAUP) <http://en.tongji-caup.org>
- Check out the following homepages:
<http://www.cityweekend.com.cn/shanghai/>
<http://www.timeoutshanghai.com>

Description of pictures

All the pictures in this report were taken by ourselves

- p.4: - Oriental Pearl Tower at sunset
- p.5: - Bar Rouge at the Bund
- East Nanjing Pedestrian Road
- Old Warehouse at the Suzhou-Creek
- p.6: - Chinese Hot-Pot with fellow students
- Taking photographs with strangers
- Street-Food at south gate of Tongji-University
- p.7 - Architectural masterpiece: 1933 Shanghai - a former slaughterhouse
- p.8 - Infinity - Shanghai World Financial Center and Shanghai Tower from the bottom
- p.9 - Pingyao - a traditional ancient Chinese town
- Zhugezhen - visited with our architecture-studio
- Zhujiajiao - a watertown outside Shanghai

