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Place: Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China  
Institution: Zhejiang University  
Program: China Studies

I first heard of the China Studies international program through the International Center of my home university – Christian-Albrechts Universität zu Kiel ([https://www.international.uni-kiel.de/de/studium-im-ausland/sonderprogramme-in-der-vr-china/stipendien-fuer-den-masterstudiengang-china-studies-hangzhou-vr-china-1](https://www.international.uni-kiel.de/de/studium-im-ausland/sonderprogramme-in-der-vr-china/stipendien-fuer-den-masterstudiengang-china-studies-hangzhou-vr-china-1)) which was offering a year scholarship to Zhejiang University.

In course of the meeting with the workers of the International Centre I found out that the Chinese Studies international master’s degree program offered interdisciplinary courses covering a vast area of disciplines, including basics of Chinese language, culture, and history and further extending the program by a choice of elective courses on politics, economy and business in modern China. Being a student of international economics, the latest direction interested me most and was one of the main reasons I chose this program. Chinese economy with its rapid development and blooming technological innovations is an object of interest and a research subject of many scholars on economics.

Chinese Studies program promised to provide its students not only with the basic theoretical knowledge and research methodology, but also help obtain practical abilities, as the program was structured in such a way, that theoretical courses were intervened with the practical workshops, seminars and field trips. This sounded pretty promising.

Moreover, the Chinese Studies Master Program initially was offered in two variations – as a full two years program or one year program (prospective students could study at a university in their host country for the first year and then study at Zhejiang University for the second year). This was a rather convenient design, while it gave me an opportunity to be a student of two Master programs simultaneously, so I decided to take the one year program.

Most of the necessary information was provided by the officials, so the process of the preparations of the necessary documents was quite easy for me. One of the positive surprises was the attainability and swiftness of obtaining initial Visa (I did mine at Hamburg consulate and it was ready within a week. The exact list of documents includes: the Admission Letter, Visa Application for Study in China, Foreigner Physical Examination Form and valid ordinary passport. Those who will study in China for more than 6 months must apply for “X1” visa. The process of visa prolonging on spot (students must apply for residence permit to the local police authority within 30 days upon their arrival) is quite another story and subject to the long traditions of Chinese bureaucracy, there one has to be patient and calm as it takes both lots of time and running.
Other thing to be taken into consideration is the necessary medical certificate (so called health verification) which has to be made before the departure to China and also can bear substantial costs depending on one’s insurance policy.

As described earlier, program was promising to provide its students with the good cross-cultural communicative competences, as well as knowledge of the politics, economy, culture and society of contemporary China, and it largely did so. One must add, that a basic rather than profound knowledge is what is attainable within a rather short period of one academic year, but the experience gained could easily compensate for this relative superficiality.

Also, some knowledge of the Chinese language including basic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should be taken into consideration, as Chinese language is a complicated one and especially hard to master for Europeans outside the original environment.

Obligatory and elective courses were read by Chinese as well as International professors, which gave a different perspective on the subjects taught and I found that quite useful.

Starting from the second semester, the programs gave a choice of three different modules where students could choose between: «History & Civilization», «Media & Life» and «Transformation & Development» study directions. International economics was my initial field of interests, so logically I have chosen the course modules most close to them. The module «Transformation and Development» consisted of, among others, courses on China's Social and Economic Development, Topics on Chinese Business Culture, Entrepreneurship, Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Policies and People's Livelihood.

In essence, could I say that the knowledge I gained would help me in the future at my further studies or work? This is a controversial question, as I have to admit that the level and quality of education in Germany is by degree higher than in China. But what place can be better to understand Chinese economics and society if not China itself? The limitless daily experiences, insights, opportunities that living in a country provides to studying it are impossible to underestimate. Being in the environment and among the people gives much more first-hand information than any classroom could provide.

What I learned about Chinese business and entrepreneurship is hard to understand taken out of Chinese context, while its essence is so different from that of any European country that it is barely comparable.

The cornerstone of the Chinese way of making business is the notion of guanxi – word that translates best as “connections” or “relationships” and is basically a dynamic network of influence. Business relations are highly socially embedded in China, and this signifies the importance of individual interaction based on which further corporate interaction must be built. As a result, a kind of exchange of favours occurs, where one member or representative of business performs a favour for the other in exchange of some favours and in this way a business relationship is build. Thus, in Asian societies social lives and business are highly
interconnected and the lack of awareness about the Chinese way of business can lead to financial fallouts for the countries who try to conduct business with them. And yes, living in China teaches much more than any articles, books or lectures could in years and years.

I guess one of the most frequently asked question about the studies in China is if one can come to the country without any prior knowledge of the language and survive. It is indeed possible, but very complicated. One should take into consideration that most of the common people in China do not speak any English – even in the big cities and among the younger population it is quite seldom to meet someone who does and in comprehensive way.

That means that you will often have problems ordering food at the restaurants (most of the menus are written exclusively in Chinese), communicating to the doctor at the university clinic or hospital, etc. The numerous mobile applications and translating programs can be helpful, but they also take time to master and often give rather confusing translation. A friend of mine, another international student from Europe who came to China about a year before, has taught me during my first week upon arrival, an essential China survival course, which included, among other things, such important information as how the character that meant “insect” looked like, so that I could distinguish it in the menu and avoid certain dishes. That literally saved my life.

Thus, I would highly recommend learning at least some basics of the language before arrival if it is possible.

On the other hand, the same lack of English knowledge among the Chinese people offers a variety of teaching jobs for students at pre-school classes for small kids, numerous English schools (mostly founded by foreigners) and private classes. This option is one of the most popular among student part-time jobs, second would be modelling.

The cost of life is quite low, both consumer products and food are very cheap, but one has to be aware that their quality is often questionable. There are also some chain-shops present on the market which provide European goods, among them Walmart and Carrefour, but those are usually to be found only in big cities.

What I could suggest, is to be open-minded and ready for surprises, as there will be many, and most of them pleasant, and just be ready for the adventure of your life.

Finally, some additional information about my host university:
Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China
Degree Programs: 1284
Number of Students: 46000
International Students: 5700
Office Website: http://iczu.zju.edu.cn/