

Experience Report – Fudan University – Winter Semester 2025/2026

University: University of Göttingen

Faculty: Development Economics

Arrival date: 25/08/2025

Departure date: 31/01/2026

- Introduction

I have always wanted to have a study experience in China. It is a country that has always fascinated me because of its long history, rich culture, and its important role in today's global economy. For these reasons, I considered China a very interesting place to spend an exchange semester, both from an academic and a personal point of view.

Even before I started my studies at the University of Göttingen, I found out that the Faculty of Business and Economics had an exchange agreement with the School of Economics at Fudan University. The latter is considered one of the best universities in China and is also well known internationally, especially in the field of economics. This immediately caught my interest, as studying at such a respected institution seemed like an amazing opportunity for my academic path.

In addition, I learned that students accepted for this exchange would automatically receive financial support through the DAAD/ISAP scholarship, without having to apply for an additional scholarship. This made the opportunity even more attractive and removed an important financial concern. For these reasons, I decided to apply without hesitation and was very motivated to take advantage of this chance to study in China and experience academic life at Fudan University.

- Administrative procedures before departure

Before leaving for China, one of the main administrative steps was applying for the student visa. As an Italian citizen, I had to submit my visa application in Italy; however, the procedure is generally the same regardless of the country where the application is made.

For a one-semester exchange programme, students are required to apply for the **X2 student visa**, which is valid for up to 180 days. The application process is relatively straightforward, and in my case it took around one to two weeks to receive the visa after submitting all the required documents.

The X2 visa allows one single entry into China, which is used upon the first arrival in the country. However, after arriving in China, it is possible to apply for an additional entry permit in case one plans to travel outside of China during the exchange period. I personally made use of this option and was able to travel to several destinations in the region, including Thailand, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, before returning to China.

In addition to visa-related procedures, it is very important to prepare in advance by downloading some essential applications before departure. Alipay is indispensable for daily life, as it is used not only for payments but also for services such as renting shared bikes and calling taxis. WeChat is the main messaging app and is necessary for communication with both locals and university staff. For navigation and transportation, Amap is highly recommended, as it is the Chinese equivalent of Google Maps and works much better inside the country. Since many Western applications are blocked in China, having a VPN is essential, and LetsVPN proved to be the best option for me. For booking train tickets and domestic flights, Trip.com is particularly convenient and easy to use.

Before traveling to China, it is also advisable to set up an eSIM in order to have internet access immediately upon arrival. At the same time, getting a Chinese phone number as soon as possible is absolutely necessary, as it is required for using most local apps and services.

- **Arrival and first impressions**

Since classes at Fudan University usually start at the beginning of September, I arrived in Shanghai relatively early, on 25 August, taking a direct flight from Frankfurt. My arrival coincided with what turned out to be the two hottest days of the year. The combination of extreme heat outdoors and very strong air conditioning in all indoor spaces was quite challenging, and I unfortunately got sick shortly after arriving.

In addition to the DAAD ISAP scholarship, Fudan University also offered exchange students the possibility to apply for the **CSC scholarship**, which is managed by the Chinese government.

I would strongly recommend applying for this scholarship as well, as it requires opening a Chinese bank account, which proved to be extremely useful during my stay in China. The university provides full support throughout the entire process, making it relatively easy to complete. The scholarship amounts to approximately 400 euros per month and also includes free accommodation in the university dormitories. Alternatively, students who choose to find private accommodation receive an additional allowance of around 50 euros per month, which is still a helpful contribution.

I personally decided to look for private accommodation. This choice was influenced by the fact that several people had told me that the dormitories at Fudan were not particularly comfortable and, more importantly, that hosting visitors is not allowed in the dormitories, which can be inconvenient if family members or a partner wish to visit. Looking back, however, I would probably choose the dormitories, as they are not as bad as I had been told and, above all, most international students live there, making socializing and building friendships much easier.

The first two weeks in Shanghai were, overall, quite overwhelming. The city is extremely large, and it often takes 40 to 50 minutes by metro to move from one area to another. The heat was intense, almost no one spoke English, and using a translation app was necessary in most daily interactions. Another very stressful aspect at the beginning was the need to constantly use a VPN to access so-called “Western” applications. In China, many apps that are part of daily life in Europe, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Netflix, and other, are blocked, and adjusting to this digital restriction required time and patience. For me personally, the most difficult aspect at the beginning, and even after five months this has not really changed, was the food. For vegetarian or vegan students, it can be very challenging to stick to such a diet, as many dishes contain meat. Although I am not vegetarian, I am a very picky eater, and I found the food culture particularly difficult to adapt to.

In general, my first weeks in Shanghai were mainly spent dealing with accommodation search, long and exhausting daily commutes, extreme temperature differences between the outside heat and freezing indoor air conditioning, language barriers, and a food culture that required a significant adjustment. Despite these initial difficulties, this period also marked the beginning of what would turn out to be one of the best experiences of my life.

- Academic experience at Fudan University

Overall, I found the academic workload at Fudan University to be much lighter compared to Göttingen. If you have survived the intensity of studies in Germany, you will manage very well in China. Assignments and evaluations often relied on group work or short, quick tests, either

completed during class or at home. This approach encourages collaboration and allows for faster feedback, which I personally appreciated. In general, I was very satisfied with the courses and the professors, who were all extremely kind and supportive, especially the instructor for Financial Statistics, who was very approachable and helpful throughout the semester.

Regarding the courses themselves, I took four main classes during my exchange: Chinese Economy, Financial Statistics, International Trade, and Social Security and its Reform in China.

Chinese Economy (3 credits) offered a broad understanding of the Chinese economy from historical, social, and political perspectives. The course covered the legacy of China's past, the evolution of government policies, the role of state-owned and private enterprises, the financial and real estate sectors, as well as demographic and labor market issues, inequality, and China's interaction with the world. The course included homework assignments, a midterm essay, and a video project, which helped me develop both analytical and presentation skills.

Financial Statistics (3 credits) was a very technical course focusing on probability, econometric models, and financial data analysis. We covered methods such as OLS, GLS, GMM, MLE, and ARCH/GARCH models, with assignments that tested our understanding of the theory and its practical applications. I particularly enjoyed this course due to the clarity of the instructor and the structured approach, which made complex topics much more approachable.

International Trade (2 credits) combined theory and empirical applications, emphasizing China's trade patterns and foreign direct investment. We studied classical trade models such as Ricardian, Heckscher-Ohlin, and Specific Factors models, and also explored trade policy instruments and the behavior of multinational firms. The course included in-class assignments and a group project, which allowed me to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world data and gain experience working collaboratively.

Finally, **Social Security and its Reform in China** (2 credits) focused on the structure and evolution of China's social security system, including pensions, healthcare, unemployment, maternity, and work-related insurance. The course also addressed social welfare, poverty reduction policies, and reforms in urban and rural areas.

Overall, I found the courses at Fudan to be very engaging and practical, combining theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. The emphasis on group work and collaboration, together with the approachable and supportive professors, made the academic experience both manageable and enjoyable.

The campus itself is extremely large, probably comparable in size to the entire city of Göttingen, and moving between classes is much easier by bicycle, which is what most students do. The

campus is well equipped with several supermarkets and convenience stores where it is easy to buy snacks or daily necessities between lectures. It is also very pleasant to spend time on campus, especially in autumn, when the trees turn red and brown and the fallen leaves cover the streets, creating a very atmospheric environment. At the beginning it can be a bit confusing to find your way around and understand where everything is located, but with time orientation becomes natural and moving around the campus feels completely normal.

- Life in China

Living in China has been, without a doubt, one of the best experiences of my life. Despite the language barrier, I found Chinese people to be among the kindest I have ever met. They always tried to help in every way possible. In Shanghai, being an international city, people are used to seeing foreigners, but in other parts of China, you are often treated like royalty: offered food, invited to talk, and welcomed warmly.

China is also incredibly efficient when it comes to daily life and services. One great example is Alipay, which basically everyone uses. It makes life extremely convenient since you don't have to carry a wallet full of coins and cash everywhere. Trains are always punctual to the minute, online orders arrive reliably, and all services work seamlessly. Shanghai itself is a huge city, but you get used to it quickly. The public transport system is so efficient and fast that, after a while, traveling across the city feels effortless. If you ever don't want to take the metro or bus, taxis (via Didi) are very cheap and easy to use. The skyline of Shanghai at night is breathtaking, and areas like the French Concession are absolutely beautiful to explore. However, from a historical and cultural point of view, Shanghai does not offer as much as other Chinese cities. It is primarily a financial and economic hub, where people move mainly in search of career and professional opportunities. That said, the city is extremely lively, there is always something to do, and the international environment makes it very easy to meet people from all over the world. If you come to Shanghai expecting to fully experience traditional Chinese culture and history, it is better to lower your expectations from the start. Nonetheless, you will meet so many people and take part in so many different activities that the experience will still be incredibly enjoyable. Over these months, I met so many people with whom I built deep and lasting friendships that I know will stay with me forever.

China is full of stunning places, many of which are not very famous but absolutely worth visiting at least once in a lifetime, and outside of Shanghai you can really feel the culture and millennial history everywhere

This is also the safest country I have ever been to: I never once felt in danger, even when walking alone at night in unfamiliar areas. Of course, my experience is from the perspective of a foreigner; life might be different for a Chinese person living in rural areas.

There were, of course, some things many people will find pretty annoying. For example, Chinese people do not wait for others to exit the subway before entering, spitting in public is common, and many people smoke, even inside restaurants or cafes. Sometimes the smoke is so strong that you need to wash your clothes afterwards. But at the end these are just cultural differences, and I adapted to them quite quickly.

- Conclusions

Overall, as already mentioned throughout this report, these five months in China have been the best experience of my life. Living and studying there allowed me to discover a completely new culture and helped me grow not only as a student, but above all as a person. Before leaving for China, I had a very different, and in many ways incorrect, idea of what the country would be like.

For this reason, to anyone who is considering a similar experience, my advice is to take the opportunity without hesitation. You will not regret it. More importantly, it is essential to forget everything you think you know about China and the way it is often portrayed in the West. The reality is very different, and in a very positive way.

Of course, for those of us who are used to a certain lifestyle and cultural background, some aspects may feel strange at first or even annoying. However, this is exactly what makes these experiences so valuable. Being exposed to a different way of living, thinking, and interacting with the world opens your mind and helps you grow in ways that would not be possible otherwise.

I am extremely grateful for having had the chance to live this experience and would strongly recommend it to anyone who has the opportunity to do so. Experiences like this do not come twice in life, especially when supported so well by the University of Göttingen and programmes like the DAAD scholarship, for which I am once again very thankful.

Please find some of my pictures attached below :)



The bund



The Bund at night



View from my room



The Avatar Mountains



Hongya Cave in Chongqing, the cyberpunk city



The Terracotta Army in Xi'an