



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	Dalian University of Foreign Languages
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	2024 Semester 2
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	BA/LLB
<b>Major(s)</b>	Chinese

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>
Intensive Reading (Intermediate C)	Chinese	CHIN 300
Reading (Intermediate C)	Chinese	CHIN 300
Listening & Speaking (Intermediate C)	Chinese	CHIN 300
Basic Language of Chinese Newspapers & Periodicals 1	Chinese	CHIN 300 (Cultural)
National Dance	Chinese	CHIN 300 (Cultural)
Dialogue With China	Chinese	ARTS

Total Otago credits gained:  72 points

Any comments about these papers?

The intensive reading, reading and listening & speaking were worth 2 CHIN 300 papers. They are all immersion classes - very few people speak English in Dalian. These are your core classes at Dalian and you have the same classmates for all of them. Every day from 8.30 to 11.30 I would have these core classes. I really enjoyed them. My teachers were great and my classmates became some of my closest friends on exchange.

The National Dance and Dialogue with China were my electives, which I would have once a week for 90 minutes. National Dance was a new course, focused on traditional Chinese dance from various ethnic groups in China. I found the pace was a bit slow, probably because of the language barrier, but the teacher was very sweet and lots of my classmates enjoyed the class. I loved Dialogue with China. It was about Chinese culture, such as superstitions, how people go about daily interactions, idioms, gifting culture etc. The teacher was super enthusiastic and spoke fast but clear Chinese. I always really looked forward to this class and felt like I got a lot out of it. The final assessment was a

presentation based on a set of questions in Chinese, where you were expected to take a bit from your class content and do a bit of research. While it may seem a bit daunting to give a speech in your second language, the teacher was super kind and it was a rewarding experience.

Basic Language of Chinese Newspapers & Periodicals 1 was a course that I took because I wanted to complete my Otago degree faster. I had this at the same time as my intensive reading course (once a week on a Thursday), and I did it with students who were studying Chinese as a Bachelor's degree at Dalian (not exchange students). Having the clash was really frustrating as I had to catch up by myself using my friend's notes on Thursday afternoons. The course itself was also difficult, with lots of new words that are only useful in highly-specific contexts. I did find it interesting, as it covered news topics such as the one child policy and empty nesters in China, from a Chinese perspective. However, if you do law or another degree that wouldn't really allow you to take 3 papers for a semester, I would suggest going somewhere else on your exchange. Alongside being quite difficult, I had to jump through a lot of bureaucratic hoops to even take the paper once I was in Dalian.

*How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?*

At the start of your exchange, you take a test to place you in a course and then have a few days of classes to try those out. For reference, I did Intermediate C after completing 200 level Chinese at Otago.

Because it is China, the courses are textbook-focused. Fortunately, I had really great teachers who ensured that we mostly learned words in a relevant context, but because a lot of the textbooks were a bit old, we learned some words which my Chinese friends said were outdated. Therefore, I'd treat the classes as a way to learn, but not your sole means of learning Chinese while you are in China. Additionally, while at the start of the semester I was worried about passing my courses, because I am good at rote-memorisation, I passed the exams with flying colours. They also give you credit for attending class. If I'd known this before my exchange, I think I could have done Intermediate B instead of Intermediate C. That said, when I tried Intermediate B during the trial period, I found the teachers were explaining words in Chinese with words that I didn't know, which I took as a sign that it was probably out of my depth.

## Accommodation

*What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?*

I stayed in a 6-person accommodation and shared a room. It was very cheap compared to Otago. Additionally, this accommodation was pretty large and comfortable. My roommate was respectful of me and we kept to ourselves. At the beginning, when I was on neutral terms with my flatmates, I would usually go into the living room if she was in the bedroom. The main frustration was our different schedules. My roommate would get up at 5.30am to get ready, go to bed very late, and nap in the afternoons. We had some minor issues at the start where she would talk on the phone late at night in the bedroom, but this was resolved through communication.

Four out of my five flatmates (including my roommate) were from the same non-English speaking country and had all lived together for a year before I had arrived. They ignored me at the beginning, only talking to each other in their language, which was fine. However, later they became very unfriendly towards me, accusing me of stealing their soy sauce and cooking oil, and not believing me when I said that I didn't. Additionally, they told me that I couldn't put toilet paper in the toilet and instead had to put it in the bin, in the last month of the exchange. It was very frustrating for me to try to talk about these issues in Chinese. These problems were due to cultural differences and difficulties communicating, but were really hard for me to handle. It got to the point where my parents told me that I should move to a hotel for the last few weeks of my exchange.

I found out at the very end of the exchange from my friend, that you are allowed to just ask the university to move accommodation, which I definitely should have done instead of trying to put up with it. The university tends to put people of the same culture together in these 6-person accommodations and as a New Zealander, you will probably end up being the odd one out. I'd therefore recommend staying in a two-person or a single person accommodation, or at least keeping these options in mind if you do decide to stay in a 6-person accommodation. The "kitchen" in the 6-person accommodation is simply not worth it - you will most likely have to buy a hob as well as pots and pans and utensils before you can even think about cooking.

## Money matters

*Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance*

Room: \$1171NZD (4800 yuan) - I think it is about double if you have your own room.

Food: 3-5NZD per meal at the canteen or outside. Cooking would be a little cheaper. I would also drink a lot of bubble tea which only cost 2NZD!

Flights: around 1800NZD.

Insurance: 435NZD (StudentSafe), plus the University's compulsory insurance which I think was 500 RMB.

Visa: 150NZD.

*What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)*

You can now link your foreign banking card to Alipay or WeChat so I just used those. However, you can't transfer your friends and some vendors directly using these means, and as a foreigner the apps do sometimes run into issues, so I'd take some cash with you. All of the stores are required to accept cash. I took 500NZD, which was a bit much - 300NZD would work absolutely fine for a semester.

## Visas & Insurance

*Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?*

It was very easy to apply for a visa. I did so in Denmark actually, as I was on a previous exchange there, and it was ready in a few days. The visa was a single entry, which was annoying as I would have loved to have visited Japan or Korea but there were no major issues.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Yes, I took cash for this.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

*What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?*

There weren't heaps of organised activities for students. You could participate in a speech competition, a dubbing competition and sports. I wasn't really interested in any of these and felt a bit bogged down with uni at the time to participate. I did some clay making in Lushun at Cookie Art Studio and played badminton with my friends.

I did the HSK 5 in Dalian, which I would recommend. It is something that I'd wanted to do for a while. They had preparatory classes as an elective at DUFL which were really helpful - I attended one the week before my exam. I would recommend preparing for the exam as early as you can, as while there is overlap between the HSK vocabulary and what you learn in classes, it is a little different.

*What was the university/ city like?*

I wanted to go to Dalian as I didn't want to live in a big Chinese city like Beijing or Shanghai, and I'd say it met my expectations in that regard. Lushun (where the University is located) is quite far from the main city, but it's a nice place with a surprising amount of greenery. Despite not being a huge city, it still has a larger population than all of New Zealand and there is plenty to see and do there. Additionally, the air quality is really good for China and there is a beach nearby with lots of fishermen.

*Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?*

Jinjin cafe (金金咖啡) is fantastic - the people there are so lovely and the food is great. There was also MC Coffee next door which I used as a study café. It was a lovely place of refuge, where you can get one drink and sit for hours.

I visited Beijing during the national day holiday, which was fun. National day is a big holiday in China, so there were lots and lots of Chinese tourists. However, it was still really fun and we found accommodation and transport with no major issues.

I visited Shanghai briefly before I left China as well, with my Chinese friend, which was really great. She introduced me to some friends who lived in the city, so I got to know Shanghai in an interesting way.

Some places I'd recommend visiting in Dalian

- The art gallery near Russian-style Street - I went to two wonderful little exhibitions there.
- Cookie Art studio in Lushun - you take the metro to the last stop and walk for a bit.
- 万达 mall - there are plenty of malls but this one is close to campus and has lots of nice stores.
- Bear cave street - while quite overstimulating, I have never experienced anything like this. It is an indoor shopping street and has a mechanical bear which moves and sprays out water now and then. Very interesting!

*Any tips for future students?*

The administration before and at the beginning of my exchange was really difficult. DUFL does not do a good job of setting students up with clear information, but the Otago exchange office was super helpful for me. On the first day, I did get a bus ride to the University and my accommodation was set up, but I did have to wait around for hours at the University and the airport. I started classes because my (one nice) flatmate told me that I could attend them. She also told me where I could do my washing and get food when the canteens hadn't opened. These things were not communicated to me by DUFL when I was taken to the University. Therefore, you do need to be quite proactive in those first few days and do your best to find somebody that can speak some English as it can be really difficult when you are not used to constantly speaking Chinese. Once everything was all sorted, the classes all ran smoothly and I was able to better get used to the place. Bear this in mind in those first few days at Dalian - it will get better, I promise 😊

It was incredibly easy to find Chinese friends at Dalian - as I am NZ European, multiple students came up to me and asked if I spoke English! There's not a lot of native English speakers at Dalian, so people will be interested in practicing with you, which is a great opportunity for language exchange.

Winter in Dalian is cold but the central heating is good and you will mostly be indoors anyway. I would usually wear three layers - a base, jumper and a good jacket when going outside. You probably also need gloves and a hat.

Apps I found useful:

- 高德地图 / AMap (basically your Google Maps for China, I found this one the most user-friendly).
- Anki (for flashcards)
- Write Chinese Characters - this helps with stroke order when learning to write characters.
- Pleco - a good Chinese dictionary.
- You can use WeChat or Alipay to book trains and hotels, but these can be annoying if you are not Chinese. For trains you might not have a choice, but I used Booking.com for hotels and thought it was perfectly good. Just bear in mind that some hotels in China don't accept foreigners, so it can be useful to use an app for foreigners as this ensures you will be allowed to stay in the accommodation that it offers.

I won't recommend a VPN for my safety, but I would ask someone who has been to China to recommend which ones are best if you can. Make sure you don't need to use Google if at all possible, just in case.

I'd recommend joining either the University gym or the gym on the teacher's college campus. There are other gyms nearby but they got super busy.

## Overall Experience

*Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!*

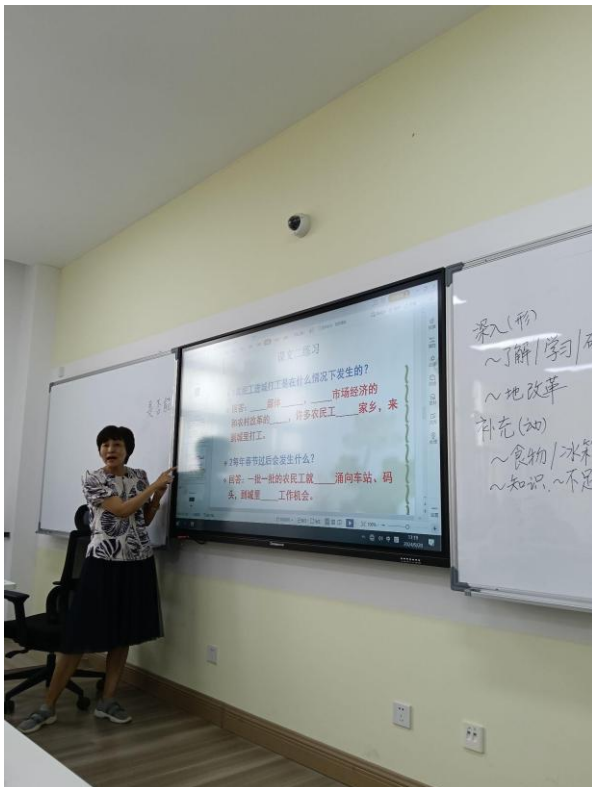
Living in China was difficult, especially at the beginning. That said, my language improved exponentially and I learned so much about the world. The locals in Dalian are so friendly. I often found that people in stores on seafood street or in the canteen wanted to talk to me, just to ask how I was finding being in China (I also got a fair share of comments about milk and sheep once I told them I was from New Zealand). Once I got in my groove, I was really able to enjoy life in Dalian. I also met so many wonderful people that have become lifelong friends. Additionally, getting to experience travel in China is a real bonus - it is very cheap and easy to do so, so take advantage of it!



In Shanghai!



Claymaking at Cookie Art Studio



My intensive reading class



The gorgeous campus lake (which froze over in winter).



Bear cave street



In Dalian, with bubble tea!



A typical breakfast for me during my exchange.