



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Tsinghua University, Beijing
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 (Spring), 2025
Otago degree(s)	Diploma for Graduates endorsed in Chinese
Major(s)	Chinese Language

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Chinese Language Programme (CLP): Comprehensive Chinese	Mandarin	Chinese 300-level paper, 6 credits
CLP: Listening and Speaking	Mandarin	Chinese 300-level paper, 6 credits
CLP: Reading and Writing	Mandarin	UO-01127954, 4 credits

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

Papers were intense and comprehensive. I could not choose my papers, as part of the CLP, there are a set course to follow and you are put into the class level that suits your level of Mandarin.

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

The CLP programme followed a Mon-Tue, Thu-Fri schedule from 8am to 11:20am. There were 2 classes on a single day, from 8am-9:30am, and 9:50am-11:20am. After each 45min period, there was a 5 minute break. All classes were entirely in Mandarin. The layout of breaking the subjects up into reading/writing, listening/speaking and general/comprehensive Chinese was quite effective. Reading and writing consisted of learning the context for a set of words that the teacher expected us to learn, and the latter part of the class was spent skim reading a short essay (with those words) (about 5mins allowed), and then answering questions about the essay (all in the textbook) and repeating

this. General class was about reading the textbook paragraphs in advance, breaking down the grammar points and character/vocab memorisation. And of course, listening and speaking was practicing commonly spoken phrases to learn dialogues and answer questions. All classes were very interactive (with about 20-30 students) and each student would have to answer a question at least once every week per class (if not more, or by volunteering). The teachers were all very passionate, intense and understanding. Homework was also intense, having to write essays each fortnight, and hand in homework after every class for General. Listening and speaking had homework after each class, and each week there was a speech/spoken and recording response that must be submitted over the weekend – feedback provided in the form of voice notes. I appreciate the encouraging attitude from the teachers and the constant drive to include all students, praise them and point out errors.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in Zijing Student apartments Building 20. This building is the last International Students accommodation to go under construction – so it is the most outdated. The room is not nice, but it is the only dorm that allows you a private room (with a shared kitchenette and bathroom with one other student of the same gender). The facilities were functional, but average. Only a microwave, jug and sink provided in the kitchen. The student dorms are very specific about fire safety, using the correct electricity plugs and cords – so I would recommend learning about this in advance or not purchasing a bunch of adaptors etc in advance. There is a small gym facility with mostly cardio options, a study area and a laundry area on each floor. The staff are all friendly and there is always someone on who can help you speak to them – you do not need to know Mandarin to go on an exchange in China/Tsinghua.

Money matters

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

Flights were quite expensive due to constant changes. The total was more than \$2,000. Accommodation was about \$2,500 for the entire semester. Visa was less than \$200. Insurance was provided for me by the Education NZ Scholarship, but you have to pay I think a 400RMB insurance at the registration in THU on your check-in date (paid in cash – get it out in advance, ie at the airport). Food was very affordable. Most meals in the dining halls are less than 25RMB. Drinks are less than 10RMB. Food delivery apps such as Meituan are completely sustainable options, although there are more than 10 dining halls on campus (with various vendors and floors in each). I ordered food for most of my stay, and each meal was under 50RMB including delivery fees.

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

I used and would thoroughly recommend Wise. However in China, you must use Alipay and WeChat. The thing is, you can link your Wise account to both of these to pay vendors/at stores (I never needed a bank card to pay, only my phone). However to make personal bank transfers (ie. To friends) and certain payments with certain vendors – you need to link a Chinese bank card to your Wechat account and deposit cash, withdrawn from your Wise card. To the Wechat balance. You cannot use your Wise card to make these personal transfers. To manage spending I transferred to my Wise balance monthly, which reduced conversion fees and helped me avoid overspending.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, Visa was complicated as I was adopted from China, and so I do have an expired Chinese passport. You have to apply online. The phone number to call for help is quite helpful and generally the process is quick if you don't have any complications.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes – mentioned above. You pay it directly during check-in, this does not need to be done in advance. Only the cash should be prepared in advance.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

A lot of different clubs and sports teams were available. See Clubs day a week or so into the semester.

What was the university/ city like?

The university was very beautiful, in a similar way as Otago. There are gardens, lawns and lakes. It's always bustling. The uni is abit far out from the main city area, but it is still near many many malls etc. The environment is VERY dry. Please moisturise and stay hydrated. In the summer it is very very hot (everyday is above 30d celcius), but the winters are very cold – yet dry (close to 0 degrees celcius most days). It's a city, so you must prepare for air pollution. Avoid going out on high high days, but otherwise you will get used to it and maybe even adapt to it. Beijing is huge – it looks simple and small on the map, but a straight line of road could take over 30mins of travel time by car.

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

The Summer palace (old and new) are about 10RMB for students and both extremely nearby. They're beautiful. China is a very dynamic environment, and everything changes quickly so recommending food places/places can be difficult. When the next student goes, they will see things I never saw, and the student after them will see things that student never saw.

Any tips for future students?

Get a Chinese Simcard at the airport, and ask them for a monthly plan (since you won't be staying for a short time). This is very important – your passport and your phone number are the key ways you will be identified. Use WISE and put money into your account before you land. China is all about being prepared. It's a difficult but amazing country to visit – you must download the necessary apps and VPNS, and you must ask for advice from people around you – that way you will avoid wasting your time and not being able to do things for a reason you may not have predicted. Biking is your friend too – the rentable bikes are amazing and the bike lanes around campus make it a safe and enjoyable experience.

Overall Experience

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

I had a great time at Tsinghua. One thing I learned is that you can be too prepared. Once you're in China, everything will make sense, but if you're not there yet – or you're back home, it's very difficult to access things – University systems especially. In terms of the actual exchange, my classes were fun and interesting, and the layout allowed students time to study, and explore. The student vibe in China is very cool too – there are always people everywhere, and the international students are many – you will have the opportunity to meet people from all cultures and befriend people from across the world. I recommend staying a bit after exams and exploring the country, especially if you're in the CLP because you are penalised for class absences and do not have a lot of public holidays to fully explore far from the University campus. I feel like I learnt so much and was able to overcome some personal goals at the same time. Having the opportunity to learn Chinese in China is an experience I will never forget!



















