

REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO -
A.A. 2015/2016

_Cognome	Ortiz Saldivar
_Nome	Mirelle
_Matricola	833542
_Anno di corso	2.LM
_Corsi di studi	DESIGN PER IL SISTEMA MODA
_Sezione	
_e-mail	mirelle.ortiz@mail.polimi.it
_Sede di scambio	China Academy of Arts (CHN HANGZHO1)
_Stato	Hangzhou, China
_ID ERASMUS (per sedi in EU)	
_Semestre svolto all'estero	2°

Testo

"LOST IN TRANSLATION" EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE IN CHINA ACADEMY OF ARTS

I decided to call this experience like this just to play a little with the introduction of it.

About my personal experience, it passed through three stages, difficulty on the adaptation, adaptation and sadness of leaving, all of them making of this period a very valuable one.

The first month has been difficult because of health issues, I haven't thought how pollution could affect me until I faced a real one, an even if I wasn't arrived to Beijing or Shanghai yet till the second week. This is to be considered as an important thing to care about before the arrival, to be consciuous about allergy problems or, on the other hand some stomach problems for people who is delicate or has certain standards for eating, fortunately this last one didn't affect me at all maybe because of the fact that being Mexican means to have previous experience with what real street food is.

Anyway, let's start from the beggining, my Italian colleague from the master and I took the same flight from Malpensa to Hangzhou with a connection flight in Beijing, then we arrived to Hangzhou's international airport at 6 pm moreless and faced the first complications: finding an ATM where we could make a withdrawal with our international cards (important thing to check before leaving, go to your bank and be sure to activate the card for abroad using), then, even if you're in an "international airport" and there's an info point for tourists, there was no one who could speak in english to us so we managed to guess and go to the bus tickets desk just next to the gate and said Hangzhou centre, some english words and some mimic to get them for 20 RMB (1 euro is moreless 7.2-4 RMB) per person and in 45 min-1 hour you arrive to a coach station near Hangzhou's railway station in the last stop, which is the most convenient for taking a taxi to the campus, taxi fees are cheap, just don't let them trick you at the arrival when they see you're a foreigner and will try to give crazy prices, taxis have taximeter and from that station to 218 Nanshan Lu, the school's adress, is 11-13 RMB, the first taxi was aking 100 RMB until a very kind chinese guy helped us.

The location of the campus is really nice, just in front of the famous West lake and very close to every kind of service, shopping malls, supermarket, pharmacy, restaurants, coffee shops, bars, even Aston Martin and Porsche were our neighbours.

ARRIVAL

That first night we stayed in a hotel just aside the campus so in the morning we didn't have to move a lot with the luggage. At 10 am we went to the Foreign Affairs Office with Miss Shao, she welcomed us and started explaining about the campus, took us to the exchange student's dorms at building 7 (entering by building 6, the sculpture one, so the way to the room is sometimes creepy, mostly at night when you see someone standing in front of you and realize it's just a new sculpture). Then, we arrived to the rooms, we decided to have each one a single room even if it can be used as double, actually spacious with two single beds, two wardrobes and 2 desks, it depends on you how to distribute them for your comfort, they give you lining as well.

The first impression with the toilet was the hardest until we got used to, one squad for 6 students in the floor, sometimes more people could come as it's an open room (also our neighbours from downstairs who are the guards of the campus sometimes came to use it). Upon the arrival we were given a key for the shower and a key for the washing machine, which were supposed to be used just by the students, but also we sometimes found our downstairs neighbours making use of them. There are laces out of the toilet to hang the clothes but we preferred to get the structure to extend in our rooms.

The room fee has to be paid in advance for the whole period we were remaining, water and electricity expenses are asked by the leaving time.

EATING

At carrefour, just 5 minutes walk, we could buy other initial stuff like boiling pot, mirror, trash can, and easy stuff for breakfast, there's no kitchen or fridge yet available in this dorms, so for lunch and dinner at least, we were used to go to the campus cafeteria (which is very cheap and quite good, just have to get used to the real chinese eating, paying 5-12 RMB for an average plate containing white rice and a selection of 2 to 4 different portions of the day's dishes), which is good but after a week of eating "the same", we started discovering the several "chinese restaurants" located all around the neighbourhood, getting noodles, dumplings or fried rice, among other dishes, for prices between 10-25 RMB, or sometimes going to a bar or western food restaurants like Mingtown hostel or Eudora pub offering international dishes, just in front of the campus, Slim's for really good hamburgers, Bernini café for European food, or others in the mall just behind school and others located in the city centre or in the other side of the lake, special day fancy dinners payed 150 RMB moreless.

For Chinese culture, food is highlighted, meal times are very important, and is about sharing mostly, expect to go with colleagues or friends and get a big bowl of white rice in the centre with several dishes from which anyone can take a portion with the chopsticks on their given small empty plate, dessert can be served at the beginning as well.

For making business they do it in restaurants, even for asking how are you in a colloquial way they involve asking if you have already eaten.

STUDYING

The Nanshan campus is where we were living, but to attend the textile design course we went to the Xiangshan Campus, 30 minutes far and reachable with the school's bus that runs 3 times a day or with public bus (line 4 from the stop next to Eudora pub, 30 to 90 minutes depending on the traffic). Xiangshan campus is huge, with more than 20 beautiful buildings and natural areas, just to say that the classrooms look quite old and unpreserved, as well as really cold when it's still winter time, not convenient when we wanted to do artistic works like painting or doing embroidery feeling blocked by the coats. In our case, the responsible of the Fashion Design department explained to us the actual offer of courses (which we never had clear upon that day), no English courses but availability of some classmates to help and translate for us. We chose Traditional Chinese techniques for textiles where we were tough silk painting, embroidery, tie & dye, and other decorations, we held it in 4 weeks working at school and at home for the delivery of the final project that included all the learned techniques.

Teachers were interested in our way of work and integration with the other students, Miss Haisuo, who we have been told is famous for her textile works, even if not speaking a lot of English, was always available and kind for any doubt or assistance for the best development of our assignments.

About the language course we understood before the arrival, with the received documents, that we could attend it on basic level as Chinese is not simple to learn just with campus life and integration but after the 4th time of asking for it and been told there was not availability, miss Shao said that actually it cost 10,000 RMB and that for us there was the possibility to get language partners who could help us, 3 amazing girls who will be in exchange in Milan from September and with whom we could learn Chinese and teach them Italian, of course this was a nice idea but sincerely it was difficult to learn without proper lessons.

SOCIALIZING

Chinese classmates were shy till the moment in which they could realize that we were open to talk and mostly interested on learning from them, we met so nice people and formed some friendships. We were also introduced to the other international students with whom we also got well along and we're used to hang out together or doing some rooftop parties with amazing views of the city. Getting to know real artists in this academy broadened my view about different personalities and ways of artistic expressions, interesting people coming from all over the world.

TRANSPORT

Transportation is easy and cheap.

Actually the subway, even in Shanghai, we never found it so crowded, but buses get really full, mostly in weekends. The traffic can be handled thanks to the good space distribution in the roads but when it's peak time 4 km can be reached in 40 minutes.

Fees on the subway are calculated depending on the distance but the maximum I paid was 10 RMB, buses cost 1 or 2 RMB, and as mentioned before, taxi or even uber service are really convenient, with a price starting on 11 RMB for the first 3 km and then depending mostly on the distance. Fast trains are very efficient for going to other cities and have so frequent schedules. Night trains for long distances are also a good option that I used, where you can meet chinese people interested in helping you to learn Chinese or them trying to improve their English skills.

TOURISTING

The weekends were full of options to do something, to get to know new things, going to other cities or villages. Hangzhou has a lot of touristic points, actually I didn't see them all because of lack of time, pagodas, temples, gardens, and also has a very convenient location for going to other places. Conscious about the fact that the exchange period was not so long and mixing course and thesis could let me few time to travel, I took advantage of it and got to know these places I suggest not to miss when you're in China:

Hangzhou- The pagodas near the campus and the small one located in the hills of Beishan road, Hefang street (traditional Chinese style houses with lot's of local food and souvenirs), Botanical Garden, Longjing tea Village, and amazing Buddhist and Tahoist temples located around the city.

Beijing – Huge city, a lot of historical places that make you understand a lot of Chinese history and culture, like the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square, temples, Great wall and traditional alleys. Shocking pollution, as it's an industrial and economical development city.

Shanghai- Just one hour or one and a half away from Hangzhou, the stunning Shanghai, with several scenic spots, like the Bund, Yun'an Garden (traditional Chinese structures that nowadays host local food and souvenir offers), Jade Buddhist Temple, Jing'an Temple, the French concession, Nanjing pedestrian shopping street, People's square, Pudond area (Pearl tower and skyscrapers), very international environment and never-ending options for any kind of activity, several exhibitions and museums as well.

Wuzhen- One hour and a half bus from Hangzhou and we were in what I saw as the Chinese Venice, very beautiful and preserved water city with small museums and temples all around it, as well as local food and souvenirs.

Lishui - Small city to which I arrived thanks to a friend I met in China, typical chinese food, mountains, beautiful landscapes.

Xi'an – Terracota warriors hosting city, traditional wall surrounded city, Drum Tower, Bell tower, Muslim's quarter.

Chengdu – Sichuan province main city, the spicy food region; amazing for a Mexican citizen to arrive there and be defeated by the "Sichuan" people ability to handle spice.

Buddhist temples and traditional streets and alleys that transport you to an idea of ancient times trading and eating in China.

The Panda's reserve centre is also here so expect to melt when you're in front of these national symbolic animals.

Leshan – One day plan to go from a town to another with the fast trains from Chengdu. The Big Buddha of Leshan and the monastery next to it are for sure an excellent option to get to visit.

Mount Emei – Be careful with understanding the maps, in China everything is bigger or farer than you can think, unfortunately travelling by myself I was with the risk of not knowing how to express in some point and that made me lost time for going to the monkeys reserve on time, but this place and mountains are stunning, great landscapes and temples.

CONCLUSION

This exchange period of three months in China has been one of the most significant mostly for my personal life. Facing the adaptation process to such a different and interesting culture can sometimes be hard, but going in this way, with a university program is a great opportunity to integrate in several ways. China is not a country that when coming from occidental countries, people select that easy, we know that it's not going to be easy at least for the language barriers, but it's what makes it better, it makes you effort in the best possible ways to deal with all the difficulties, opens your mind to other way of thinking, makes you patient, tolerant and empathetic, and enriches the cultural background as long as you are open and able to go on looking for more.

About the partnership between schools I consider thee must be an improvement in the communication about the courses and offers from CAA as a hosting entity and a real welcoming day in order to be better prepared, as well as the proper integration to Chinese lessons which can help a lot to handle with the daily life and attendance to classes.

Firma Milrelle Ortiz Saldivar

Autorizzo al trattamento dei miei dati personali ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n. 196/03 da parte del Politecnico di Milano.

Firma _____