

# SEP Report

## 1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Law
Host University	Tsinghua University
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (e.g. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 Semester 2

## 2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?
- What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?
- Advice on module registration and module mapping

### 2.1 Conduct of Classes

The manner in which classes are conducted at Tsinghua University differs widely amongst courses. Of the five modules that I opted for, three had larger class sizes of about 40-50 students, while the remaining two were small classes consisting of less than 10 students. The larger classes were conducted in 'seminar-style', in which the professors spend the bulk of the lesson lecturing the class, and give students opportunities to contribute and interact at appropriate intervals. The two smaller classes were conducted more informally, as a fluid dialogue between professors and students, with lectures from professors interspersed with presentations, questions, and comments from students.

Specifically, discussions for the 'Hong Kong and Macau Basic Laws (香港澳门基本法研究)' course, which consisted of only seven registered students, were highly palatable and often took place over lunch. I greatly enjoyed the more relaxed atmosphere, and how it seemed to make many of my classmates especially willing to contribute to the discussion.

### 2.2 Academics

What I liked most about academics in Tsinghua University is the large amount of freedom my professors gave me in each of my courses. For example, for two of my modules, 'Internet and e-Commerce Law (网络与电子商务法)' and 'A Study on China WTO Cases (世界贸易组织中国案例研究)', I was given a list of sample topics, yet granted free reign to write my own paper on *any* issue related to the syllabus. This is a privilege not often experienced at undergraduate level in NUS Law, where courses are often still assessed through a combination of examinations and essays (which have precisely prescribed questions and parameters). I was very thankful for this freedom; given that I could write about what I felt for, I enjoyed my assignments more.

Some future outgoing students may be concerned that university education in China may entail rote-learning and memorization; indeed, this is a common notion of Chinese education that some of my peers in NUS have. On balance, while there are indeed a few courses that seem to fall into this stereotype, and require students to heavily memorize content from textbooks, the vast majority of courses in Tsinghua's Law faculty allow for truly independent research and development of personal

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insights.

Even so, one aspect of academics that I found difficult is that academic views originating from beyond China are often blocked by the Great Firewall (China's internet censorship machinery). Whilst I acknowledge that state censorship is not within the control of any Chinese university, and I could still access such material with the use of VPN settings to get across the Great Firewall, it is unfortunate that many of my own classmates did not have such easy access to foreign materials, thereby restricting the scope of discussion in class. This is a reality of academic research in China.

## 2.3 Module Registration and Mapping

Module registration in Tsinghua University is relatively straightforward. The process is highly systematic, with an online registration system similar to what NUS students currently enjoy in Law school. Moreover, the local students offered to help us in person to register for our modules, not only assisting us with navigating the system, but also recommending courses and 'better' professors based on their own experience.

My only advice to future outgoing students would be to bravely register for modules that are wholly conducted in Mandarin. First, English courses in Tsinghua University are not popular with local Chinese students, and cater largely to exchange students from Europe and the United States; my opinion is that this subtracts from the experience of studying in a Chinese university. Moreover, as an issue of module mapping, NUS Law allows for mandarin modules to be mapped over at *twice* the credit of modules read in English.

**Please list the courses that you took during SEP.** (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
90660173	Hong Kong and Macau Basic Laws (香港澳门基本法研究)	3	-	-	6
40661723	A Study on China WTO Cases (世界贸易组织中国案例研究)	3	-	-	6
80662042	Judicial System and Judicial Reform (司法制度与司法改革)	2	-	-	4
30660102	Internet and e-Commerce Law (网络与电子商务法)	2	-	-	4
60660022	Chinese Study (汉语和中国文化)	2	-	-	N/A

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## 3. Accommodation

**What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (e.g. on campus / off campus)?**

**Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?**

**Do you have any other suggestions?**

### 3.1 My Accommodation

In general, exchange students at Tsinghua University can choose from on-campus accommodation of either single rooms (80RMB/day) or double rooms (40RMB/day), or choose to live off-campus at nearby apartment complexes. I chose to live on-campus, in a single room apartment at Zijing Student Apartments (紫荆留学生公寓).

### 3.2 Recommendations and Suggestions

I would recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students, as off-campus accommodation generally costs more than on-campus accommodation. Moreover, as some of my fellow friends on exchange discovered, living off-campus also comes with other costs such as utilities and internet bills (which are free in Tsinghua's accommodation), and also inconveniences such as the need to register with the police and the inability to access the school intranet from home. Another consideration is the rent for on-campus accommodation is computed on a daily rate, which makes it more flexible than off-campus accommodation, for which rent is paid on a monthly basis.

However, one drawback about Tsinghua's accommodation for foreign students, as compared to *other non-Chinese universities* that my NUS Law friends went on exchange to, is the fact that Tsinghua houses local students and foreign students within the same student area, but separates them into different blocks, lowering the chances for interaction with local students in a non-deliberate, everyday, setting.

I would also recommend outgoing students to check-in as early as possible; my fellow NUS exchange students realized that 'early birds' get first pick of the choicest, highest, non-railway track facing rooms in the more conveniently located blocks.

## 4. Activities during SEP

**Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?**

### 4.1 Buddy Programme

I would recommend other students sign up for Tsinghua University's Buddy Programme for exchange students. It was through this programme that I met Wang Huimin, a Law school senior who became my first local friend in Tsinghua University.

### 4.2 Student Groups

Instead of recommending future outgoing students to join a *specific* student group, all I have to say is

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that they should join *any* student group that suits their interests. In general, the student groups that my friends participated in all gave them opportunities to meet local students and to enjoy getting to understand China as locals would. As each student group is usually rather commitment-intensive, meeting approximately two to three times a week on average, it may be best to register for only one or two groups, in order to participate optimally.

I chose to join Tsinghua's Christian Fellowship, as it was composed of both local and foreign students, and met my spiritual needs in China. The Fellowship provided me with a network of friends who were undergoing similar experiences at school, and also became the starting point of several close friendships which I hope will turn out to be lifelong friendships. One of my closer friends from the fellowship visited Singapore recently, and I was able to arrange for Singaporean friends to bring him around. I was also thankful to be able to bring something useful to the fellowship; as it turned out, I could help with instantaneous translation between English and Mandarin, for the benefit of other exchange students who were non-mandarin speakers.

## 5. Cost of Living

**Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?**  
**Please list travel expenses separately.**

My total expenditure for exchange stands at about \$10000 SGD, of which approximately \$2500 was spent on traveling.

Monthly expenses in Beijing average about RMB 6000 in total (approximately \$1000 SGD); Monthly rent averages RMB 2500 (approximately \$500 SGD) and a generous estimate for living expenses is about 3500 RMB (approximately \$700 SGD) a month.

Future outgoing students should take note that Semester 2 exchange to China commences in Spring, before the end of the Lunar New Year. As such, the flight to Beijing would coincide with China's New Year peak travel period (春运/黄金周) and return air tickets from Singapore to Beijing may be relatively costly, at slightly over \$1000 SGD.

## 6. Challenges

**Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?**

### 6.1 Administrative Processes in China

Admittedly, I took some time to get used to the way things are done in China. My friends and I quickly learnt that most matters in China involve many procedural steps, and strict adherence to these steps; this applies across the board, from 'smaller' matters such as school accommodation applications and train ticket applications to 'larger' matters such as preparing documents and meeting requirements for visa applications; in fact, I would not be surprised if this applies to most official processes I may encounter in the workplace, should I choose to work in China in the future. Other exchange students often shared about difficulties they faced when they did not adhere to these procedural requirements.

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To my mind, this was good training, and encouraged me to be *extra* meticulous when handling things in China. On the rare occasion that I faced administrative hurdles, I learnt how to meet them with a healthy dose of stoicism and patience, while calmly trying to solve the problem.

Moreover, despite the emphasis on procedure, I learnt that, in China, there is often room for compassion amongst administrative officers. At points of great desperation, I learnt that if I sought their help politely, sincerely and *persistently*, they would help me.

## 6.2 Academic/Legal Mandarin

Even though I had tried to brush up on my mandarin before arriving in China, I realized to my dismay that while I was fluent in everyday conversation, my standard of mandarin was not quite up to scratch to handle legal and academic mandarin required for readings and participating in class.

Thankfully, my professors were very understanding; for example, in the Hong Kong Basic Law class, in which each student had to present an article or case review every week, I was usually assigned the shorter cases and articles. My classmates were also a crucial pillar of support, and helped me with my numerous queries. Perhaps, sufficient practice and exposure was all I needed; when it was close to a third through the semester, I gradually found myself being able to cope nearly as well as a local student could.

## 6.3 Challenges Socializing

Another challenge I faced was getting to know local students. This was challenging for two reasons. First, as mentioned above (at [3.2]), Tsinghua University separates local and foreign students into different blocks. Secondly, my larger courses consisted mainly of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students who had registered for those courses along with their friends, making it a little bit harder to mix with them. My approach to this was simply to be 'thick-skinned' and to make it a point to be friendly to anyone around me, be it in class, at church, in the gym or even at the supermarket.

## 6.4 Others

Naturally, I faced other miscellaneous teething issues whilst on exchange, including occasional feelings of homesickness and not being used to food. It is fortunate that I was in a city as cosmopolitan as Beijing, as these are quickly dispelled by a combination of Skype calls and visits to 'Raffles City', 'Toast Box' and 'Orchard 17' (a restaurant serving authentic Singapore food).

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## 7. Overall SEP Experience

**Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.**

Living in Beijing and studying in Tsinghua University has been a coming-of-age experience for me. Academically, I have grown whilst studying among the brightest students in China. I have also been blessed by the relationships built with my Chinese friends, as well as friends of other nationalities and fellow Singaporeans living and working in Beijing. I have come to love the beauty of China and her people. Now that I am back home, I find myself missing China, missing Beijing, and missing Tsinghua, for they had become my home for the past five months.

## 7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

**Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.**

To be broad-minded and to embrace China on her own terms.