

Final Report for the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation

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Fudan University, Academic Year 2017–2018

Introduction

I spent the 2017–2018 academic year in Fudan University with the help of a scholarship from the Helsingin Sanomat foundation. During my year in Shanghai, I learned a great deal, gained many new friends and experienced a number of interesting things. After my studies, I can say that I have gained a deeper understanding of China than before. I also realize that there is still a lot to learn. The year in Fudan left me a great desire to keep learning about Chinese culture and continue my Chinese language studies. I am truly grateful for the opportunity given me by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation and wish that the Foundation will keep supporting Finnish journalists with their studies in China for many years to come.

In this final report, my aim is to describe my experiences in Fudan University and Shanghai and also to give useful hints and tips for the people considering applying to Fudan.

Applying to Fudan and Getting Ready for China

I was selected to go to Fudan in the fall of 2016, nearly a year before the start of my studies in September 2017. I was eager to get going right away and the wait felt like a long time, but it also offered me an excellent opportunity to ready myself for the year to come. It also gave a chance for my employer to prepare for my absence.

My employer Ilta-Sanomat granted me a study leave for my time at Fudan, for this I am very grateful for them. My study leave from my position as a news editor for the sport department lasted from the beginning of September 2017 to the end of June 2018. Besides that, I was on summer vacation from mid-July to the end of August in 2017. So, in total, I was away from work for nearly a whole year. I had been working in Ilta-Sanomat since the summer of 2003, so returning to care-free student life after nearly 15 years of work was a very appealing thought.

As soon as I heard that I had been selected to go to China, I started my preparations for the year at Fudan. I soon contacted Heidi Väärämäki in Shanghai, who was at Fudan at the time. I also had several meetings with Heidi's predecessor Antti Järvi in Helsinki. Besides them, I had many

discussions with previous Fudaners Katriina Pajari and Eeva Eronen. I soon found out that the spirit among the Fudaners is great: the people who had been to China, would gladly give up their time to help a newcomer to find his feet.

Right after being selected, I also started reading Chinese literature and newspapers (especially South China Morning Post), to watch Chinese movies and documentaries. I felt this was a good way to prepare myself mentally for China. In addition, I also started studying Chinese, first with an introductory course in Helsinki City Workers' Institute and after that with self-study.

In March 2017, I spent a week of holiday by traveling to Shanghai. There I met up with Heidi Väärämäki, who showed me around Fudan's campus. I also saw Eeva Eronen, who was in town writing a book on the Chinese economy. She showed me around town and gave a lot of useful advice. I found that the week in Shanghai was very helpful. I learned to find my way around town and could then start thinking where I wanted to live during my future time in Shanghai.

The application process to Fudan was relatively uncomplicated. With the help of the University website and the experiences of previous Fudaners, I could find the program that best fit my interests. I decided to apply for a English taught masters programmer called Chinese Society, offered by the School of Social Development and Public Policy (SSDPP). I participated in the program with the status of Senior Advanced Student. Antti Järvi had earlier taken part in the same program, so he was a great help in figuring out the application process.

Fudan had an online service for the application process, though I also had to send notarized documents of my masters degree from the University of Tampere by mail to China. The SSDPP office also phoned me for a short interview, in order to make sure that I knew which program I was applying to and with what status. The matter was soon clear after I mentioned Antti Järvi's name and at the end of the interview I was told that I would get in. That was a relief, even though the earlier Fudaners had told me that the application process was only a formality.

Studying at Fudan and the life in Shanghai

Before moving to Shanghai, housing was my greatest concern. Even though the average wage in Shanghai is much lower than in Finland, the rental costs in central areas of the city were even higher than in my hometown Helsinki. I sent a message to the Facebook-page of the Finnish

community in Shanghai to ask for advice, and many people told me that the best way to find a place suitable for my needs was through AirBnb.

I took their advice and found a reasonably-priced room in a neighborhood called Tongji Xincun, 15 minutes bike ride from Fudan and near metro line 10. I was also intrigued by the opportunity to share a flat with a local resident and have the chance to peek into a local lifestyle that way. My AirBnB-host was called Xiao, he was a young architect, who had studied in Denmark. Xiao was a kind and helpful host, who helped me a lot of with settling in to Shanghai. For instance Xiao helped me to register at the local police station and to get a local SIM-card. During my stay in Shanghai, I became friends with Xiao and we had a lot of interesting discussions on Chinese politics and life in Shanghai.

Settling in was also helped by so-called scholarship kit, a bunch of everyday necessities collected by the previous Fudaners that I could pick up in Shanghai. The kit has in it sheets, towels, plates, cups etc. All sorts of things, that I didn't now have to go shopping for. The kit stayed with Xiao, waiting for the next Fudaner to pick it up. I also added something into it, and now there's already a half a cupboard full of things.

I chose the Chinese Society -program, because the courses on offer looked at the Chinese society from different and interesting angles. My main goal for the year in Fudan was to learn to understand China better and I felt that attending this program would be the best way to achieve that goal.

During the fall semester I participated in four courses, one on the Chinese demography and the consequences of the one-child policy, one on Chinese religions and how they have influenced the society, one was an introduction on Chinese society and culture and one concentrated on Shanghai from different angles. In addition, I also participated on a Chinese course offered by SSDPP.

I felt that the most interesting courses were the demography and religion ones. They had the most interesting lectures and well-curated reading material. The two others were more hit-and-miss, both were taught by a veteran professor Yu Hai, who had gathered a whole host of guest lecturers and also organized many field trips. Some of the guest speakers and field trips were very interesting, but the big picture of the two courses was a bit vague.

I also found that the language course offered by SSDPP was too slow-paced and basic. It also was hampered by a large class-size. Many of the students were young exchange students, who weren't

interested in learning Chinese. They had come to Shanghai to party. Most of them cheated their way through the exams.

In order to learn Chinese more efficiently, I signed up for a private language school called GoEast. Many previous Fudaners had studied there and they all had nothing but good things to say about the school. The praise was warranted, I found that GoEast offered very high quality education. The teachers at the school were in their late twenties and early thirties, but already quite experienced. They all held masters degrees on teaching Chinese as a foreign language, plenty of teaching experience and they all spoke excellent English. I studied at GoEast's small group classes 6–9 hours per week, 149 lessons in total. In April, I took and passed the HSK-exam, which is an official Chinese proficiency test, like IELTS- or TEUFEL-tests in English. There are 6 levels at HSK in total, I passed level 3.

During the spring semester in Fudan, I participated in three courses. One was an introduction to Chinese culture through modern Chinese cinema, one was on Chinese political economy, one was about the Chinese marketplace and one about the ancient trade on the Silk Road. I found all four to be interesting, though my favorite was the movie course. During class we had a lot of fascinating conversations on the course films and what they taught us on Chinese culture. The instructor of the class also taught a course on Nordic cinema for the Chinese students, so I had quite a few discussions with him about Aki Kaurismäki.

Founded in 1905, Fudan University is one of the most respected universities in China. It is considered to be among the top-100 universities in the world. Fudan has four campuses around Shanghai and tens of thousands of students. My studies were at the main campus, which is located in Northern Shanghai's Yangpu district, about 30 minutes travel away from the city center. The foreigners studying in English and the Chinese students have very little activities in common, so my closest study community was mainly composed of other Chinese Society students. I got to know locals more through my AirBnB-flat and studies at GoEast.

I didn't do badly in my studies. Fudan uses an American style in grading, so my fall report card read A, A, A-, A- and B+. By the time I am writing this in mid-June, I haven't yet gotten my grades from the spring semester. The deadline for my last essays was only a week ago.

In addition to studying, I tried to familiarize myself as much as possible with Shanghai and the neighboring cities. I spent my days off visiting sights or doing sports. I played football with a team

composed of foreign students in the Fudan University league, which we managed to win. A Japanese friend from that team, Saito, introduced me to two Japanese teams playing on weekends in the Shanghai foreigners' league. So I also played with them and on Mondays I took part in floorball practice with a Finnish team in Shanghai called Hakkapeliitat. With them, we traveled to Guangzhou in May to take part in the China Championship and came home with the trophy.

Advice for future Fudaners and people considering applying for the scholarship

I learned a great deal during my year in Shanghai and would recommend applying for the program to all who are interested in the rapidly growing mega-state of China. A five thousand year old culture cannot be learned in a year, but living in Shanghai is a good start to a lifelong project. The scholarship is big enough to cover a year's expenses quite well. It won't let you live lavishly, but on occasion you can eat a bit better than just noodle soup from the university canteen. Even though you don't get selected the first time, it pays to keep trying. I applied twice before finally getting the scholarship.

Even though Shanghai is a mega city with a population four time more than the whole of Finland, moving there wasn't a huge culture shock for me. Studying Chinese and reading a lot about China before going, really helped me to adapt. Also the trip I took to Shanghai in the previous spring was very useful. I taught me a lot about how to move around in Shanghai and what neighborhoods are interesting. I would recommend everyone to visit before moving.

The advice and support from previous Fudaners was invaluable during the application period. The survival kit waiting in Shanghai helped a lot too. The foundation trusts you to figure out the application process yourself, so the previous Fudaners are the best resource of information.

In Shanghai and at Fudan, there are times when the Chinese bureaucracy feels overwhelming. The previous Fudaners advised me to consider the bureaucracy to be a part of the whole cultural experience. I found that this is a very good piece of advice and it helped me through some tough moments. For instance, due to a computer problem, I was unable to pay for my tuition for over two months. In the end, the SSDPP office managed to get the problem sorted out. I worried that I would be kicked out of the university, but the office stayed on the case and eased my mind. At the end, the problem was at Fudan's end.

Finally, an academic year is in the end a relatively short time. I often felt I was missing out on something. This happened for instance, when I did not have the time to go to an interesting guest lecture in Shanghai or did not see all the fascinating places in China or even Shanghai that I had wanted to visit. However, I found out that one needs to be merciful to oneself. China is a massive country with a population of 1,3 billion and even Shanghai alone has a population of over four times that of Finland. A lifetime is not enough to see all of that. In the end, you need to learn to enjoy every new thing you get to see and experience. In China, I felt like I learned something new every day. Hopefully, the experience made me a bit wiser.