

My exchange life in Chemnitz

Last september, the first time I came to Europe, with a nervous and exciting emotion. And then I began my new life in Germany, in Chemnitz.

When I got off from the airplane, I could not help smiling. Everthing around me was fresh and new, including the all German words, the blonde-hair people. That day was a raining day. Because of two heavy luggages, I could not use my umbrella. I got almost all wet, but I still felt happy and satisfied. When we took the underground to the hotel, there was no elevator. It was really hard for me to carry my luggage down or upstairs. But everytime there were local people showing up, and they were very nice to help me. It was a pity that I had no enough time to travel in Berlin because I had to attend tommorrow's language courses. But I really had a very good impression on Berlin.

The whole September I attended the German classes and the jaunts orgnized by Studentenwerk. I found the teaching methods of language had a significant difference between China and German. I had learned German in China for two years. What we did in class is just learn new words, new texts, and new grammar by reciting them. After class, teacher would arrange a lot of homework, we should finish them and hand in. However, I found in German, the teacher taught only a few learning points in the class. Most of the time, we were communicating with German no matter our German was good or not. Teacher always let us play some games or made the dialoges in groups or in two. So we were moving all the time rather than had a fixed seat. It was really interesting and efficient for us to learn language. For the jaunts, we had gone to Dresden. As the captial of saxony, it is a city with both modern and ancient elements. There were two tour guides, one introduced in English and the other in German. At first, I tried to follow the German speaking tour guide, but a few minutes later, I gave up. It was still too difficult for me to understand what she said. Following the tour guide, we visit the churches, castles and so on. They were all typical ancient europe buildings which were with intricate decorations.

In the German courses, I made friends with people from other countries, such as Korea, Turkey, Czekh, Romania, slovakia, Russia and Italy. We learned together, played together. We had a lot of parties, this really shocked me. In my twenty-year life in China, I had attend only several parties, no more than ten. But in Germany, almost every week, there are one or two parties. People talk, dance, drink, laugh. The leisure methods are so different from China. I used to spend my weekends singing in KTV or playing table games. But in Germany, people will attend parties to spend their weekends. At first, I can't understand well why they like parties so much. It wastes a lot of time to prepare, and spend a lot of time to clean as well. But now I know it's a way to gather all the friends together and make funs.

In October, the new semester finally began. My courses were not so many, especially comparing with my schedule in China. I had two linguistics courses, one about English culture called Hitchcock's narrative cinema, two German courses and one bodyshape PE class. And here, I want to talk about the Hitchcock's narrative cinema first. It is my favourite course in Germany, or even the favourite one in my college. Honestly, I knew nothing about Hitchcock, and I had never heard or watched any movie of his. I chose this course just for its credits. But I was attracted by the content immediately when the class began. Every week, we need to watch one of his movies at home, then the students will give a presentation on it, at last, teacher will analysis it and we discuss. It seems like not a class, but a movie association. Although most of the movies are black and white ones, its special shooting methods and narrative ways attract me a lot. After classmates' presentation and teacher analysis, we took a trumble about the details. I really enjoyed the process. For example, Hitchcock is a director who likes to do a cameo in his own movies. Thus, everytime I watch his movie, I will try my best to find him by myself in the first time. If I find him, I will feel kind of satisfied. Furtermore, when it was my turn to give a presentation, I need to watch the movie three times or even more to find some details. Everytime I watched, I would have new discoveries. And I can present all that I had found in the movie no matter it was important or not, because all of them were found by myself. The course is also the only course which has a presentation. Through it, I can also find the difference of Chinese students and German students making presentations. The most prominent one is that the German students seldom focus on the design and the background of PPT. Most of them just use the white background with the black words. It looks very simple but also a little bit boring for the listeners. As the Chinese students, they use more pictures and more beautiful background. And the German students' presentations are more casual and fluent. Comparing with them, Chinese students are more nervous, while their preparations are also more sufficient.

Besides Hitchcock's narrative cinema, I also had two linguistics courses. Although I also learned English in China, this was my first time learn something so academic. What I learned before were more applied English, such as listening , writing, reading and so on. So the applied linguistics and introduction to English language were hard to me. Sometimes I could not understand what teacher said because I only know the Chinese translation of some nouns, such as "gerund". I know it is verb with -ing, but I don't know its academic name. It really bothered me a lot. Another example is "transtivity", I only know "Vt" which means there is a object following the verb while "Vi" means no object. But I never know its full name. I really spend a lot of time to review them before exams. In Germany, most of the courses have tutorings. But as first I thought it was not available to everyone, so I missed a lot of tutoring. In tutoring, the teacher assistant will focus on the difficult point and most important point, and gives some exercises. It is usefel and helpful. I hope that t my home university can learn the teaching model one day.

As for the PE class, it's up to us to decide whether or which one to attend. I choose the bodyshape. When I went to the gym, I found several mid-age men and women. In my bodyshape class. There was a woman over fifty. It shocked me. I have seldom seen mid-age men in gym in China. Most of the Chinese mid-age women would choose to dance in the square. It is now popular in all of the China.

All the things above is about study. In fact, half of my time in Germany was spent in travelling. I have been to Prague, Miliano, Venice, Pisa, Zurich, Basel, Paris, Madrid, Bcelona and so on. Prague is a city full of arts. We can see the artists playing the piano in the center of the square while seeing the typical western buildings around the square with our eyes. Prague likes a stage where we can always watch a excellent performance. Italy is a country filled with history. We can find historical sites everywhere. It's amazing. I admire local people can visit them, can learn the history easily. I always believe that history is one of the most important part of human beings. It can not only show the past, but also can teach us something about the future. Florence is my favourite city in Italy. It is famous for its history: a centre of medieval European trade and finance and one of the wealthiest cities of the time, it is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance, and has been called "the Athens of the Middle Ages". A turbulent political history includes periods of rule by the powerful Medici family, and numerous religious and republican revolutions. From 1865 to 1871 the city was the capital of the recently established Kingdom of Italy. The city is noted for its culture, Renaissance art and architecture and monuments. The city also contains numerous museums and art galleries, such as the Uffizi Gallery and the Palazzo Pitti, and still exerts an influence in the fields of art, culture and politics. I spend a whole day there, and even can't move when it was time to leave.

After Italy, I choose Switzerland to spend my rest Christmas holiday. There is a saying that Switzerland is god's garden. The country is situated in Western and Central Europe, and is bordered by Italy to the south, France to the west, Germany to the north, and Austria and Liechtenstein to the east. Because of this, there are several language used in Switzerland, including German, French. But when I arrived there, I found the German used in Switzerland is not the same as in Germany or Austria. And we have gone to a city called Basel. It is in the middle of France and Germany. It was very interesting to walk around in this city because you would recieve the message"welcome to France" and "welcome to Germany". Besides Basel, we went to zurich as well. It was the most beautiful city I have seen. A big, clean lake locates in the middle of city, where you can also see the Alps if the weather is fine.

At last, I went to Heidelberg as my last destination in Christmas journey. Heidelberg is a ancient city, or we can also say Germany is an ancient city with the most amounts of castles in the world. But because we had only half day in Heidelberg , we just had a look around.

Then we went to Berlin. Oh, plus an interesting story. We used to buy the train tickets with Deutschbahn app in smart phone. The cost which from Heidelberg to Berlin was so expensive, more than 100 euro. So we tried to get a cheaper one tickets. At last, we went to the train agency and asked the officer, she gave us a nice solution that we can choose to transfer. It cost only 39 euro but took 4 hours more.

When we mention Berlin, we can't avoid mentioning World War Two. But what surprised me most was that in Berlin, you can see how German people think about the history and their attitude from the Berlin Wall and the relatively museums. Besides, Berlin is a modern city. We can have different dishes from almost all over the world. We had left China for more than four months, which means we really missed Chinese food. We found a Chinese restaurant which was very Chinese taste rather than German taste. I seldom go to the Chinese restaurants in Chemnitz because the food have been made some changes to meet the German people's taste. Moreover, the Chinese restaurants are managed by Vietnamese. Come back to Berlin, the restaurant in Berlin was literally so Chinese that we enjoyed a lot. We even found a shop to sell bubble milk tea in Berlin. In Germany, or even in most Europe , people love to drink coffees or hot chocolate. But in China , we have more choices, such as tea, soya milk, milk tea and so on. Europe countries are developed countries, but I think that China, or we can say Asia countries are more modern in fast life. We can see from a very small detail that in China , you can buy the yogurt with a straw so that you can drink it everywhere and anytime as you like. But in Europe , I had never found there was a kind of drink with straw in supermarket.

My 31-hour Birthday

February 3rd is my birthday. As the song "Mad World" goes "Children waiting for the day they feel good, happy birthday, happy birthday", I was supposed to be waiting for this day too, especially when it was such a unique one as I was in Germany.

Well, I actually forgot about it.

Until my phone started beeping crazily on February 2nd evening.

It was some friends in China wishing me happy birthday. And I realized that it was my birthday already in China which had an earlier time zone. It was a surprise indeed. I felt nothing but grateful for their kindness and friendship they shared with me.

On the next day, my German birthday, all my friends threw a mini party for me. There were gifts, music, a homemade cake, and lots of fun. I couldn't say I was surprised by all these offered, but when those, who you expected and dint expected, all being there, it was just about gratefulness.

Counted from the first wishing message I received, to the end of the day, my birthday lasted for 31 hours.

I am never alone, no matter where I am, how far I am apart.

The exchange experience was a special adventure for me. For education, firstly, international learning and knowledge propels students towards acceptance and understanding of an array of different culture and community perspectives. By talking with my Erasmus friends and having the project management, I can learn a lot about their culture, which is totally different from China. It can board my horizon and give me the idea of different thinking. Secondly, language acquisition is achieved through practice immersion. When I was in Germany, what I can use is the only German. When I go to the supermarket, when I talk to the house keeper, when I buy the train tickets in agency, what I can use is Germany. Actually, I don't think I have a big progress in German grammar, but I am sure that I have a big progress in German listening and speaking. Because it is what I use every day. Thirdly, awareness and adoption of alternative, multi faceted approaches to learning. The teaching methods in Germany has a significant difference with it in China as I have said above. In a word, the students in Germany need to be more independent and self controlled than students in China. In China, what we do is just to finish the homework teachers have given to us. However, in Germany, the teachers seldom give homeworkers to students. They never make any attendance check on students. So the students will never be forced to come to the class and listen to the teachers. If they think they can learn by themselves and can achieve a good grade in the final, they absolutely can choose to stay at dorm instead of having the class. Fourthly, exchanging can enhance interest in global issues as well as a broader general knowledge. There is an interesting story. Several months ago, Chinese government published a Document that Chinese couple can have two children, which means the one child policy was officially cancelled. In fact, I didn't know the piece of news in Germany until my foreign friends come and said to me excitedly "hey Caroline, do you know that now China has cancelled the one child policy and. Can have two or more children?" And this situation happened several times, not once. I wondered "why the foreigners are so interested in this policy. Maybe in their mind, the right of deciding how many children I want to have can never controlled by government. But I think it is benefit to the family as well as the whole society resources.

For personal, there are more benefits. The first one is about self development and awareness leading to enhanced self confidence and self esteem. This is often the most noticeable change in returned exchange students. Secondly, we develop maturity and social poise, fueled by the necessity to confront challenges outside a familiar support network and comfort zone. Thirdly, we develop a tremendous sense of accomplishment upon completion encourages students develop independent opinions, make informed decisions and strive to attain fresh goals. When we leave our home country, it is impossible for us to depend on our parents or friends any more. So we

have to learn to make the decisions by ourselves. We should think again and again , think what would happen if the decision is different.

Students who go on to tertiary studies find themselves more comfortable in 'foreign' environments. Prospective employers in almost every field look favourably upon experience gained while living overseas and knowledge obtained of another language and culture. Increased pressure to communicate and relate to others develops an awareness of group dynamics and personal sensitivity towards others. Successful program completion represents an excellent measure of personal flexibility, encompassing an ability to reach compromise, focus and succeed through challenging times.

I have visited a lot of German cities such as Frankfurt, Leipzig , Dresden , Berlin , Heidelberg and so on. Because we have the student card and we can take the free trains in Sachsen state , we always spent our weekend on adventure in Sachsen. Most of the time we had no plan at all, just got on the train and got off anytime as we like. It was an experience we had never tried before. No matter it was a city or a town or maybe just a village, they are Germany . We tried to find some different things about Germany not by traveling to the famous or travel cities. The record was that we had taken more than 10 trains a day. It was a little bit crazy but really interesting.

I also find that German people really love reading. We can see people read on the bus, in the park, in the trains, or just sitting in a chair on the road side. In most of the bus and trains, while we are playing the smart phone , German people choose to read a book. I respect them , literally. I thought that maybe that's the reason why Germany can be a developed country. The residents in Germany keep learning and keep the traditional way of reading. In China, I seldom see the passengers read book in buses or trains, most of them just listen to the music and play the mobile phones. There are even special lights in buses and trains for passengers to read.

Just before I leave Germany and come back to China, I choose Spain as my last journey in Europe . My first destination is Barcelona . It is Spain's second most populated city, with a population of 1.6 million within its administrative limits. The barri goticis the center of the old city of Barcelona. Many of the buildings date from medieval times, some from as far back as the Roman settlement of Barcelona. Catalan architecture , developed between 1885 and 1950 and left an important legacy in Barcelona. Especially remarkable is the

work of architect Antoni Gaudí, which can be seen throughout the city. His best-known work is the immense but still unfinished church of the Sagrada Família, which has been under construction since 1882, and is still financed by private donations. As of 2007, completion is planned for 2026. Barcelona was also home to Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion. Designed in 1929 for the International Exposition for Germany, it is an iconic building that came to symbolize modern architecture as the embodiment of van der Rohe's aphorisms "less is more" and "God is in the details." The Barcelona pavilion was intended as a temporary structure, and was torn down in 1930 less than a year after it was constructed. A modern re-creation by Spanish architects now stands in Barcelona, however, constructed in 1986. Barcelona won the 1999 RIBA Royal Gold Medal for its architecture,[53] the first (and as of 2015, only) time that the winner has been a city, and not an individual architect.

I was born and live in Shanghai in my first eighteen years. Shanghai is a coast city in south China. And my university is in Guangdong which is a province in south China . So I have never lived in a city in the middle of land. I was not used to the weather when I stayed in Chemnitz because it was too cold and too dry, but in Barcelona in Spain, I find it is very similar to Shanghai , both in weather and the city style. I really like here. By the way, although I was not used to the dry weather in Chemnitz, I still was very happy of the winter, especially when it snows. I had never seen snow in my first twenty years . So when I saw the snow, I can't help shouting and jumping. I went out immediately and play with the snow. The second day I went out again and made my first snow man with my friends. The German passed by and watched us with a strange sight hahaha. They must think we are weird. Every time when it snows, it would be my day! I can keep smiling and exciting because of it.

The life in Germany was nice except one point---punctual. People all over the world know that Germany is a country with preciseness and punctual. However, I found that almost every week , teacher would late for class. And besides, the trains were always late too! When I went to Frankfurt, I didn't catch the train from Leipzig

to Frankfurt joust because the train from Chemnitz to Leipzig was late. So we had to wait for almost two hours. But luckily, there were always kind people help us. As for German people, when we talk about them, unfortunately, German people are often considered as rude, cold and humorless. This is quite a stereotype and whether it's true or not you will discover yourself when living in Germany. Nevertheless, there are some personality traits many Germans have in common.

• Efficient and disciplined

German people are hardworking, efficient and disciplined. They think quite practically and try to find a solution for nearly every problem. Therefore, many inventions are made by Germans. What would we do without cars, many car parts or printing? They always want to find the best way to solve the smallest problems and do not give up without a solution.

2. Sense of humor

Do Germans have a sense of humor? Yes, they do. They are not stiff and humorless as people imagine. It is just a different type of humor. They do not like the silly and clownish kind of humor. What Germans appreciate is a more ironic and cynical sort of humor. Especially when it comes to their own stereotypes they can be surprisingly self-ironic. When Germans smile or laugh, it is genuine and they really enjoy the joke or the situation.

3. Well-organised

Germans love to plan things. They plan and plan, and whatever happens they try to stick to their plans. This does not mean that they are not spontaneous. They just have an alternative plan for every possible scenario. This has to do with the fact that they are quite orderly as well. Germans try to keep everything clean and tidy. They like to structure their days well and schedule appointments exactly. This leads us to our fourth point.

4. Punctual

Germans are known for their punctuality. This is not true for everyone of course, but most Germans are very punctual, unless there is a traffic jam, the train is late or something serious has happened. So, if you have a meeting with someone, you should be there at least five minutes earlier, since you do not want to be late. Most Germans get offended when the other person is late.

5. Traditional

Traditions are important in Germany and people strongly hold to traditions. This could be an annual fair celebrated in your town or the monthly get-together with the neighbours, which takes place on a fixed date every month. They do not easily shift from their traditions, even on the personal level. If a German drives a Mercedes, he will do this for his entire life and will normally stick to this brand.

But what German people like in my eyes ? They are warm hearted and nice. I have travelled for a lot, but my poor German can't help me when something emergency happens. For example, once I come back to Chemnitz from Weimar, we were so tired

that we fell asleep in the train. But suddenly, all the people in the train get off at a station. We couldn't understand . But at this time, a nice German girl come to us and told us that the train had to be shortened, so we need to get the former train. How lucky we were! Another example was that when I went to another city and I chose the flibus. But the bus broke down in the halfway. So the German strangers just helped me and took me to the destinations. They knew my German was not so good, they talked in English all the way and I was so touched.

It was with me most of the time, with its counterpart sadness, occasionally jumping in, and leaving shortly. Happiness, it was the first time I said hi to my professor and classmates, standing in front of the class and introducing myself with excitement and nervousness, saying hi to the whole new world and embracing a new fantastic point of view; happiness, it was the time when I tried new things in a new city, a new country and no one to tell me no or where to go, or tell me I am just dreaming, when I overcame new challenges and obstacles, and was still able to smile at myself in the mirror and say you made it; happiness, was one I blew my birthday cake candles, when I opened the Christmas boxes, when I counted three and I saw the shooting stars and I made a wish. Happiness was just everywhere , and I was truly lucky to be able to have it with me. Respect, to me, it is not only the respect to everyone around you, but also the respect to myself. Respect was there when different culture collided and you were still able to find a way and make it merge. Respect was when I could open my heart and truly accept and embrace something I didn't appreciate or recognize or misunderstand in the first place. Respect was all the ideas I received and my growing ability of rationalizing all the information and providing my honest points of view. As for the self respect, it was easier. I tried to do my best in all courses of my exchange time and it paid back. It started from little things like taking care of my laundry and cooking my own dinner. I started to pay more attention to my behavior and tried to be the best that I could be in all manners. I would learn all the etiquette in western dinners. I would research class materials before the class. Respecting yourself is respecting people around you. And I sincerely hope that my friends, my mentors and my parents would be proud of me for all the efforts I have put in to make myself a better person.

The last word would be gratefulness. And it is the one word that I have to say to everyone I met here during the exchange. Everyone I met could have changed my perspective, or at least widened my eyes a little bit. I appreciate all the teachers who encouraged me to share my opinions during the class and let me know that I also had a say. I appreciate all the love from my friends here, without whom it would not be the same. They were everywhere and I would always remember those faces and the German they taught me. I appreciate all the helpers when I was lost on the streets, I appreciate every single day with the comfortable weather, as well as the snowy days when I made my very first snowman. I appreciate everything I encountered and I am more than happier that I made the right decision to visit Chemnitz.