

Exchange Experience Report

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◆ Introduction

Hitherto, I still really appreciate that I decided to become an exchange student in TU-Chemnitz. This is not only because the experience here does not let me down, but also it enriches my mind.

Actually it took me a long time to think about whether I can handle the exchanging life when facing the opportunity to exchange to TU-Chemnitz. I struggled between yes or no until my German teacher she told me "The things that you regret you haven't done usually much more than the things that you regret you have done." So I went straight to what I wanted and tried my best to handle it, and the experience so far proves that my decision is correct and is worth me staying for another 6 months.

◆ Life

(1) From China to Berlin, from Berlin to Leipzig, from Leipzig to Chemnitz, and the life from Chemnitz on-----the steps to be more independent

I still remember how complicated we want to apply a visa to Germany. We prepared every steps of visa by ourselves, such as APS and so on. For ordinary students in China nowadays, it is a “tough” and “boring” task. This is because parents will always prepare all the documents you need and help to complete all the procedure for you. We just need to get a good mark to match the request and then the rest things are all waiting for parents. Sometimes, we are too afraid of complicated things result in we even forget we have already grown up and been an adult. To be much more independent more rich-experienced is one of the reasons that I want to go abroad for temporary studying---to be an exchange student.

Facing and dealing with problem on my own is the process I need to experience. And this time it doesn't let me down even from the beginning. I am the person who is really afraid of complicated official procedure, but for this precious exchange opportunity, I try my best to be patient and careful for each step to study in Germany. I clearly remember how happy and excited I was when my passport with visa was been delivered to me. It is the same as that I knew me myself passed the interview to TU-Chemnitz. First, you give, and then you can gain. After you work hard to give, the time when you gain is much more wonderful.

It is my first time fly to a foreign country without being led. I have already been America before, but that time I was accompanied by 6 teachers and schoolmates and did not need to care about anything about this communication trip but just focus on communicating with American local high school students. However, this time, from Hong Kong Airport to Chemnitz, we manage all the process by ourselves. With excited and worried emotion, we started the trip.

Therefore, after 14 hours, when I could say hello to Berlin, I could not speak out how excited I was. The time and problem would not stop when we had already been in Germany. A tougher thing for us at that moment is how to find the way to arrive in our hotel in such an entirely unfamiliar country. At that time, our German was not as good as when we were ready to pass German exam. Honestly, we even did not open our mouth to speak German with local people and ask them questions in German. What was worse, was that we did not sure how to buy a train ticket in a selling machine and the tickets needed to be valid, if not, we would be fined.

Furthermore, at the same time as we “struggled” to go to the hotel from the airport, it was raining not so slightly in Berlin, and each of us were holding our own luggage with the biggest size. And we were also too stupid to find the elevator in the subway. So everything seemed to be very difficult for us.

Luckily, Berlin did not let us down. This is because we met lots of nice people when we were as new “immigrants” then. At first, we met a gentleman who came to us positively to ask whether we need help, when we were the persons who had a pretty confused face in the subway. He told us the position of the selling

machine and the selling machine which accepted cash and bank card were in different places. And he also advised us to buy how many group tickets and single tickets to save money. At that moment, I was really touched this warm-hearted people and had a great impression of Berlin and also German people. This kind of nice things also happened when I was in Hamburg to spend my Christmas holiday. When my friend Alice and I were confused by the timetable and routes of the bus which were showed on the glass of bus station, an elegant old lady came to us and told us how to read them. After this gentleman, we met a young boy who maybe just 10 years old. He used his not so good English to tell us we need to valid the train tickets and also bravely used his body to stop the train door closing to save time for us to valid the tickets. Because of these two guys, we thought we were already lucky enough and felt how nice German people deeply. However, it was not the end. Do not forget that there were one luggage with biggest size and also other stuffs in everybody's hand, and we were too foolish to find the elevators in subway. So we held our heavy stuffs going upstairs and downstairs by climbing stairs again and again, and it was raining. When we were very painful because of our heavy luggage, two strong men came to us with smile and carried them to the exit for all the girls. I could not express how warm my heart at that moment. Thanks for these gentle people, I got much more confidence that I can start a good new life in Germany.

Because of our good preparation for Berlin and the help from these gentle people, eventually, we were able to live in a comfortable hotel and take a good rest before we left to Chemnitz, and the trip from Berlin to Chemnitz were able to go well as well. In addition to that our buddies so kind that waiting us in Chemnitz central train station to pick us up and lead us to prepare many things in our dormitories. This is the simple description of our trip process from China to Chemnitz. The reason that I remember all the details so clearly, is that it is my first impression of Germany and German----people are nice and gentle, and everything here is in order and have its own timetable which all the people will follow it strictly. And this impression made me much more excited to wait for the life that I would live here as an exchange student.

[Picture 1]:



We were in the airport in Moscow, and waiting for the plane from Moscow to Berlin

[Picture 2]:



The beautiful sky out of the SXF Airport, when we arrived in Berlin

[Picture 3]:



Finally, after more than 20 hours, we could take a rest in a comfortable hotel in Berlin

[Picture 4]:



Berlin Central Train Station

(2) the life in WG (the difference of kitchen things, private room, male-female mixed apartment)

In my university, 4 girls show one room to be the student dormitory, and the dormitory buildings for girl and for boy are separated. At the beginning, I applied for 2-person room previously, but I got an email to inform me there was no more 2-person room, so they put me into 7-person apartment (we called WG in Germany). Therefore, when I was so excited to have my own room in TU-Chemnitz, and nervous to share a dormitory with students from different countries and even they might be male.

I have heard about that western people think highly of personal privacy, so they don't share one room with other people and have their own private place. For them, privacy is much more significant for a person, even if he thinks communication and accompanied by friends are important as well.

At first, what shocked me a lot is the elevator in student dormitory. Before I knew how was my dormitory, I was a little bit sad because I was been arranged to live on the 7th floor. It is the 7th floor in Germany, and this 7th floor means the 8th floor in China. This is because there is no elevator in student dormitory in my university. And I lived on the 6th floor in my university, so I took stairs every day. Especially

when you forget something and hurry to take them, you would be very annoyed by such a lot of steps to climb. Do not forget my “king-size” luggage. I was thinking about how I was able to make it possible to bring my “king-size” luggage to 7th floor by climbing steps. I still remember how excited I was when I told my mother there were elevators in my dormitory.

Communicating with people and ideas sharing both do not give me a lot of cultural shock, but the kitchen in Germany plays the most important role in giving me cultural shock. The first difference, the thing which takes me a long time to get used to is the cooking stove. In China, we have fire but here not. And this “gentle” kind of cooking stove heats up really slow, and cools down slowly as well. Because of this situation, previously, I always make some mistakes when I went to cook something. Besides, the knife is a big problem. The knife we use to cut meat and vegetables is broader than the knife here. Chinese knife is like a rectangle, while German knife is slimmer like a fruit knife in China. I was really annoyed by this slim knife. I felt my physical strength could not become the pressure on the raw materials to cut them into the piece I wanted. Right now, I have already got used to all the different kitchen tools, but I am still missing Chinese cooking style. I think that there is no fire in the cooking stove and no big knife in the kitchen is because that German people think high of the safety. When I complained this to my Czech friend and French friend, they said to meet it was common in Europe and wondered how the knife and cooking stove look like in Asia.

(3) German cultural impression and influence (transportation, office hour, the behavior of knocking table is similar to one of Cantonese custom, people will say hello to each other even they are strangers and it is similar in America---compare with the say hello experience in my daily life, in Abisko and in America, German old ladies usually so elegant, and German old couples are so sweet)

The bus ticket is one thing that I think it is pretty expensive. At least, it is much more expensive than in China. In Chemnitz, a one-trip ticket costs 2 Euro and it only lasts for 1hour, and day-ticket costs 4.2 Euro. While in China, a bus ticket only costs from 1 to 3 RMB which is the same as 5 cent to 10 cent. So before I got my student card and did not know the way to city center, I spent nearly 4 Euro per day for the bus ticket to buy stuffs for my dormitory or deal with the official things. However, the privilege for students is out of my imagination in Germany. With my student card, I can take bus and the train any time and to any place in Sachsen for free.

Another one about bus is the door. In China, we have front door to get on and back door to get off. Everybody needs to obey this rule strictly, but in Germany is not. There are more than 2 doors in a bus and people do not strictly use the front door to get on. You can take the door which is the nearest one to you. Furthermore, sometimes you do not need to show your ticket or student card on the bus or train, because people here choose to believe people and appreciate honest people. You do not need to show any proof when you take something, but there will be some

people to check tickets or identity sometimes. If you were been caught by them that you did not have any ticket or proof, you will have a really “tough” life in Germany, and lost the trust from other people.

Then the rule of office hour also gives me a big shock and even sometimes annoys me. Every place has its own office hour, and all the people think highly of it. Not the same as in China where the office hour is the same every day except weekend, the office hour is different every day, and before you go there, you must search of its office hour. For example, the office hour of the student secretary in TU-Chemnitz is from 08:30 to 11:30 and from 12:30 to 15:00 on Monday, while it is from 08:30 to 11:30 and 12:30 to 17:00 on Thursday.

Knocking table to show appreciation is an entirely special cultural way. German people will knock the table to show their appreciation, for instance that students knock the table after class to express they think the class is great and thank for their teachers. This behavior maybe is exactly different from other countries all around the world. And these days, a lot of Erasmus students go back to their home countries. Before they leave, we often make some jokes of this behavior. For example, now we have already got used to knock table to show appreciation after class, but when we go back to our own university, and after class, maybe only we ourselves knock the table and other students and even the teacher will look at us with a pretty confused face.

However, as for me, a purely Cantonese, I think it is partly similar to a behavior in Canton, China. In Canton, when somebody is adding something drink into your cup, you ought to use your finger to knock on the table to express your appreciation.

Even if I strongly feel myself is an “Ausländerin” in Germany, I am still been touched by the people with “nett” personality. In Germany, when you have an eye contact with someone, you two will smile and say hello to each other, while it is not a common behavior in China. This greeting behavior really make me feel happy and have good mood to continue my day and face everything. I strongly feel this is a process to deliver happiness. The counters always say Hallo and “Schönes Wochenende” or “Schön Tag noch”. I met a German guy whose name is Jonas during my Christmas holiday in Sweden. He is a German from Stuttgart and now he is as an Erasmus student studying physic in Sweden. We acquainted ourselves with each other on the night train from Stockholm to Abisko. And then we enjoyed our trip in Abisko together with other Swedish Erasmus students and went to see polar light together. I remembered when Jonas and I walking on the way to our hostel, two strangers walked to us and then passed by. They were tourists as well. That two people shot a glance at us and then Jonas said hi to them. After they left, I asked Jonas whether he knew them, but surprisedly he said no. he told me he just felt good to say hi to the people we met here because there were not so many people in such a chilly place. I told him that we called this situation as “缘分” (Yuan Fen) in China. And then we two discussed about whether it was destiny that we could meet here and needed to be kind to each other. In China, we called that two strangers meet each other is “缘分” (Yuan

Fen), it has a similar meaning as destiny, but still has a little bit difference. And I am trying my best to find a English word which can match it. So now, we can probably call it “the destiny that ties people together”.

Except for this nice personality, what impress me as well are the old German people. First, I think the old ladies in Germany are really elegant and they still care about their appearance like when they were young. When I go to dm or Kaufhof, there are not a small amount of old ladies go to choose and purchase lipstick, perfume and make-up. They choose them carefully. And they will also shop in the same shop as us and are able to handle lots of dress style. In the street, you can see many well-dressed and elegant old ladies and appreciate how they love themselves. This phenomenon is totally different from China. Most of Chinese old ladies usually take their family as the most important part, and consider that they ought to some dark color clothes and old-fashioned dress. And they will regard the old lady who cares about their appearance as western old ladies as a weird people. In addition to that, old couples always hand in hand in the street. In my opinion, I think this behavior is pretty sweet and romantic. Old couples, they have already accompanied with each other for half of their life, but they still behave like when they were young. It is also different from in China. It is not common or we can say it is special that old couple will be hand in hand walking in the street. They will walk together closely, but not hand in hand. Young valentines’ “hand in hand” or even kiss does not let me touch or feel so romantic, but old couples’ has this effect. This is my will for my future with my husband. And it is also the way I hope Chinese old couple to learn to express their love for their spouse.

(4) The feeling as a foreigner (difference between in Europe and America)

As I mentioned before, I have been America, and because of the experience in USA, I feel differently between when I am in America and I am in Europe. I think European culture is different from American culture and also people, even if as for Asian people especially Chinese, they both are western culture. In America, you will not feel yourself is a foreigner, but in Europe you will, and in Chemnitz ,it is a really strong feeling, because America is a country consists of every kind of races and people, and it has multicultural root, but Europe is not. In Germany, if I could speak German like a native speaker and my nationality was already from China to Germany, but I still have yellow face, black hair and Asian facial characteristic, German people still would not think I am a German as before, but in America is not.

(5) German people’s poker face (the boy we met in Hamburg, The young man I met in Abisko, I am so sensitive about people’s facial expression but it does not work for German people)

I am the person who is so sensitive to people’s facial expression, because I want to know the emotion of the people who I am talking with. However, it does not work

for German people. It is an interesting topic that we always talk about German people. We think poker face is a common and typical German face, especially German young men. They say something without strong facial expression or even they just move their mouth when they speaking. The German young man Jonas I met in Sweden who I have mentioned before has this characteristic as well. And who impress me most by his poker face is a little boy we met in Hamburg. He is a little boy about 7 years old. Other little boys this age are always with a happy or curious face which shows their innocence. On the contrary, this boy sat with his father quietly and with a serious cool face, looking out the window without words. At that moment, I felt that German people's poker face habit may be built up from they are young.

(6) The day with Erasmus students

intensive courses, English of the majority of them is not so good as I imagined, every country have their own language, party and alcohol, cooking with Erasmus girls every Sunday, travelling with them to Munich, Czech, be brave to travel to foreign countries alone, country impression and stereotype such as Russian and Indian, people's opinions to marriage, Learning foreign language----English, German and French (always with Erasmus students and speak English, know few German students deeply, speak German in daily life)

(7) cultural communication with other Asian people especially the people from Japan and Korea

About Spring Festival, Korean people's Chinese name on their identity card, Mid-autumn Festival, how Korean assess their age

(8) the communication of sensitive topic

Racism, the history of Chinese political parties, attitude difference between government and civics when facing relation of other countries, North Korea and South Korea

(9) Christmas experience (Christmas market, similarity between Christmas and Chinese Spring Festival, different celebrating ways between American Christmas and German Christmas)

Christmas market is really similar to Chinese Spring Festival market. Everybody goes to the market and buy something for the Christmas or Spring Festival. Both of them are really important to the people in each country. Spring Festival means New Year starts and people celebrate it to pray for good luck for next year.

(10) Christmas holiday

Christmas songs (The experience about the song "Tannenbaum" in Sweden that I mention in my "Project Management report", Swedish is similar to German, English is really important, auto-machine in Stockholm

◆ Studying

To be honest, this semester I do not do well in my studying. Lots of things I did not get used to and did not know how to do it. I miss much information and resource for studying, like library and tutorial. As for me, this semester is for me to get used to the learning style in TU-Chemnitz, and get all the information I need to prepare well for next semester.

(1) **Set up curriculum and timetable (difference between in China and in Germany)**

Making a schedule by ourselves is free but important in Germany. It is not like in China, the secretary of your major set up the course for you, and you just need to choose different teachers for some of them. You only have few courses that you are able to choose by yourself. Besides, you do not need to choose every course online buy yourself, but in Germany you need to do that. For example, this semester I put almost all my classes on Wednesday (I have 6 classed on Wednesday), and then about two class a day for the rest. From this way I can have more free time to arrange my things.

I think in Germany, it emphasizes independence, being responsible for yourself and self-study. You manage your timetable by yourself and you are responsible for your studying.

(2) **The importance of tutorial**

Another part of studying which is new for me is tutorial. At the beginning, I never thought highly of tutorial. I thought it just a teacher sit in a classroom and wait for students to raise some questions and help them to work them out. When I am in my university, there are few classes like tutorial. Teachers have their own office hour except the class, and we can go to teacher's office or somewhere the teacher tells us before to ask them question or talk with them. In addition to that I did not know clearly what was tutorials, another reason that I missed a great many tutorials of linguistics course was that the time of my French course crash with this tutorial.

After I went to tutorial once, I suddenly realized that I must have missed a lot of knowledge and practice from tutorial. Tutorial is to explain what we have learned in class and to help us to solidify the knowledge we learn from class. It means another class for a course.

Learning from this semester, I know I must think highly of the effect of tutorials and try my best to attend them. This is because if we only rely on what I have heard in class but without after-class studying and tutorials which contains detailed explanation, we are not able to know all the knowledge from this course well and remember them.

(3) **Class attendance (Vorlesung and Seminar)**

It is very interesting that it is not allowed teacher to check the attendance of students here. The first time I heard of it, I was been shocked. I have heard about that in some universities, the teacher do not need to check students' attendance if they do not want to, but teacher is not able to check the attendance is pretty new for me. However, when I think about it deeply, I realize that it is probably because it emphasizes independent studying and personal responsibility to your school work, the same reason as making our own schedule. However, three classes that I applied on OPAL----German, Business English and French, all of them will check the attendance.

In Germany, Vorlesung and Seminar are different. Vorlesung is similar to a lecture, and Seminar is similar to a discussion class. There are less people in a Seminar than in a Vorlesung. Some regular students tell me secretly: you can escape Vorlesung, but do not escape Seminar, because it is much easier to be found that you are absent in a Seminar than in a Vorlesung. Actually, I think attending class is a kind of behavior that we respect the teacher and respect our studying. Though working hard is our personal business, we still need to consider about the feeling of the teacher who uses their heart and spend their precious time to impart their knowledge to us liberally. However, to be honest, sometimes it is tough to attend the morning class starting at 7:30a.m. I dearly hope there will not be any morning class at 7:00a.m for me for next semester any more.

(4) Difficulties in studying

To learn things in English or in German is the toughest thing in my studying. Some courses I am interested in or I want to attend them for transforming the credits to my university, but they are in German. It is tough problem that need me to work hard to improve my German, nobody else can help me in this dilemma. When it comes to have class in English, I think the problem is the term. I always need to translate the terms into Chinese, and then I realize that I am learning about, but it is not always a good way to understand the principle of the knowledge.

(5) Register for exam

It is my first time to know students need to register for the exams. And it cost me a long time to understand and find the right way to register for my exams. Previously, I think it is weird that the students attend this class are not able to attend the exam if they do not register for it, and writing a paper also need to be registered. In China, if you are o the list of the students in this class, absolutely you are able to have the exam without registering. Then, one of my friend tell me this is because you can attend this course to learn the knowledge you want, but you do not need to suffer the pressure from the coming exam if you do not need this credit.

(6) Project management

As for me, to know other countries' culture through the way of party and trip is not only easy but also impressive. If we were just sitting in the class and listened to the presentation of cultural differences, it might be not an interesting way to learn for everybody or to feel the culture deeply. Before attending this project management, I have already heard a lot about German custom and culture, and also something about other countries. For example, German people will knock the table to show their appreciation, for instance that students knock the table after class to express they think the class is great and thank for their teachers. This behavior maybe is exactly different from other countries all around the world. Many things have been kept in my mind, but I think I just get them surfacely on the book or from teachers before I experience them by myself. At the beginning of this class, we used tree diagrams to show the content of German and Chinese culture, and we made lots of brunches.



I think maybe most of us have already forgotten majority of the content we mentioned. However, we all remember what we have done for our Christmas Party and Chinese Evening and how we enjoyed them.

One of the things that I am not satisfied with is that we did not introduce each other in the class at the beginning, and we even do not know where the other students from. This really makes me confused and even don't know our own classmates in this class.

I think we learn a lot about other countries' culture not just in our Christmas party, but more in the procedure that we manage to make the things together. What I have experienced is important, but also what I get and meet after this experience is also significant even more to me. So this is why more experience is good after all. It will enrich your life and your mind. When you meet something in the future, maybe you will analyze the problem deal with the situation in diverse ways.

(7) **Word hard, play hard**

This is the thing I feel most strongly when I get along with foreign students, it is the habit they have and it is also the life principle that I want to follow in my whole life

- a) Focus on their hobbies, they will make their hobbies become one of their advantages or the things they are good at.
- b) In German, students are crazy at playing, but also serious and careful in studying
- c) They do not like to talk about study when they are playing, and also they only focus on studying when they are studying

