

ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY – EXPERIENCE REPORT

Hello, my name is Hoang Anh (Annie). I am a Master's student in Management Science from Goethe University, and I participated in an exchange program at Zhejiang University during my third semester through the QTEM Exchange Program. This period was one of the most memorable chapters of my life and a decision I have never regretted. It encompassed discovering an entirely new culture and studying at a university with outstanding academic quality, ranked 3rd in China and 49th worldwide.

Through this report, I would like to share some of my personal experiences, as well as what you may need to prepare for this journey. This is a long and detailed review, and I hope it can, in some way, narrate the five months that were both incredibly happy and intensely hardworking for me.

Visa and Dormitory

The first essential step was obtaining a student visa. After receiving my Admission Letter from the university, I promptly applied for an X2 student visa through the website of the Chinese Embassy in Frankfurt. The waiting time was relatively short: it took around three days to receive the notification to submit my documents, and another three days to obtain the visa. In total, the entire process took less than one week.

One special aspect of the X2 visa is that it allows only one entry into China and does not permit re-entry. This means that you cannot leave and re-enter China for travel during your stay. After receiving the visa, I also booked my flight tickets. Overall, the administrative procedures were quite straightforward and smooth.

Regarding accommodation, the university offered international students single rooms in the dormitory at a price of approximately 250 euros per month. The application process was simple and non-competitive. Near the dormitory, there is a large canteen and several convenience stores, making daily life very convenient. The dormitory is located about 500 meters from my academic building, so walking to class was quick and easy. The International Administration Office was also very supportive whenever I needed assistance, making the entire preparation phase before arrival extremely smooth.

Academic Program

Now, I would like to provide a more detailed review of the academic experience. There is a common saying that China has one of the most rigorous and competitive education systems, and I truly felt that during my exchange.

Zhejiang University offers a wide range of English-taught programs, including courses in Management, Economics, the PIEGL program (Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Global

Leadership), and GMBA. Each course typically carries 2 credit points in China, equivalent to 4 ECTS in Germany, and is completed within approximately two months.

One distinctive feature of Zhejiang University is that the academic year is divided into an autumn term and a winter term, rather than being combined into a single semester as at Goethe University. As a result, I was able to take more courses, since each course had a shorter duration.

The most significant difference between the education systems in China and Germany lies in the grading structure. In Germany, grades are usually based almost entirely on a final exam or a large project and presentation. In China, however, grades are divided across multiple components: attendance (typically 10–20%), in-class exercises (around 20%), homework assignments (about 30%), group projects (approximately 30%), and individual final essays (around 20%). This means that for each course, students must attend classes regularly, prepare in advance for in-class exercises, continuously complete assignments, work on group projects and presentations, and also submit a final essay. As a result, the workload for each course is extremely heavy.

In terms of teaching quality, one minor drawback is that some instructors' spoken English may not be as fluent as in Europe, which can occasionally make lectures challenging to follow. However, from my personal experience, the courses were highly specialized and very applicable to practical, real-world situations.

To fully maximize my academic experience, I chose to take nine courses simultaneously, in parallel with the QDC Challenge and GBAC, amounting to **40 ECTS** within just under four months. During this time, I worked in nine different groups. In about half of them, I formed teams with other international students, while in the other half, I was the only international student working alongside Chinese classmates.

In my view, the MBA and PIEGL courses offered the highest level of academic depth. I was particularly impressed by the GMBA course **Leadership and Organizational Behavior** and the PIEGL course **Carbon Innovation**, both in terms of class structure and teaching quality. Data-related courses, such as **Data Mining**, were extremely difficult and demanding, but I learned a great deal about machine learning. **Programming for Data Analysis** was mainly suitable for those interested in R programming, **Operations Research** focused on simulation, and **Technology & Innovation** emphasized theoretical frameworks for bringing new technologies to market. Overall, I learned the most through large group projects, especially when working with Chinese students, who are incredibly intelligent and diligent.

Academic and Living Environment

Zhejiang University is one of the largest universities in China, so large that traveling around campus often requires buses, electric bicycles, or even taxis. A wide range of student activities are organized throughout the year, covering academics, culture, and sports.

Personally, I participated in volleyball sessions in the evenings from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., although students can also choose other sports such as badminton, tennis, or basketball.

One particularly unique experience was participating in the Lanxi Provincial Chess Competition together with international students from Zhejiang University. I had the chance to play against primary school students as well as retired elderly participants. This was a very special opportunity to gain insight into traditional Chinese competitions, and I was honored to achieve 5th place overall.

Academically, I also participated in the Zhejiang University Academic Poster Exhibition with a Brazilian classmate. We successfully passed the preliminary round and are currently continuing through the next stages of the process. Our research focused on innovations to reduce electricity consumption in dormitories through smart tracking systems and mobile applications designed to engage students.

In addition, I took part in the International Festival held at the end of 2025, where nearly 30 country booths were set up. These booths showcased national cultures, organized games, and helped participants learn more about different countries around the world.

Travel – Hangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing

Of course, an essential part of studying in a new country is traveling. Hangzhou is one of China's most precious gems, with scenery that feels poetic and serene.

In Hangzhou, West Lake is calm yet lively throughout the year. In the mornings, people stroll along the paths, while in the evenings, visitors gather to watch the sunset reflected on the water. Ancient temples are tucked away behind rows of trees, and the sound of temple bells is enough to slow one's thoughts. Old streets wind around the lake, tea houses open early, and the gentle aroma of Longjing tea lingers in the air. Hangzhou is not noisy, but it is gentle enough to make people want to stay just a little longer.

Leaving behind the tranquility of Hangzhou, I decided to visit Shanghai. My first visit was to witness the semifinals of the League of Legends Worlds 2025, and my second was to fully immerse myself in the city's vibrant energy. Shanghai is a city that never truly sleeps. The Bund shines brightly at night, while the Huangpu River flows quietly between modern skyscrapers and historic architecture. Areas such as Nanxiang, Xintiandi, and the remaining old alleyways offer a slower rhythm of life, where people sit and enjoy freshly steamed xiaolongbao amid soft conversations. Shanghai is both modern and nostalgic, lively, yet still offering moments of stillness where one can pause and watch the city move.

To conclude my relatively short journey in China, I traveled to Beijing, where temperatures had dropped to as low as -10 degrees Celsius. The Forbidden City stands in quiet solemnity beneath the vast sky, each tiled roof carrying the weight of history. The hutongs are deep and narrow; in the mornings, the sound of street vendors drifts through the lanes, and in the afternoons, elderly residents sit at their doorsteps, quietly watching the day pass. Beijing is not as gentle as Hangzhou, nor as glamorous as Shanghai, but it carries a sense of dignity and stillness that instinctively makes people lower their voices.

And Most Precious of All: The People I Met

During my five-month journey in China, it felt as though I lived an entirely new life: Fast-paced, intense, and driven by a deep desire to learn. I met many new people who became part of my small world. We truly found one another and shared countless everyday experiences in this city together. Even though I have since left, the memories and relationships we built will never truly end.

I hope my experiences can serve as a gentle invitation to this university. It is not easy to adapt or open oneself fully, but with effort and perseverance, I believe I managed to do so and gave my very best during these past months.