

## Experience Report from studying at Peking University Autumn 2019 – Spring 2020

Having just finished a bachelor's degree in peace and conflict studies, with mandarin as a minor, I was eager to move to China and develop my mandarin skills with the view to contributing to peaceful future relations between Europe and China. My time at Peking University was unfortunately cut short after my first term as universities halted on-site learning and China closed its borders due to the Covid-19 outbreak, but the language learning continued online.

A language as rich in layers as mandarin is, with single characters having multiple meanings and constant word-play on similar sounding words, is particularly badly suited to being translated in delicate negotiations, as so much of the initial message risks being lost. Thus I believe that, along with both past and future stipend-holders, my efforts to master the language will have a genuine positive impact on Sweden's ability to handle relations with China and I am deeply thankful to the Swedish School in Beijing for supporting such efforts.

Peking University, being not just one of the best universities in China but in the world, attracts many dedicated students from all over the world. This, combined with experienced teachers makes it an ideal place for studying mandarin. There is also a vibrant extracurricular life on offer, with gyms, cinemas, and cultural exhibitions on campus along with sports teams and student associations of all kinds. Living in Beijing, constantly rubbing shoulders (often literally) with the populous locals, visiting historical sites like the Forbidden city or being witness to political events, such as the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the founding of the PRC in 2019, also provides a great opportunity to deepen ones understanding of the country.

Navigating life in China can sometimes be as complex a task as navigating the language. As frustrating as the process of attaining the correct official stamps in order to apply for residence permit or sick leave is; or as confusing as attaining different answers to the same question depending on whom is being asked, and then having to figure out who is the real authority on the question is; these are the experiences which deepened my understanding of how China truly works, the power of stamps and hierarchical authority, and something I would not have been able to learn if not for the opportunity to study on site in China.

Deciding to master the Chinese language is the most immense mission I've set myself, it is challenging, it is time-consuming, but it is also satisfactory when progress can be perceived. Thus I am deeply grateful for the generous stipend I was granted by the Swedish School in Beijing, which allowed me to wholeheartedly focus on the task for a full year straight, notwithstanding the added complexity of the Covid-19 outbreak.

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