

Innovi Management Consultants At PHBS



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Peking University HSBC Business School fosters an environment for entrepreneurship and encourages students to take charge of their commercial lives. A number of PHBS students have created ventures themselves over the course of their studies and have developed them into well run, profitable businesses. One such example is that of Innovi Entrepreneurial Management Consultants, a company founded by students that began their PHBS studies in the Fall semester of 2013. The current partners consist of She YangJie, Yu Jie, Ye MengZhen, Du Yu and Zhang ShuoWen. Finlay Grogan sat down with She Yangjie and Yu Jie to find out more.

Thanks for taking the time to talk to the Nanyan Observer! What do you guys study?

She YangJie: Hi, I'm Troy and I'm a 2nd year Finance and Economics CUHK dual major student from PHBS.

Yu Jie: Hi, I'm Jay and I'm a 2nd year Finance and Economics CUHK dual major student too.

When did you first get the idea of going into business yourself?

SY: I think it was last February when one of my friends asked me to help him on a project because he had just graduated from the University of Oxford. He possessed a technology for wireless charging, for example we wouldn't need a cable to charge our phone as we would just use our WiFi signal. He asked me to think about a product which could incorporate his technology so I talked with my roommates, who are currently my fellow Innovi partners, and we brainstormed to come up with a proposal. My friend found venture capital funding to invest in our project and introduced some of his friends to me to cooperate with.

YJ: I joined Innovi after the initial founding by Shi YingJie and Ye MengZhen.

How many founding partners were there?

SY: There were 5 partners and we currently have 20 employees who are all students from PHBS. We have two colleagues in the USA at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and Princeton University in New Jersey. We don't have any formal international business yet but ongoing cooperation.

Do you think Shenzhen lends itself well to young people creating consulting companies and startups?

SY: Yes, I think so but currently Shenzhen has a lot of entrepreneurs and most importantly Shenzhen is a place that possesses a lot of cheap hardware so many place are engaged in high technology business. In terms of financial resources it is pretty easy to access funding as Shenzhen has over 1000 venture capital firms and also a lot of angel investors so it's a great environment for accessing capital.

In what way does the Peking University brand offer you a competitive advantage?

SY: Well first of all, PHBS is one of the top business schools in China so when we introduce ourselves we always mention that we are from PHBS as the people here have a great reputation. Secondly, all of our employees are students and we are very cheap labour! This is one reason why many startups want to hire us for their business, because we are cheap! Step by step we are gradually increasing our experience.

To what extent do you believe any classes you may have taken at PHBS have aided you in setting up Innovi and your corporate experience so far?

SY: The one course that I think helped me a lot is called Companies and Entrepreneurs instructed by Dean Hai Wen. In that course, Dean Hai invited a lot of very famous entrepreneurs to PHBS to communicate with us and I really learned a lot.

YJ: I found business model and accounting classes to be very useful. The first question we are asked is 'how do we build a business model' followed by 'we don't have accountants' so we need to help our clients build such models and accounting systems.

Innovi offers four key services: Business Planning, Management Consulting, Research and Capital Connection. How did you come to focus on these areas?

SY: At first we only offered one or two services, Business Planning and Management Consulting. However, we found this wasn't enough for servicing startups

since they mostly need capital. We therefore came up with the idea of offering financial advisory services so we could connect startups more closely. If their product isn't perfect they would come to us to hear our ideas and we may introduce them to angel investors. After a period of development, they may want additional rounds of financing. Currently, I believe we lack in the research and capital connection business areas so I think for the next step we will reinforce these.

Have you utilized the PHBS alumni network?

SY: We have used it but not too an extensive level. Actually, some of our clients have been pitched to us from PHBS alumni. Currently, around two of our fifteen clients are from the alumni network. I think over time the effect of the network will become stronger and stronger.

How do you manage your time between school work and Innovi? You must have a hectic schedule!

SY: I believe that as long as we want to do these projects we can make time for them. As PHBS encourages us to start our own companies we believe it is part of the educational experience that can also help future students. If we introduce fellow students to our company we can help them receive exposure to the business world.

Thanks to the staff of Innovi we manage to share the work. During the first six months when we only had five partners, we were suffering since we had too many projects so we were often delayed. Since we have hired more and more employees, our stress levels have decreased. We really want to thank all of our staff for their contribution!

Innovi is growing and growing, do you see this as a project to continue after your graduation?

YJ: I believe that what we are doing is really a platform; we know we are students and we cannot do well in an easy sector. There are many financial advisors in China and right now we cannot compete with them. So now we are focused on building a platform to expose our students to the business world just as YingJie said earlier.

An Innovi empire! You seem to have a particular focus on the Technology, Media and Telecommunications (TMT) sector, is this a sector you particularly enjoying working in?

SY: All of our five partners are very interested in TMT because it represents current high tech firms such as Tencent. We

all have a strong interest in the sector and possess work experience dealing with TMT firms therefore we hope that most of our clients will come from the TMT sector.

When do you envisage you will need to begin hiring employees off campus?

SY: Actually we want to do that now but we have no money! The initial aim of founding Innovi is not to make money but to provide business and startup exposure for the students. When we have them money, we would like to expand and hire some time full time employees off campus alongside angel investors. When we finally introduce some venture capitalists and have some money then we will begin to recruit some full time staff. We really want to invite new students to join us from different schools here at PKUSZ such as STL because we need employees from different backgrounds.

What advice would you give the next generation of PHBS entrepreneurs?

SY: My advice would be: try everything when your opportunity cost is not too high. Currently, we are students so we don't have much to lose. After graduation, when we are working for different companies, if we want to join a startup then we'd have to sacrifice our wages so why not try to have a startup here and try everything. It's better to pick a good direction rather than waste excess effort.

YJ: These days I think too many business school students are focusing on investment banking, they don't see the big picture and in fact in modern China all of these industries are changing. I believe we should focus more on that, Dean Hai encourages us to think bigger and not focus purely on investment banking.

Where can students contact you and find more information?

We have a LinkedIn page where you can find us, search for Innovi Entrepreneurial Management Consultants. We also have a WeChat ID, search for yinnuwei for more details.

Innovi Entrepreneurial Management Consultants have established an outstanding platform for future growth and are an exemplary showcase for both entrepreneurial flair of PKUSZ students and superb environment Shenzhen offers for young people to do business. We wish the partners and employees of Innovi well for their future studies and future success in business.

Reported by Finlay Grogan

The PKU Basketball Association



The Academic year is about to finish and so far we have interviewed associations from different fields on campus. However, they have mostly been academic or career related. Our campus has a wide variety of associations and a lot of them are related to sports. Continuing our series of interviews with the leaders of these different associations, we are going to talk to the President of the Basketball Association, Kang Risheng.

When was the association established?

The PKU Basketball Association was established in 2012 by Chou Changhe. He used to be my classmate in the School of SECE.

Is our Basketball association somehow related or connected to the one at the main campus?

Currently, we don't have much connection with the counterpart association on the main campus, but we have built a strong relationship with the Tsinghua Basketball Association. We help each other out a lot by holding regular basketball competitions and share the costs of related arrangement, referees and share ideas in order to make more students join our competitions. Also, we have arranged a lot of practice games between these two University teams in order to strengthen the communication between the two schools.

What is the main purpose of the association?

First, we try to provide a place where all the interested parties can come and play basketball together according to norms and rules. Secondly, we want people to be more active and take care of their health in a fun and entertaining way and what could be a better way than playing basketball. Thirdly, we create a place where people can get to know different people on campus both within PKU and with other schools. Finally, we strongly believe that by playing basketball people can engage in a team activity which can teach them how to rely on each other and never give up even in the hardest of situations. We think this can be a valuable life lesson.

In your opinion, what makes this association stand out from other sport related associations at PKU?

As basketball is quite physical game, it can make people more competitive and we think it is as valuable to character in sports as in academia or professional career. We think winning is important, but only when it is a fair game with equal rules.

What kind of current or future events are you planning on doing?

Currently we are preparing for the Asian University basketball tournament which will be held in Macau in the beginning of July. We have spent about 20 days on physical training and we are now working on the basketball offence strategy. Recently, we had a practice game with Shenzhen Polytechnic School in Xili in order to gain more experience. Also, in the short run we are planning more practice games with Tsinghua University and hope we can make our school proud.

How often are the practices organised?

We have training 3 times a week and a friendly match on the weekend.

Who can join the association?

As I mentioned before we are very serious about being fair towards everyone so we encourage anyone who loves basketball, doesn't matter the level of your skill, to come and join us.

How big is the management team and how does the association function?

In the Association we have 3 departments: a department arranging competitions, marketing and media department and the executive department. In total there are about 20

of us.

What made you join this particular association?

I was invited by the previous president, Yang Bo, to join the association.

Are you satisfied with what you have accomplished so far?

I think I am. It has been challenging from time to time to make all the arrangements but this has been an incredible experience. I have gained friends for life and shared some of the best moments with them. We are like one big family.

What have you, personally, gained the most from this experience?

A lot of leadership and communication skills both with Chinese students and internationals alike. A lot of friends as I mentioned before and this fantastic experience of improving together with our team and I thank them for relying on me and giving me a chance of being their team captain.

Would you encourage others to join? Why?

I would encourage everyone who has a passion or deep interest for this sport to join us because that is the best motivation. There can be many challenges if you want to play for the PKU team from early morning practices to weekend games and only passion can keep you going in the hardest moments.

What have been the main challenges you have faced?

Time constrains. First of all, we all are students, so studies take a lot of our time. I study robotics and artificial intelligence so it is challenging to balance my time between being in the lab and leading this association. With time, I have learned how to do it and it isn't much of a challenge or pressure anymore.

What is the future for the association? Where do you see it developing in the next few years?

We would like to keep the high quality of our tournaments and maybe organise them more often with more teams involved and start introducing other activities such as a cheerleading, dancing or various basketball skills competitions. Also, we would like to attract more crowds to these events and get more people involved. We hope to keep cooperating with various schools and raise the level of basketball related activities for everyone at PKU.

Reported by Karlis Lubka



Top Traditional Chinese Novels

If you know Chinese well enough, you will probably find that unlike the West, Chinese people always love to pick up the top four of anything instead of the top five or top ten. In the novels category, every Chinese person has been told that there are four top traditional Chinese novels: They are Journey to the West, The Romance of Three Kingdoms, A Dream in Red Mansions, and Outlaws of the Marsh. One thing that should be mentioned is that all of these novels were written long ago, in or before the Qing dynasty (1636-1912).

Among those novels, Journey to the West is probably the most popular among children. The most famous character in China named "Su Wukong" comes from this novel. He is known as the Monkey King, who learns magic and creates a tremendous uproar in the heavens, where the gods live.

As the name goes, the novel tells a journey to the west: A monk from Tang dynasty (618-907) wants to go to west, to learn Buddhist sutras. Along the journey, he saves Sun Wukong, who has been a prisoner under a mountain for five hundred years.

On their way, they meet master of Pigsy and monk Sha and together, are supposed to overcome eighty one obstacles to get sutras. This is a journey worth following and highly recommended by our team.

The Romance of Three Kingdoms is based on the history of the era of the three kingdoms (220-265), namely Wei (220-265), Shu Han (221-263) and Wu (222-280). The novel goes over the division of Han dynasty followed by the unification under the Jin dynasty.

This novel is very interesting as it goes over the politics inside every kingdom as well as their wars. Characters like Zhu Geliang, Liu Bei and Guan Yu are household names in China.

After reading this novel, you will know the history of particular period of China, even though it is not exactly the real one. Most importantly, you will grab a general picture of the traditional Chinese culture and its strategies on the battlefield.

A Dream in Red Mansions, also known as The Story of the Stone, is an "encyclopedia" about the end of Chinese feudal society. It portrays the lives of noble families and love story between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu is the main story line.

The novel specifically covers the prosperity and decline of four noble families, lead by the Jia family.

Last but not least, Outlaws of the Marsh, tells a story about a peasant rebellion in the Song dynasty. The story follows the transformation of one hundred and eight men and women, from Liangshan mountain, from peasants to outlaws and rebels.

These books are very important to every Chinese person. International should definitely consider reading them to understand more about China. It is true that there are so many translation versions, but you can just pick up one. So good luck.

Reported by He Jian



The 2015 PKU's African Community

Africa is known to others as the cradle of humankind where the first hominin fossil was discovered, a continent that is rich with natural resources and has high economic growth potential. Over the years with the rise in influence of the Chinese economy, the Chinese government and some corporations have created multiple ties and expanded within Africa. This further highlights how China is growing in the international realm to become a global economic behemoth. Over the past three years there has been a rise in number of international students' intake by the university (PKUSZ) and we are the first stream with over 5 students from Africa. In total there are eight students from Africa, and we are all studying at the HSBC Business School. Our experiences have been different given our different cultural backgrounds as four are from North Africa; Tunisia and three are from the Southern African states of Namibia and Zimbabwe and one from West Africa; Guinea Conakry.



Safa –Tunisia

Safa Saidani is a full time Management Major whose background is in Finance from IHEC which is the top University in Tunisia. Her high school was completed at the top school in Tunisia; This brief background highlights the quality of the students admitted at Peking University. She chose to major in Management at PKUSZ given its cultural diversity, as she wanted to improve on her soft skills such as leadership and presentation which she feels will give her a competitive advantage as a future job seeker in the global market. Her experience in China has been memorable despite the cultural differences that exist and her belief that life is even more enjoyable when it is full of experiences and feelings has made it easier to embrace the challenges.

Alhassane Bah- Guinea Conakry

Hassan is the Chinese veteran in the whole group. He did his undergraduate in Taiwan and had an exchange stint in Hong-Kong. Over the course of his studies he took some trips into mainland China, hence this experience is one of the many exposures to this beautiful and abundantly rich culture. He finds attending one of China's most prestigious school Peking University; not only a challenge he is fully prepared to take on, but also an opportunity to meet Chinese students from different parts of China and international students. These students are from different cultures all sharing a common goal which is the quest for knowledge. His basic understanding of Mandarin gives him an added advantage of free mobility within the country, without the constant need of having a Chinese friend around to help with the translation. From China he hopes to capitalize on this academic experience and achievement and ultimately build a career for himself when he goes back to his homeland in Africa.



Timotthews Tupombili Shangheta– Namibia

Tim was employed by the Economics department of the Namibian government, and knew to climb up the employment

ladder a Masters in Economics would be essential. Hence his search for the best Chinese University took him to Peking University where despite saying the school content has been quite challenging for some courses, he finds this further enhanced his learning capabilities. His experience in Shenzhen has been amazing as the city is very safe, has a well-developed and efficient transport system and our university has friendly and outgoing people. He was saying one of his biggest surprises was the Chinese barbecue which is different from back home and is very tasty. Coco Park and Shekou are also memorable mentions as they are fun places to hang out and meet people.

Khayem Chemli- Tunisia

Khayem standing at almost 2 metres tall, is a highly creative person who loves singing, playing the violin, piano and so many more instruments. He attended IHEC and majored in Finance. For his masters studies the key words he was looking for was a highly diverse campus in a dynamic economy and that led him to China. He is looking to add Mandarin as his fourth language as well. The reason he diverted to Management was mainly because his past experiences working for various NGO's showed him the importance of strategy formation and leadership for any business model to thrive. So far his experience in China in his own words is '8/10' which is very high in my opinion. He has volunteered for fundraising walks in Hong-Kong and visited Guangzhou, further enhancing his experience of the Chinese culture.



Rasha Attaher- Tunisia

Rasha, Safa and Khayem have been friends since their undergraduate days and coming here together has brought them even more closer. I mean how many close friends can boast and say we share a China experience. She chose to continue on with the finance field and she is a Quantitative Finance major. She said she has 'been having a great time in China so far. Not only am I learning so much, I also met a lot of people from all around the world and made some great friends, both Chinese and internationals. The courses and curriculum fit perfectly with my goals, and would hopefully help me achieve success in the future.'



On a personal note the way we interact together is with a spirit of Ubuntu, where we embrace all humanity without any reference to sex, religion and racial orientation. My Chinese experience has deepened my respect for different cultures and has improved my intercultural communication skills. Being at PKUSZ is an added bonus as we are gaining a qualification that will propel us to greater heights and it is preparing us for international domination. To close off, lest we forget the keys to our future success here is a reminder by quoting Confucius 'the will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential...these are the keys that will unlock the door to your personal excellence.'

Reported by Fortune Sanyanga

For our last edition of this academic year, we take this chance to thank you for your Support & wish you a happy summer :)



South East Asian Trip, PKU's Exchange Community Shares Memories

As many others of our young generation who were brought up as world citizens, exposed every day to the wonders of other cultures and exotic places, a huge passion for travelling grew on me since I was little. However, being young may provide us the time and energy to travel, but not the money to fulfil these dreams.

Nevertheless, the unexpected happen: I was accepted as an Exchange student in China, and a whole new world of possible travels flourished before my eyes. Not just China, but Shenzhen, so close to my dream travel destination – Southeast Asia. And there I was; May 2nd and about to leave to my two-week-on-a-student-budget travel to Cambodia and Vietnam. Most experienced travellers will tell you how unrealistic this is: it's absolutely impossible to truly explore these countries when you're spending one week only in each of them. Well, I will tell you that the perfect trip is what you make of it. If you don't have neither the time nor the money to make the socially acceptable not less than 3 months trip across Southeast Asia, don't give it up. Over the next paragraphs, I will tell you about my dream trip of 2 weeks, and how I made it through the amazing countries of Cambodia and Vietnam; even though I was not able to visit every landmark and must-see-landscape, it was a trip full of difficult choices, counting money and days left in paradise, but a trip which ended up being truly memorable and amazing among great friends and I completely recommend you to do it.

A close encounter with the Khmer brilliance

Some travellers might want to leave the best to the end, but we decided to start big, flying directly to Siem Reap with Air Asia to visit the amazing temples of Angkor. During the Angkorian period, the Khmer empire ruled most of what is now Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, so it seemed appropriate to start our Southeast Asian exploration right at the heart of it. After one day exploring the touristic town of Siem Reap and its street markets, enjoying its delicious gastronomy (I highly recommend this one restaurant on Sivatha Boulevard called "Karo", with astounding local cuisine under 4\$) and relaxing on the pool of our laidback hostel Mad Monkey, we were then ready to rise before dawn and enjoy on of the most dreamlike spectacles of our life.

It wasn't even 5am and the ticket office was already full of eager backpackers impatient to get in. We were part of this crowd; as our tuk tuk driver and guide recommended, we couldn't miss the sunrise behind the exotic lines of Angkor Wat imposing structure. And I'm so glad we followed his suggestion. The sunrise at Angkor Wat was one of the best things I've ever seen in my life. There's nothing as peaceful as sitting in front of the swampy lake among equally mesmerized backpackers and photographers, watching the sky light up, waiting for the sun to come up, to take the picture you've been dreaming of... And when the sun actually comes out, it's so much better than your expectations.



The Restless Search for Paradise on the Beach

Siem Reap has more to offer than just temples. But when you're on a tight budget and especially on a tight schedule, decisions have to be made. As beach lovers, we decided to head to the coast to relax on the islands of Sihanoukville, in south Cambodia. Night buses are definitely an experience. On the map, things don't seem that far away, but when the roads are as bad as you would expect in a third world country, 180km can and will be done in 5 hours. Now imagine doing that on a crowded night bus, where you barely have space to stretch your legs, and the AC breaks down when it's 35°C outside and there are no windows... That is hell.

Sihanoukville, the supposedly crazy coastal village... was a huge disappointment. It sure had nice beaches, but they were just that: nice. Luckily, it was only our way to get to our alleged paradise destination: the beautiful Koh Rong.

20\$ dollars round trip ferry tickets on our hands and we were packed and ready for the wild islands. As the speed boat sailed away from mainland, we saw Koh Rong rising magnificent with its tropical mountains and white sandy beaches, and I could feel myself enter paradise. About 5 minutes before arriving, I started to spot a little village. Koh Toc emerged between the palm trees, and we found the backpackers' Holy Grail. Party at the beach, party on the boats, party in the bungalows, there is life everywhere, all the time. Populated by voluntarily stranded backpackers, some locals, and a lot of cats and dogs, the second biggest island of Cambodia presented itself as heaven on earth for every twenty-something travelling around Asia.

Koh Rong Sanloem or my eternal happy place

9th of May, 9:30 in the morning, and about to leave paradise. You feel like you lose a little bit of yourself on this island and you promise you will be back here, next time with enough money. Note to self, paradise is expensive. As we nostalgically left our sandy beach on the speed boat, I started to miss it already, there where the sand is as white and thin as I've ever seen it, and the hot sea water from the Gulf of Thailand almost burns on your feet when you touch it.

When you enter there you feel like part of a community away from the world. No way of communicating with the outside, you enter a magical atmosphere where you're only allowed sandy and barefoot, with salt on your skin and a smile in your face. There are a lot of amazing bungalows on the beach for around 20-30\$, but as broke backpackers we decided to stay in these beds under mosquito nets for 6\$ a night in an open dorm bungalow, right in front of the beach. We felt safe in paradise and our little community, where we had our full tropical experience in the hot humid air through the night, little water, scheduled electricity, no signal, just the perfect beach, mosquitoes, a lot of free beer and good friends.



There is one clear memory I have from that place that summarizes its essence. After some late night swimming in the ocean and gazing at the stars, I was laying on the perfect beach watching the thunderstorm over our magical Saracen Bay, in finally comfortable temperature, with the stars above me in my really wet and salty dress, my legs covered in mosquito bites, my shoulders sunburned, and my happy eyes contemplating all that wonder that was about to end. It was my last night in Sanloem and I was in for a well-deserved rest at paradise after an exhausting journey. We woke up early that day to chasing the sunset all the way to the other side of the island, facing west. We followed this little path in the dunes, which pointed us to a "Lazy Beach", but guided us through an exciting jungle, with a full orchestra of birds chirping and peeping to the rhythm of the wind on the leaves. The path guided us to an even more remote part of this island: a little beach where the rocks shaped a charming bay, where we swam and tanned until the sunset. However, back in Saracen Bay, that night, I wasn't even tired; I had this indescribable feeling of pure happiness and joy. You know you are in paradise when a place can give such an emotion. You know you're home, and at some point in your life, you will have to return to your happy place.

Road to Vietnam

We drove through the long sun-dried plains, painted with occasional green mountains like tropical islands along the horizon. Everything is somehow orange thanks to the soil's colour here, and the sunlight reflected on the palm trees along the tricky road North is even more beautiful. Before continuing our long way to Ho Chi Minh City, we made a stop at Phnom Penh, where it was nice to finally get a nice room. When your idea of nice accommodation starts to be first without AC, then fans, then walls at all and you still somehow have sand everywhere, having a proper shower and a proper bed can go a long way.

Cambodia truly gained a piece of my heart. From breathtaking natural beauty to an unbelievably relaxing atmosphere, I felt welcome in this country among locals and fellow backpackers, most travelling for months or simply settling down in their favourite Asian spot. It really has to be said how nice Cambodians are – something truly surprising with such a depressing history in this past few years. I always felt like they not only try their best to help you, but they do it in English. Whether they are driving us through ancient temples in a tuk tuk, or selling us a souvenir t-shirt or just lying on the beach next to you, they will put their hands together to say hi in a prayer gesture and smile.

Good morning Vietnam!

Saigon was a nice break from all the adventure. Back in a big city, we had once again access to all that makes us comfortable. There were no more tuk tuks, but normal taxis. We had Asian street food, but also all the western brands. Between the motorbike chaos and the once again greyish sky, we enjoyed our evening in the city walking around downtown, from the reunification palace to the Notre Dame basilica, ending our quick sightseeing on top of the Bitexco Financial Tower. Even though we didn't have enough time to explore it properly, Saigon seemed a vibrant city with a lot to offer and a clear American influence, mixing Asian and western cultures in an exotic way.



Sailing to Halong Bay

We woke up to a rainy and for the first time not so hot morning. We actually forgot how it felt to be under 30 degrees! However, we defied the rain and went on our boat tour around the island all the way to Halong Bay –and the clouds actually gave it a mysterious and wonderful look. Luckily, the storm didn't last long. We spent a superb day on the boat among the crows enjoying the amazing landscape and the wonders of the karst formation. Everything was planned in detail to make this day truly wonderful: we went kayaking through tunnels and caves underneath the karst mountains and chilled and played in-between peaks, we swam and snorkelled in secret and super tiny beaches, we had this amazing Vietnamese lunch on the boat, and we visited the mysterious Monkey Island, where surprisingly we saw no monkeys but we decided to embrace the monkey within us and climbed all the way to the rocky peak which presented us with an amazing view. Ironically, as we were leaving on the boat already, we saw the monkeys finally appear on the beach. Bummer.

Before going back to China with a very expensive night train to Nanning and a fast train to Shenzhen, we decided to have a final stop at Mai Chau, as we didn't have enough time to go Sapa. Although Mai Chau wasn't exactly what we were expecting, it was a nice resting spot in a peaceful valley, where we cycled, we met some locals and we played cards a lot when the heavy rain stopped from exploring.

All in all, we skipped several important must-sees in both countries, half of our time was spent on trains, buses, boats and motorcycles, we arrived absolutely exhausted to campus, but we managed to make our dream trip happen on a student budget – although I have to say it ended up being more expensive than predicted. Nevertheless, I would do it all over again. If you don't have the time to spend months exploring these countries, don't keep yourself from doing in the time that you have. It's tough to choose what to see and what not to see, but either way you won't regret any second spent in this amazing part of the world. I'm certain these two weeks will be one of my most cherished memories when I return back home after my Asian experience!

Reported by Mariana Cirilo Coimbra