FROM BEIJING TO BELGIUM

Marie-Laure Wattier, Service de Génie minier

In the last few years, under the impulse of our Dean Pierre Dehombreux, our Faculty has developed a close relationship with the China University of Mining & Technology, Beijing. Since 2011, several FPMs Units have welcomed Chinese students willing to pursue their education in our country. This year, we greet Zhou Qin and Wang Xiangren in the Mining Engineering Unit, Fu Zihao in the Machine Design and Production Engineering Unit and Wu Sailong in the Theoretical Mechanics, Dynamics and Vibrations Unit. They will all stay for a duration of three months. Here are some of their views on what their stay in Belgium means to them:

**What was most difficult for you when coming to Belgium?**

Group – “We think the language barrier was the most difficult for us when coming to Belgium. We could only speak Chinese and some English. French is indeed a completely new language for us. Here, in Mons, many people speak only French and even simple things like the packaging of most products in the supermarket is written in French! So, we think the language barrier was definitely the most difficult for us.”

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**What did you think you would find here, studying in Belgium? Is it different from what you imagined?**

Group – “We thought that we could learn a new way of thinking. While the language barrier complicates things, we are very happy that we can learn some French, which is a new and beautiful language.”

**What specific technical baggage do you hope to acquire in UMONS that you would not have been able to get in China?**

Group – “The first specific technical baggage that we hope to acquire is the ability to communicate in English - for example with foreign professors, to read foreign literature rapidly and also to write reports in English, which is a difficult but very important skill. The second one is to gain international perspective about our professional field.”

**How do the curriculum here relate to your curriculum in Beijing?**

Group – “In Beijing, the students have a lot of courses each semester. The curriculum is theoretical and basic. The students in Beijing work hard and learn the basic knowledge well. Here, courses are less time-intensive. They are practical and innovative. So, the students here have a lot of free time to do what they like. Practically, they are good at developing new technologies.”

**How does the UMONS campus compare with your campus in Beijing?**

Group – “The architectural style of the UMONS campus is very different from the architectural style of our campus in Beijing. The buildings of UMONS are scattered in the city, while our campus is more concentrated inside Beijing, as there are many universities in the city. In addition, the students of UMONS have more time to participate to club activities than the Chinese students.”

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**How is your relationship with the teachers and professors here in Belgium? Can you describe how it compares with China?**

Group – “We get along with our teachers and professors here really well now. The teacher-student relationship here is more informal than in China. This is because the teacher-student relationship was like the parent-child relationship in ancient China. Therefore, the Chinese teachers are sterner than Belgian teachers.”

**How is it considered for students in China to travel and study in Belgium? What do people think about that initiative?**

Group – “Many people in China encourage the Chinese students to go abroad to study and travel because they think that the exchange students can broaden horizons and acquire knowledge through their study and travel. They also think the exchange students can promote the cultural exchange between two countries. So, they are very happy to hear that more and more Chinese exchange students travel and study in Belgium.”

**Is there something you would like to tell to Belgian students?**

Group – “There are many differences between the Chinese culture and Belgian culture. So, we should keep an open mind to respect each other. Chinese culture has an history of more than 5000 years, the traditional culture is profound and Chinese food is very delicious. Therefore, we hope that more Belgian students can take an interest in our country in the future!”