

Introduction of Major Institutions

Moritz Kuhlmann*

The Beijing Center: Fostering Mutual Understanding between China and the World

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jciea-2022-0001>

Published online May 20, 2022

1 Identity

The Beijing Center (TBC) is a higher education and research institution in Beijing and serves as junction point in China for TBC's global network of partnering universities, academic institutions, and individual scholars. Its mission is to contribute to constructive relationship between China and the world.

2 History

TBC is preparing to celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2023. The Beijing Center was founded in 1998 by Ron Anton who that same year also established Beijing International MBA at Peking University as founding dean. Professor Yang Hengda 杨恒达 from Renmin University served as TBC's first academic director. In the beginning, Beijing Sport University was the home of TBC. Since then, it moved twice, once to Beijing Institute of Technology and in 2002 to its current home, the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE).

The initial mission of TBC was to educate the international academic community about China. Growing from only eight students in 1998, TBC has welcomed more and more international students, at the time of its 10th anniversary admitting 134 students for fall semester 2008. In the undergraduate program it enrolled each semester over 100 students, mainly from US colleges such as Loyola Marymount University and Georgetown University, but also from

***Corresponding author: Moritz Kuhlmann**, University of Munich, The Beijing Center, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China, E-mail: m.kuhlmann@thebeijingcenter.org. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8665-2098>

institutions outside of the US such as Javeriana University in Bogotá, Colombia, offering over 50 different university courses about China annually. It has since continuously adapted to the ever-changing reality of China, lately using the chances COVID-19 provided to turn around its study abroad direction, now hosting Chinese students for a one-year curriculum as preparation to transfer to international partner universities such as Syracuse University, Sewanee University, or Seattle University. Thereby, TBC has shifted its initial approach towards striving for a symmetrical academic exchange between China and the world operating in both directions. Maintaining its mission of being a portal to China for the global academic community, TBC is opening pathways for Chinese students to receive academic education outside of China and serves the academic communities in Beijing.

TBC's mission of cultural engagement and international friendship goes back far beyond its 25-year history as it starts with Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing in 1601, marking the beginning of a period of harmonious encounter between China and the West.

3 Matteo Ricci's Way of Proceeding

TBC stands in continuity with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), journeying on the path which he together with his friend Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633), and many others paved. Two principles characterize the tradition Matteo Ricci stands for: friendship and communication.

Friendship: “Be more ready to understand the other's proposition than to condemn it”. This principle is what made Ricci be ready for intercultural friendship. Until today, he personifies the friendly exchange between China and other cultures. Leaving behind prejudice, assuming positive intention, building constructive relationship, strengthening mutual trust and seeking to become friends—this is the legacy of Matteo Ricci and at the heart of TBC's way of proceeding.

Communication: “Communication lies in interchange between two parties: that is to say in the one's giving and communicating to the other, what he has or out of what he has or can; and so, vice versa, the other to the one.” Based on friendship, collaborative communication is possible: Both sides while acknowledging their differences share what the other side might be lacking—this was Ricci's vision for China-West relationship and TBC continues to work for it.

4 TBC's Contribution to the Academic Community

Since 1998, TBC has been contributing to the global academic community by fostering mutual understanding between China and other cultural environments, focusing on education, research, and cultural exchange.

4.1 Education: Pedagogics of Transformation

- a) Pedagogy. TBC is primarily an institutional educator, offering a holistic pedagogics of transformation by letting anyone who participates in TBC, be it as student, teacher, employee, or supporter, make the transforming experience intercultural encounter provides.
- b) Internationals studying in China. Students of universities outside of China spend up to two semesters at TBC, choose from a broad variety of courses on China and immerse into the Chinese context. Students do not only learn about, but also live among those who vitally typify today's China by sharing their room with a Chinese roommate. TBC's space allows them to be surrounded by a collection of cultural treasures and a carefully designed authentically Chinese room concept. Through excursions along the classic Silk Road in Yunnan, students get in touch with history and diversity in China, and through student life activities such as service learning and credited internships with local enterprises engage in everyday life in Beijing.

Immersion: The interior design of TBC itself teaches about China, integrating a Beijing-style Hutong alley, traditionally fashioned gardens, sections specifically dedicated to China's diverse geography, furniture from Ming and Qing dynasty and a presentation of artifacts ranging from the Warring State period (475 B.C.–221 B.C.) through the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), with representative pieces from the Han (206 B.C.–220), Northern Wei (220–420), Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), Yuan (1271–1368), and Ming (1368–1644). The oldest artifact is a Banpo-type amphora from the Central Yellow River Valley in Shaanxi province, near present-day Xi'an, dating back to the Neolithic Yangshao culture (4800 B.C.–4300 B.C.). Among some of the most noteworthy treasures are an imperial wedding plate created for the Guangxu Emperor's wedding in 1889, a Ming dynasty silk edict scroll from 1522, an exposition of a large variety of early 7th century Tang dynasty pottery figures and a double-fired triple rooster vase which was a gift from the Emperor Guangxu to General Cen Yuying's 岑毓英 (1829–1889) battalion for the successful repression of an 18-year-old rebellion in Dali, Yunnan province, which ended in 1873.

- c) Chinese studying internationally. TBC opens its broad network of worldwide partner universities to Chinese undergraduate students. Before they proceed to their university of choice in the US or Great Britain, they spend up to two semesters at TBC receiving a comprehensive preparation for their international studies on the level of language training, academic credits, and personal growth.
- d) Conferences. Through conferences such as the online published East meets West Talks series, extends its educational outreach to those who cannot locally engage at TBC. The talks bring voices from various backgrounds together covering topics such as ethics in the age of AI, service learning, and ecology.

4.2 Research: Intellectual Hub

TBC provides an intellectual hub for scholars around the world, creating a creative and collaborative research space at the intersection of Chinese and Western cultures. Studying the encounter of Chinese and Western culture in history and present time is the shared goal of all research activities hosted at TBC.

- a) Library. Hosting a substantial and significant English book collection (ca. 30,000 volumes, one of China's largest private English book collections) on China, TBC's Anton Library has much to offer: to Chinese scholars an opportunity to explore Western academic perspective on their own culture; to international scholars a uniquely focused and concise literature body covering all aspects of China; to domestic and international professionals in Beijing a quiet and stimulating study environment; and to specialized scholars a collection of rare books mostly from the 17th century selected to represent the first knowledge of China in the West. These historic volumes have recently been made more easily accessible through the EU financed digital database project GECEM, open to the public since November 2021.

Some of the most intriguing items of the rare books collection are original first edition volumes of Matteo Ricci's *Journal*, the most important work on China in the 17th century, Confucius *Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), the first Confucian Work in a Western language, Mendoza's (1588) and Martini's (1655) writings which count as the first histories of China, Missionary accounts of China ranging from 17th to 19th century, as well as a vast collection of atlases and maps from the 17th and 18th century.

- b) Publications. The Beijing Center Press publishes primary source material about China and the West. Its latest book provides the only English translation, with commentary, of some letters written in China by Matteo Ricci.
- c) Scholars. TBC has been offering research opportunities for individuals in many ways: Scholars from around the world are hosted as researchers in residence, academics working in China spend study periods among TBC's books and data, young students of various universities in Beijing pursue research as interns, professors from China and abroad educate TBC's students and profit from being interconnected.

4.3 Cultural Exchange: China is Our Classroom

Being based in China, TBC serves as a foothold for individuals and institutions outside of China, willing to leave behind presumptions and make first-person experiences of China. TBC's aim is to enable its partners to not only talk about but be in relationship with China and Chinese people—believing this to be key for mutual trust. “China is our classroom” became the motto of a variety of short-term courses:

ChinaContact program designs tailor-fit tours for institutions who want to discover and understand China more deeply. Focused on the group's chosen topic, lectures and sites are selected. Courses from five days to six weeks for academic and professional groups spanning four continents have emerged, touring China on topics such as a one-week “The Business Environment in China Program”, a three-week “Social Work in China Program”, a two-week “Temple Visits Program”, a six week “Chinese Language Study Tour,” or a two-week “Inspire Engineering Trip”.

Career-Ventures and Internship Programs help young professionals to explore Chinese working environment. Since the beginning of the pandemic, these programs are run virtually and hence open unexpected and easily accessible doors to China for people abroad.

5 Invitation for Collaboration

TBC supports researchers whose work contributes to deeper mutual understanding between China and other parts of the world. There are various ways of collaboration and receiving TBC's support, such as: giving access to TBC's academic

network in and outside of China; paving the way for relevant publications in international outlets, including TBC's own publishing program; enabling young academic professionals to gain valuable experience in higher education teaching and research. Individuals and institutions interested in collaborating with TBC are encouraged to get in contact.

How to contact TBC:

E-mail: academics@thebeijingcenter.org

+86 10 8415 8816