Introduction
Tsinghua University is located in Beijing and was founded in 1911, with 55 departments, 3,100 faculty members and over 25,900 students it is considered to be one of China’s most renowned Universities. The International Summer School for Construction is now in its 6th year and is a 9-day intensive programme. It is open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students from around the world who are studying Construction, Engineering or Architecture courses. The prestigious programme is delivered by teaching staff from all corners of the world and each of them has their own specialist interests and subject areas.

I was fortunate to take part in the programme having been successfully won a competition organised by the University of Reading’s School of Construction Management and Engineering. The Tsinghua Summer School was held from the 2-9th of July and involved a brief stopover at Dubai international Airport. Whilst on the flight travelling to China I realised how little I actually knew about the country and more importantly how little I knew about the international construction market in general.
Setting the Scene
The People’s Republic of China is a single-party state and an international powerhouse with a population of over 1.35 billion people and a national GDP of around $8.25 trillion. The construction industry alone in China is recorded to have a conservative output of $1.9 trillion and has been responsible for financing and delivering some extraordinarily interesting and challenging projects in recent years. Examples include:

- The Beijing National stadium (Below at a cost of $423 million),
- The Shanghai world financial centre ($1.2 billion), the three gorges dam ($26 billion)
- The South-North water diversion project (Still under construction but estimated to be delivered at a cost of $62 billion)

Each of the above projects have challenged the way in which construction projects are delivered. In China, there is a growing demand for infrastructure on an unprecedented scale and a real opportunity for new and innovative methods of construction to be put to the test.

Course Content
The students, in common with the lecturers, came from all corners of the globe: the United States of America, the People’s Republic of China, New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, Hong Kong, Venezuela and the United Kingdom, just to name a few. The group comprised a diverse mix of undergraduate, post-graduate and practicing professionals with a mixture of backgrounds, cultures and interests. The typical day was divided into a morning and afternoon session in which modules were delivered by visiting professors. There were three additional trips as part of the programme: the
museum of Beijing, the Temple of Heaven and a visit to a local construction site. The evenings were kept free and there was an additional free day on which to explore the local sights and attractions.

The course covered key subject areas such as; Value management, Construction Contract bidding (A Hong Kong perspective), Corporate Social Responsibility, Build Operate Transfer for Infrastructure projects, Sustainable Construction, International Construction Risk Assessment, ICT support for International Construction projects and Drivers and Issues for Companies operating in the International Construction Market. To receive certification and accreditation for the course, the students had to produce seven short summary articles detailing the key points about the lectures and what you had taken away from the each.

**Highlights**

This experience was incredibly rewarding both academically and on a personal level, there are so many highlights that spring to mind but I would like to share my best, worst and most unforgettable parts of the trip:

The visit to the Great Wall of China - you cannot fully comprehend the sheer scale of the wall until you are standing atop of it; it is epically vast! The actual wall is reported to stretch over 6,000km and is linked with a serious of fortifications of brick and stone stretching from the east-west of China. It stretches as far as the eye can see and then some; the journey along the small portion of the wall at Mutianyu was surprisingly hard work. The sun was unrelenting, the humidity was severe with inclines of 60 degrees plus, and the subsequent effect was a sweaty breathless westerner standing aghast atop the highest point in Mutianyu. They have an old saying in China that you are not a ‘real man’ until you have walked atop the great wall; having ticked that box off the bucket list I can fully appreciate the analogy.

The reward for all the hard work was a speedy toboggan ride down to ground level through the jungle, I’m not sure that a modern attraction could be built on a world heritage site in many other parts of the world but I can vouch that it was a lot of fun.

**Lowlights**

I think the worst experience about the trip was using the squat toilet for the first time, unlike most western toilets there is no toilet to sit on; there’s just an open hole in the ground. I will spare the details but I came out of that cubicle traumatised for life, a sweaty shell of my former self having almost lost a flip flop and thanking the lord that I had some spare tissues on me.
Looking back the most amusing part of the trip to me was hiring bicycles for travelling around campus. The bikes were very basic with the deposit for non-return being £20. My first bicycle was a small black ladies’ model. It had a wonky wheel and brakes that gave you shivers when you put them on and warned everyone on campus that you were arriving.

During my third day riding into campus on this rickety old bike I cycled down a kerb, leading to a spine tingling crunch as my seat snapped backwards and I landed on the bag carrying rack inches above the back wheel. This led to a few giggles from some local Chinese students hearing cursing from a chubby westerner who had just broken his seat. Having had enough of this particular cycle I headed back to the road where we had purchased the bikes from.

I approached the shop in a huff and out came some the proprietor, I showed him the original receipt and demonstrated how the seat had come loose and could be tilted fully in both directions. In response, he just looked confused and pulled out a new seat from the cupboard. As communication was difficult I tried to act out that I wanted to exchange this broken bicycle for a new one. After several exchanges we were clearly getting nowhere. Both parties were getting frustrated with the proprietor repeatedly pointing down the road. Fed up as he retreated back into his little hut, I decided that I would fix the bike myself and set about the task with a few of the tools from the toolbox. Once I was satisfied with my work we exchanged a final look. My protagonist duly spat on the floor as I cycled off into the distance.

Walking along the same road with my friend, but from a different direction he pointed at the shop where we had hired the bikes. To my despair and disbelief it dawned on me that this was a completely different shop to the one where I had tried to return the bike the morning before. Feeling very embarrassed and slowly thinking back through the events of the previous day, it clicked why the guy from the original shop kept pointing along the road; it wasn’t to tell me where to go, it was pointing me in the right direction to the shop where I had actually hired it from. It just goes to show how easily things can be misinterpreted. Thankfully I got myself another cycle (inset) and this one was flawless. I was truly sad to hand it back sat the end of the trip.
Words of Wisdom
The whole experience in Tsinghua has helped to broaden my understanding on the subject of international construction and given me an insight and interest into the global perspective about what is happening in the world outside of the UK. The industry is more competitive than ever before and the big companies are consolidating, diversifying and looking internationally more so than ever before.

The experience to meet and engage with international students from all over the world was so beneficial. It made me realise that we are not isolated in our pursuit for efficiency and improvement in the industry. There are some breath-taking projects under construction on a monumental scale around the globe and never before has international construction been so accessible.

If I had to give one piece of advice to current students then it would be to consider your options when deciding where you want to work in the world. These companies are crying out for bright, talented young professionals and often the opportunities and rewards both on a personal and professional level far outweigh what you would find in the UK.

All that’s left to say is “Good Luck” in your future careers wherever it is you decide to work.