

#### SHARE IN OUR EXPERIENCE

The book “When a Chinese PhD Student Meets a German Supervisor: Tips for PhD Beginners” was not just written for Chinese doctoral students and German supervisors, but also for International Office staff members as well as those who are either curious about Chinese culture or interested in viewing German culture through international eyes.

Since the book’s publication, Keshun and Shuang have received many emails and questions about studying in Germany from readers from around the world. In fact, the book was so popular in the first week it was published that the KOPS website crashed due to the large number of simultaneous download attempts. The Chinese embassy in Germany now sends the book’s KOPS website link to Chinese doctoral students in Germany. Additionally, Keshun was recently interviewed and cited by a US-American journalist who wrote a Career Feature article that was published in the 24 May 2018 edition of the scientific journal Nature. Furthermore, he has been invited to speak as a guest lecturer on the topic of doctoral studies in Germany by several other universities, in both China and abroad.

Keshun and Shuang are both thrilled that their publication has surpassed the 100,000 download milestone so quickly. Why is this book so popular? Thomas Götz believes that the high demand for the book can be explained by its high practical relevance for both doctoral

students and their supervisors: “The book with its straightforward text and fun drawings is not about critiquing culture, but about common and shared challenges, and about how to meet those challenges”. Keshun and Shuang also believe that its popularity can be

traced back to the fact they have made it freely accessible in Konstanz via the university’s open access KOPS server. “It is important for us that everyone can share in our experience”, says Keshun. And this experience includes, of course, his new-found preference for using bullet points.

#### Facts:

- “When a Chinese PhD Student Meets a German Supervisor: Tips for PhD Beginners” written by Chinese early career researchers Keshun Zhang and Shuang Song on the topic of intercultural understanding between Chinese doctoral students and German supervisors
- Book published in Konstanz Online Publication System (KOPS) surpasses 100,000 download milestone – with more downloads than any other publication
- Includes practical tips on how to navigate German academic culture as well as insights into intercultural understanding and open communication
- Target audiences include Chinese doctoral researchers, German doctoral supervisors, International Office staff members as well as anyone curious about Chinese culture or interested in viewing German culture through international eyes



Shuang Song, Keshun Zhang and Thomas Götz

# CHASING LARRY, SERGEY, DRONES & DREAMS

Authors: Michelle Jordan, Max Reinwald, Julian Schuessler, Johannes Zaia

On the golden west coast of the United States of America, just below San Francisco with its famous bay, lies a cloud of intermingled cities - Palo Alto, Mountain View, Santa Clara - that is home to many of the largest and most innovative technology companies in the world. This area, better known as Silicon Valley, received not only its name but also its global importance from those tiny computer processors essentially made of sand. For us, this place used to be something that was far away and out of reach, in every sense - but thanks to the Kilometer1 start-up initiative of the University of Konstanz, we could call this place our home for 10 days.

In late 2017, Kilometer1, which is funded by the State of Baden-Württemberg and active both at the University as well as the University of Applied Sciences in Konstanz, for the first time hosted an idea competition. It asked students to submit a “business model canvas” - essentially a description of the business idea, the problem it solves, the target audience, and its revenue model. The potential reward for this effort? A trip to the Silicon Valley! For us, this was motivation enough to start an exciting process of brainstorming and entrepreneurial thinking.

Every once in a while, we would chat in the office about daily problems we had that seemed solvable using modern technology. One impression that stuck with us was that most people are immensely skilful in at least one area - be it their job or their hobby -, and also are happy to teach these skills, but that this happens all too rarely. For example, Johannes does a lot of photographing, while Max and Julian are just amateurs. Of course, we being friends, it is straightforward for Johannes to teach Max and Julian some basics. But what if Johannes wants to learn how to cook a crème brûlée, and Michelle wants to

start bouldering, but they do not know anyone who knows how to do these things?

The existing approach is to look for clubs or companies that offer courses - easy enough for sports, but already a bit harder for cooking. Furthermore, these always come at a price, both in terms of money and in terms of rigid organisation - sport courses at the university usually start twice a year, so better be quick. At the same time, there are hundreds of people in your city who know how to cook a crème brûlée or to boulder (or both) and are happy to teach it. Existing



With Google’s Chief Innovation Evangelist and Adjunct Professor at Stanford’s Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, Frederik G. Pferdt, who studied in Konstanz and obtained his PhD at the University of Paderborn





Julian Schuessler, Max Reinwald, Michelle Jordan, Johannes Zaia

social networks do little to match these “teachers” to avid learners.

Our business idea, therefore, was to build an online-platform in which users can both offer and ask for expertise in just any subject, on a local scale. Ideally, you just look at an electronic map of your city and see where you can start crème brûlée-ing. This rather technical setup makes up one half of our idea. The other half is the social science bit: Making sure there are enough motivated teachers, and that the encounters we facilitate create great experiences. With Michelle’s research focus on social preferences and Max’s expertise in motivational theories, it was soon clear to us that this requires a credible signal that allows one to showcase his or her engagement on the platform. So just like programmers collect points

and badges on StackExchange, we envisioned everyone to collect points and badges via peer review on our platform.

Remarkable events are stored in the “episodic” part of one’s memory, and since this is what we were aiming for with our idea, we named it Episodic. After scanning the market for similar platforms - none of which is sufficiently similar to our idea - and spelling out some potential revenue streams, we wrote down our idea and submitted it to the idea competition.

This whole process of brainstorming and fleshing out an idea already was extremely satisfying, and encouraged all of us to think more about how entrepreneurship can solve real-world problems. It then came as a huge surprise that we were actually ranked first out of

numerous submissions and would travel to “the Valley” with three other teams and the organisers, Franz Wanner and Christoph Selig.

Our stay in California in early September 2018 turned out to be an unforgettable experience. We met with phenomenally interesting people from the start-up scene - founders, investors, supporting organisations. Whilst enjoying the beautiful weather, we also discovered the campuses of UC Berkeley, Stanford University, Google, and Facebook, as well as the city of San Francisco, Alcatraz Island, the Santa Cruz beach, and the Big Basin National Park. Margaritas and tacos were consumed, too, and we were amazed by the value-for-money that In ‘n’ Out Burger delivers.

It is hard to single out the most

memorable (so to speak: episodic) moments, but among them was certainly meeting with Catalin Voss, a young German inventor and entrepreneur currently pursuing his PhD at Stanford. He casually told us about his work, which includes developing a barcode- and credit-card-scanning technology running on standard smartphones for very small shops in Nigeria, which then transmit the information to central payment services using the SMS network, as mobile data connections may not exist. The same day we also participated in a great workshop at Stanford’s d-school, run by Frederik Pferdt, Chief Innovation Evangelist at Google. He helped us to refine our own business ideas and to sketch an authentic and vibrant PR approach. Andy von Bechtolsheim - co-founder of Sun Microsystems, first investor in Google, and current Forbes list #242 - gave an inspiring presentation on chances and challenges of new technological developments, such as Artificial Intelligence. Finally, we were excited by a super-smooth pitch by one of the heads of Matternet, a start-up whose drones fly medical supplies over Swiss cities.

All in all, we gained the impression that the people we met are extremely motivated to practically solve small and large problems that affect millions and billions of people, and that the Valley indeed offers a unique network for facilitating such endeavours. We met founders that turned down higher funding from other places just to get access to this sphere; and at some point, we understood not to be surprised should

our Uber driver tell us that his son co-founded a multi-billion-dollar business. It has become clear to us that the “model” of Silicon Valley at its current scale is hard to copy - other regions need to find their own niche and approach to become similarly successful.

At the same time, there are certain aspects we certainly would not want to transfer to Europe, such as the striking economic inequality, which can be seen and felt on almost every street. Our aim as a society should be to promote progress for everyone through innovation and freedom. It is evident to us that universities play a crucial role for this, and that people need to think big. We are, therefore, very happy that in 2019

Kilometer1 again offers an idea competition where the prize is a trip to the Valley. Take this as an opportunity to think about solutions for problems that bother you and others, and perhaps you will find yourself at the beach of California in the not too distant future, and, after some time, at the wheel of a great company.



With Andreas von Bechtolsheim, technology entrepreneur and first investor in Google