

## Doing Buddhist/East Asian Studies in France: A Guide.

In January 2020, I received a Canadian fellowship to spend six months in Paris (even though pandemics has it prolonged to 1.5 year), affiliated with École pratique des hautes études. This was not my first time living in France, but I was never here for graduate studies, so right away I felt disoriented in the face of the complicated system of the French higher education: there are many *établissements* (institutions) and their differences are more than just being different universities — they often have different institutional statuses, operating by their own rules, and relating to each other in a complicated bureaucratic network. As for locating resources, there are so many libraries, and each requires a separate library card and has its own database — which ones to use?

In this guide, I want to clarify what has taken me weeks to wrap my mind around. Hopefully the reader of this guide could find their footing in Paris much more swiftly than I did. The guide is primarily for students and researchers in East Asian Studies, especially Buddhist Studies, but could be useful for any foreign researcher coming to France.

Lastly, I want to thank Prof. Costantino Moretti, Prof. Ji Zhe, Dr. Wang Huayan (Cécile) and Prof. Bernard Faure for their suggestions to this guide.

The guide has seven components, including a “Paris Survival Guide” and a fun comparison between the cost of education in France and in North America.

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## 1. Locate Institutions

It is hard to categorize French institutions. For the expedient sake, I grouped them in the following five categories and highlighted the institutions that are the most relevant to the Religious Studies.

### 1.1. 13 Public Universities

In 1970, the once uniform University of Paris was divided to 13 universities. Each inherited a domain of specialty from its mother university and is marked by a number from 1 to 13, in addition to their respective name (e.g., Paris 7 is also known as Paris Diderot).

#### — **Paris 1 and Paris 6 (Sorbonne University)**

The famous Paris-Sorbonne is the main inheritor of the Faculty of Humanities. In 2018, it merged with Paris 6, forming the Sorbonne University.

#### — **Paris 5 and Paris 7 (Paris University)**

Both have strong humanities and East Asian Studies. In 2019, Paris 5 and 7 merged and formed the Paris University — not to be confused with the Paris-Sorbonne or the disintegrated University of Paris.

Due to the two merges above, there are now only 11 public universities, but this change has yet to gain traction in the mind of Parisians.

— **Paris 3 and 4**

are also strong in Humanities. Paris 3 has strong Sanskrit Studies.

## 1.2. Grande École

*Grande école* is often viewed as the counterpart to public universities, despite it also being public and state-owned. The major difference lies rather in that *grande école* has strong autonomy and could devise their own selection process: after French high school students pass the graduation exam *baccalaureate*, they could choose to enter either a public university (or equivalent) or a “preparatory school” (*école préparatoire*) where they spend two years preparing intensively for entering the *grande école*. Each *grande école* has its own selection exam (*concours*). This selective admission is a reason contributing to the ‘elitist’ vibe that is associated with the *Grande écoles*.

Each *grand école* has a *forte* in a particular domain and is originally tasked with training French elites in different skills that are instrumental to the functioning of French society. The *grande école* that is tasked with academic research is the reputable ENS.

— **École normale supérieure (ENS)**

ENS is strong in many science and humanities disciplines, and is perhaps the most prestigious of all *grandes écoles*. It is ranked as the number one Nobel prize producer in the world.

## 1.3. Grand établissement

If *grande école* is for elite undergraduates, then we could say *grand établissement* is for graduate students with an academic bent. In fact, *grand établissement* used to be, and remains so, the default choice for students pursuing a research career. Its “monopoly” on academic training was not loosened until recently when some *grande écoles* also added graduate programs. Given its academic nature, a *grand établissement* usually does not have an undergraduate program.

— **École pratique des hautes études (EPHE)**

EPHE has a wide-ranging curriculum in both Humanities and Sciences but is known especially for its Religious Studies (*sciences des religions*) and history. EPHE only has graduate programs and is the main avenue for the graduate courses on Buddhism.

— **Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO)**

Library: La Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations (BULAC) (see the section 4 “locate libraries”)

Inalco is the main avenue to learn oriental languages. It is common for the students from other universities to attend language courses here. Inalco is a *grand établissement*. As noted earlier, a typical *grand établissement* does not have an undergraduate program, but Inalco does have one, which makes it similar to a *grand école*. Unlike *grand école*, however, it does not have a selective entry exam. But the absence of an entry exam is made up by its competitive examination during the program which yields a high failure rate. The failure rate each year could reach as high as 50% for major languages. It is also a strong research institute with 270 faculties and 300 Ph.D. students.

— **École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)**

EPHESS specializes in social sciences. Some sociologists and anthropologists are interested in the contemporary development of religions in East Asia.

Note: **Université Paris sciences et lettres (PSL)**

You will often see the name of this university, such as in your student/faculty card. It is a collegiate university formed by several universities, formed in 2019 to increase the international visibility of French universities that are often too small to be rated competitively in international rankings.

## 1.4. Research Institutions

In this category, I grouped together institutions with different institutional status but that are alike in their shared emphasis on research (versus teaching).

— **École française d'extrême orient (EFEO)**

Library: Maison de l'Asie

The French School of the Far East is a very important research institute on East Asian Studies. It does not have a regular body of students but does offer courses in collaboration with universities, especially EPHE and EHESS. It gathers some of the best French scholars in the field of Far East Asian Studies (but also Indian Studies despite the “Far East” in the title). To appreciate the weight of the EFEO members, it suffices to recall that both Paul Pelliot and Paul Demiéville started their career in EFEO.

EFEO is particularly strong in archaeology — which is its original *raison-d'être* when it was created in 1898—and philology. Two current EFEO scholars on Chinese Buddhist, Costantino Moretti and Kuo Liying are both philologists working closely with archaeological materials from Dunhuang.

EFEO also hosts a number of productive journals. Buddhist research usually appears in its *Arts Asiatiques*, *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* and *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*.

EFEO is unique among other Asian research institutes in France for it has oversea branches: 18 centres in 12 countries. This international character could be traced back to the origin of EFEO: it was created in Hanoi in 1898 to encourage archaeologists to stay long term in Indochina and to preserve its cultural heritage. After the independence of Vietnam, the headquarter was moved to Paris. This highly international character about EFEO gives it a semi-diplomatic role in addition to being a research institute.

It is located in a building named *Maison de l'Asie* which also houses EFEO's resourceful library (see the section 4 “Locate Libraries”)

— **Collège de France**

Three Institutes: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (IHEC)/ Japonaises (IHEJ)/ Tibétaines (IHET)

Collège de France is the most prestigious academic institution in France, but it is not a college, as its name may imply. Rather, it is a research institute and a sort of honorary academic society that selects a handful of scholars of the highest caliber from each major discipline.

In the field of the Far East Studies, there are currently three scholars: Anne Cheng specializes in the intellectual history of China; Frantz Grenet in the pre-Islamic histories and cultures of Central Asia and Jean-Noël Robert in the philosophy of the Japanese civilisation.

Even though the Collège de France does not operate like a university with a regular body of students, it does offer public courses. Anyone could join the course without registration.

The Far East Studies is further divided into five research centres, respectively on Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian and Tibetan Studies. Its Chinese Studies institute (*Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises*) has many primary and secondary sources (see the section 4 “locate libraries”).

Its library in the Latin Quarter is my favorite study space in Paris.

— **Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS)**

CNRS is the French state research organization. It is among the best research organizations worldwide (e.g., ranked by Scimago Institutions Rankings as the second-best research centre in the world). It operates on research units, commonly referred to as *laboratoire*. See below.

### 1.5. Laboratoire (Research Unit)

CNRS is a French state research organization and consists of numerous “research units” known as *laboratoire*, each of which focuses on a specific domain of study. (Even though the name *laboratoire* sounds scientific, it also applies to Humanities).

A *laboratoire* could operate either directly under the CNRS or under the collaboration between the CNRS and institutions. A *laboratoire* of the latter kind is called *Unité mixte de recherche* (UMR). In a profile of a researcher, he/she would customarily indicate the code of UMR with which he/she is affiliated. A *laboratoire* may be further divided into research groups (*équipes*)

Every French researcher has to be affiliated with a *laboratoire*. When a researcher enters a *laboratoire*, the institution with which the researcher is affiliated would contribute a certain sum of the funding to *laboratoire*; this contribution repeats every year.

— **Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale (CRCAO)**

Philology and archaeology are the two pillars of CRCAO. This penchant has to do with its former role as the centre that specialized in cataloguing and studying Dunhuang materials. The team figured among the most important contributors to Dunhuangology. Its mission was concluded with the publication of its sixth — and the last — catalogue of all Dunhuang materials in France. It has since evolved, under the name of CRCAO, to become a generalist *laboratoire*. But its ancestral concern with archaeology and the Dunhuang Studies persists, with members of its members being Dunhuang specialists. It is currently directed by Sylvie Hureau.

— **L'Institut français de recherche sur l'Asie de l'Est (IFRAE)**

This new *laboratoire* was established in 2019, as the result of the merger of two *laboratoires*. It is not yet well-known due to its young age, but it is, in fact, the biggest research unit of East Asian Studies in France (and perhaps in the world) with 65 lecturers and researchers and more than 90 doctoral students. In addition to size, IFRAE is also the most multidisciplinary *laboratoire* in France for studying East Asia, comprising both traditional disciplines (e.g. philology and history) and such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, literature and economics.

IFRAE has three teams, one of which concerns religions directly — “History and Sociology of Religions in East Asia”. It is not only a hub for studying major religions, but also includes specialists in a wide range of religious traditions such as the historic Manichaeism and various forms of folk religions and new religious movements.

— **Group société religion et laïcité (GSRL)**

GSRL is jointly run by CNRS and EPHE and focuses on the religious issues in the contemporary society. Ji Zhe studies contemporary Buddhism.

— **Chine Corée Japon (CCJ)**

CCJ inherits the tradition of the Annales School and stresses the social history. Even though its members also study ancient East Asia, the majority focus on modern history.

— **L'institut de l'Asie Orientale (IAO)**

Based in Lyon, IAO focuses on the contemporary societies of East Asia. Some members work on contemporary Buddhism.

— **Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale (CRLAO)**

CRLAO focuses on the linguistics of East Asia.

— **Centre d'études Himalayennes (CEH)**

CEH is an intramural *laboratoire* that operates directly under CNRS. Ethnology, geography and agronomy are the team's key disciplines to study the Himalayan regions, including Nepal, India and the Tibetan region.

## 1.6. Others

— **Centre d'études interdisciplinaires sur le Bouddhisme (CEIB)**

CEIB was inaugurated in 2017 and is located in the Inalco, and co-run by the Collège de France and the EPHE. It is the first university centre in France that focuses exclusively on Buddhism.

— **L'Institut d'études bouddhiques (IEB)**

On the mid-way between an academic centre and a practitioner centre, IEB is run by researchers who, apart from scholarly research, also intend to spread Buddhist teachings that are well-informed. It hosts regular courses and conferences.

— **Le Groupement d'intérêt scientifique - Études asiatiques (GIS ASIE)**

GIS ASIE is an academic network that connects Asian Studies researchers from 30 *laboratoires* and 22 institutions. It aims to facilitate dialogues among scholars working on different aspects of Asian Studies.

— **Société Asiatique**

A French learned society dedicated to the study of Asia founded in 1822. Its *Journal asiatique* played an important role in the Asian Studies in France. Its library contains over 100,000 volumes, housed in the storage site of Collège de France outside Paris.

— **Société Européenne pour l'Etude des Civilisations de l'Himalaya et de l'Asie Centrale (SEECHAC)**

SSECHAC aims to diffuse the latest research on Himalayan Studies to the general public and to facilitate the international scholarly exchange.

— **Association pour le rayonnement des cultures himalayennes (ARCH)**

Its main mission is to organize photography and art exhibitions to preserve and promote the knowledge about the Himalayan region.

## 2. Locate Dunhuang Sources

### 2.1. Locations

— Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) \*Richelieu Branch

— Musée Guimet

Dunhuang materials in France are preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in its Richelieu branch (manuscripts) and in the Musée Guimet (arts). The materials are mostly collected in the *fond* (collection) of “Pelliot chinois” and “Pelliot tibétans”, named after its collector Paul Pelliot (1878-1945). Manuscripts in other languages are collected in “Pelliot ouïgour”, “Pelliot sogdien”, “Pelliot sanskrit” and “Pelliot si-hia” (Tangut). Khotanese manuscripts are not grouped separately. For an overview of the Pelliot collection, see Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 153-161. Costantino Moretti offers a course on Dunhuang manuscripts in EPHE each year, which typically involves a field visit.

### 2.2. Online Catalogues

#### 1. International Dunhuang Project (IDP)

This database has digitized a vast collection of Dunhuang manuscripts from around the world. However, for a more user-friendly experience, I suggest using the French database when consulting French Dunhuang manuscripts.

**2. Gallica (Catalog General):** <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

This database encompasses the so-called Catalog General of the entire BnF collection.

**3. Catalog des Archives et Manuscrits:** <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/>

As the name suggests, this catalog specializes in archives and manuscripts. You can directly order manuscripts through it.

### 2.3. Consulting Manuscripts in Person

All Dunhuang manuscripts at the BnF have been digitized, so access to the physical copies requires justification. You must provide sufficient reasons each time you request a manuscript. The procedure for requesting and viewing is as follows:

First, order a ‘research pass’ (*passé de recherche*) online through the library's website. The pass is available in various durations, each with a different cost (e.g., an annual pass costs 50 euros). At this stage, you'll need to provide documentation that proves your qualifications, such as enrollment in a PhD program.

To request a Dunhuang manuscript, you can either order it via the ‘personal space’ in your BnF account or through the Catalog. I personally prefer the latter method. Locate the desired manuscript in the Catalog des Archives et Manuscrits and click ‘reserve.’ You'll need to provide a brief explanation for why you wish to consult this manuscript in person.

Given the particular value of the Dunhuang manuscripts, I would advise writing an email to the director of the Manuscript Room or the keeper of the Dunhuang manuscripts. In this email, briefly introduce yourself and explain your intentions. Their contacts can be obtained in the Manuscript Room.

To view the manuscript, visit the Manuscript Room (Salle des Manuscrits) located on the second floor of the BnF's Richelieu branch.

Lastly, even though the library may not explicitly inform you of this, always wash your hands before handling any manuscripts and exercise the utmost care when handling them.



## 2.4. Cataloguers

[Tibetan]

### **Marcelle Lalou (1890–1967)**

Lalou continued the work started by Jacques Bacot (1877–1965) and completed cataloguing all Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts; see her catalogues in three volumes (1939, 1950, 1961)

### **Wang Yao 王堯:**

Based on the microfilms of the Pelliot collection and on Lalou’s catalogue, Wang made a more detailed catalogue than his French predecessor and has referenced, moreover, the latest scholarship. See *Facang Dunhuang Zangwen wenxian jieti mulu* 法藏敦煌藏文文獻解題目錄 (1999).

However, the microfilms on which this catalogue is based on, turned out to be incomplete, so some important documents need to be looked up in the next catalogue.

### **Ariane Macdonald & Yoshiro Imaeda:**

They jointly published the two-volume *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale* (1978-1979). I cite from Rong Xinjiang: “In Volume 1 the authors selected from the range of P.t.1–990 a number of manuscripts with particular significance for research, such as votive texts and non-canonical texts (e.g. Rāmāyaṇa, *Religious Annals of the Li Country*) and provided high quality photographic plates of these. In Volume 2 they selected from P.t.996–2220 non-Buddhist texts such as secular documents, historical texts, divination manuals (e.g. *Old Tibetan Annals, Old Tibetan Chronicle*, various official and private documents from the Tibetan period and later).”

### **Tsuguhito Takeuchi:**

*Tibetan Documents from Dunhuang Kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the British Library.*

### **Frederick William Thomas (1867-1956):**

Thomas has collected and translated a quasi-exhaustive corpus of Tibetan texts related to Xinjiang, many of which are drawn from the Pelliot collection, notably including the *Religious Annals of the Li Country* (Khotan). See his four-volume *Tibetan literary Texts and Documents concerning Chinese Turkestan* (1935-1963).

### **Jacob Dalton & Sam van Schaik**

The index of their catalogue *Tibetan Tantric Manuscripts from Dunhuang* focuses on Stein collection in London, but it lists the overlapping Tibetan manuscripts in the Pelliot and Stein collection.

### **Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社**

In collaboration with the BNF and the Northwest Minzu University, this Chinese publisher published the *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang Zangwen wenxian* 法國國家圖書館藏敦煌藏文文獻 [Documents Tibétains de Dunhuang conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale de France] (2021), containing 35 volumes.

[Chinese]

### **CNRS Dunhuang Research Team**

Initiated by Paul Demiéville (1894-1979), the team has since published the five volumes of the *Catalogue des manuscrits chinois de Touen-Houang: Fonds Pelliot chinois de la Bibliothèque nationale*.

Volume I (1970): P. 2001-2500, edited by Jacque Gernet (1921-2018) and Wu Chi-yu 吳其昱.

Volume II: still not completed.

Volume III (1983): P.3001–3500, edited by Michel Soyminié (1924-2002) et al.

Volume IV (1991): P.3501–4000, ed. ibid.

Volume V (1995): P.4001–6040, ed., ibid.

Volume VI (2001): This latest volume catalogued the Chinese texts on the verso of Tibetan manuscripts, edited by Francoise Wang-Toutain.

All five volumes could be downloaded on the Gallica database.

### **Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社**

Another collaborative project with the BNF resulted in this 13-volume catalogue containing the manuscript P. 2001-2432 — *Faguo Guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang Xiyu wenxian* 法國國家圖書館藏敦煌西域文獻 [The Dunhuang Manuscripts of the Western Regions Preserved in the French National Library] (1995–2000).

#### **[Tangut]**

### **Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社**

This collaborative project with the BNF focuses on the Tangut manuscripts — the *Faguo guojia tushuguan cang Dunhuang Xixia wen wenxian* 法國國家圖書館藏敦煌西夏文文獻 [Documents XiXia de Dunhuang conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale de France]. See p.23-33 for the list of Tangut texts.

#### **[Inclusive]**

### **Shi Pingting 施萍婷 (Dunhuang Academy)**

*Dunhuang yishu zongmu suoying xinbian* 敦煌遗书总目索引新编 [New Comprehensive Catalogue of Dunhuang Manuscripts]

## **2.5 Secondary Sources on Dunhuang**

The abovementioned catalogues often include a list of secondary literature for every text. Most secondary literature on Dunhuang Studies could be found in the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (IHEC) (see my description above).

Dunhuang scholars who are still active: Jean-Pierre Drège, Francoise Wang-Toutain, Kuo Liying, Costantino Moretti. For their brief introduction, see the excel chart “French Buddhist Scholars”.

## 3. Locate Non-Dunhuang Primary Sources

### 3.1 Tibetan

There are ten sites in Paris containing Tibetan and Tibetological sources. See this [guide](#) made by the librarian Rachel Guidoni. See page 20 for a table listing all the relevant libraries, and their websites and online catalogues). Below I will highlight the three institutions that house the most numerous Tibetan documents.

#### — **Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) \*Richelieu Branch**

Apart from the Dunhuang manuscripts, the BNF also contains a rich reserve of Tibetan sources that are less well-known. For instance:

— Cordier Collection collected by Palmyr Cordier (1871-1914), a doctor in the French colonial medical corps. The collection contains both Sanskrit and Tibetan texts. The collection was [catalogued](#) by himself and the Tibetan texts were [re-catalogued](#) by Jean Filliozat (1906-1982). Recently, Charles Li, the former postdoctoral researcher at the BNF, started a new cataloging effort. I've contributed 12 entries to this initiative, and further contributions are welcome. For more details, visit the project website: [tst-project.github.io](http://tst-project.github.io).

— Foucaux Collection: This collection compiles primary sources and scholarly works associated with Philippe-Édouard Foucaux (1811-1894), the first European professor of Tibetan and the chair of Sanskrit at the Collège de France. His research marked the earliest Western scholarly exploration of Tibetan Buddhism. See Charles Li's article 'The Foucaux Collection at the BnF.'

#### — **Centre de documentation sur l'aire tibétaine (CDAT, École pratique des haute études)**

Closed in 2019, CDAT transferred all its Tibetan collection to Campus Condorcet. The collection contains a photography library, over 3000 monographs in Western languages and over a thousand Tibetan documents, part of which originated from Rolf Stein's collection.

#### — **Institut d'études tibétaines (IET, Collège de France)**

Created in 1974 within the Collège de France by the scholar Rolf Alfred Stein (1911-1999) and currently headed by François Wang-Toutain, IET houses more than 6000 volumes in Tibetan language and has the most complete collection in Europe of *Mirror of Tibet* (Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long), a Tibetan-language newspaper that was published in Kalimpong, India from 1925 to 1963.

### 3.2 Chinese

#### — **Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) \*François-Mitterrand branch**



— **Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (IHEC, Collège de France)**

IHEC is a library of Collège de France. You could use its OMNIA search engine to navigate the catalogue or see the *Catalogue Annoté des Ouvrages Chinois Rare Conservés à l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises du Collège de France* 法蘭西學院漢學研究所藏漢籍善本書目提要. Some notable collections include *Baxun wanshou shengdian tushuo* 八旬萬壽盛典圖說, *Qingdai dianshi cejuan* 清代殿試策卷, and *Nanhuajing* 南華經.

## 4. Locate Secondary Sources/Libraries/Study Space

### Library

You can find most secondary literature on Asian Studies in the following libraries. Each library requires a separate library card.

— **Maison de l'Asie** (of École française d'extrême-orient)

Subscription requires a letter of recommendation from an affiliated faculty.

Online catalogue: <https://catalogue.bulac.fr/>

— **La Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations** (BULAC, INALCO)

(of Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales)

You could easily obtain a library card in the reception.

Online catalogue: <https://catalogue.bulac.fr/> (the same as Maison de l'Asie).

— **Institut des hautes études chinoises** (IHEC, Collège de France)

IHEC was created by the famous Paul Pelliot and Marcel Granet and is currently headed by Marianne Bujard 吕敏. It houses a resourceful library on sinological materials, one of the most resourceful in Europe.

After seven years' closure, the library is finally opened on a new site: 52 rue du Cardinal Lemoine.

Online catalogue: OMNIA (<http://omnia.college-de-france.fr/>)

Subscription requires a letter of recommendation from an affiliated faculty.

If you have any question, you can ask the *documentaliste* Wang Huayan. She is very helpful and ready to help newcomers.

— **Société Asiatique**

It locates also in 52, rue du Cardinal Lemoine and contains over 100, 000 volumes in 54 languages concerning 80 countries. It also has the collection of Paul Demiéville and Jean Filliozat.

### Study Spaces

#### [In Latin Quarter]

1. College de France's library boasts a quaint and classic design and, for some reason, is seldom visited, making it an excellent study space.
2. Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève was designed by the renowned architect Henri Labrouste, who also crafted La Salle Labrouste within the BnF Richelieu. It is cross the street from the Pantheon.

3. Maison de la Recherche – Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 is a huge study space with a lovely courtyard equipped with coffee machines and a free printer.

4. The library at the Institut des hautes études chinoises is recently opened in a stunning historical building.

### **[Outside Latin Quarter]**

1. Bibliothèque National de France, Richelieu

2. Bibliothèque National de France, François Mitterrand

Both national libraries boast stunning interiors and are open seven days a week.

For a more exhaustive list of libraries in Paris, search the document ‘Libraries and Centers of Research in Paris and its Suburbs.’

## **5. Locate Buddhist Scholars**

See [this Excel form](#).

## **6. Living in Paris**

### **Transportation in Paris**

#### **Navigo Metro Card:**

- Options:
- 1) Navigo Liberté: charge by ride at discounted price
  - 2) Navigo Mois: 75.2€ per month for unlimited ride
  - 3) Imaginair R Etudiant: 350€ per year for students

#### **Vélib Bike:**

Public rental bike with stations throughout the city.

37.2€ per year (27.6€ for students) ; 250€ deposit.

#### **Batobus:**

60€ per year for unlimited boat rides (“Bateaux Mouches”) along La Seine.

#### **Second-hand bike**

Try leboncoin.fr, the Craigslist of France

### **Transportation in France**

#### **SNCF:**

National rail company.

#### **Ouigo:**

Low-cost train, a branch of SNCF. Its station is outside Paris, near Disneyland.

#### **Blablacar:**

Carpooling

#### **Blablabus/Flibus**

Bus companies

### **SIM Card**

**Free Mobile** is excellent choice. Two options:

1. 2 euros per month for 50 MB, 2h phone-call and unlimited SMS.

2. 19.99 euros per month for 80 GB and unlimited call and SMS (first year costs only 10.99 euros).

You could travel in more than 70 countries while keeping a decent portion of the services above. Even after I returned to Canada, I decided to keep my French number, because with 20 euros per month, I still have the right to unlimited calls and 25 GB data. As its advertisement say, “Il a Free, il a tout compris”...

### Food

Students and faculties can eat at the university restaurants operated by CROUS, a governmental student service. For students, it is a mere 3.25 euros for a full meal! Near Bibliothèque François Mitterant, CROUS even owned a boat housing a floating restaurants and café!

### Museums

Most museums are free for under 26 years old and/or for students. Some museums, such as La Panthéon needs to see the student visa, so it is helpful to have a copy of it on your phone.

### Entertainment

#### **MK2 Cinema:**

Unlimited pass for under 26 years old for 18€ per month, annual subscription

#### **Onvasortir.fr:**

Events at Paris

#### **Meetup.com:**

Find groups by interest.

### Accommodation

#### **Caisse d'allocations familiales (CAF):**

Students, including international students, can request housing aid from CAF. It covers often half of the rent. You will need your birth certificate, among other documents, for the application.

#### **H-France Forum:**

French academics rent out their properties on this website.

#### **PSL Housing:**

Housing information for students affiliated with one of the partner universities

#### **Cité Universitaire**

A residential area for international students at a beautiful location at the southern edge of Paris.

#### **CROUS Dormitories**

Several locations; competitive price.

### Some Fun Reading about French Culture

1. *Stuff Parisians Like: Discovering the Quoi in the Je Ne Sais Quo* (2011). By Olivier Magny
2. *The Discovery of France* (2007). By Graham Robb.
3. *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong: Why We Love France but Not the French* (2003).  
By Jean Nadeau.
4. *Dawn of the Belle Epoque; and Twilight of the Belle Epoque*. By Mary McAuliffe.
5. My Youtube Channel: Paris is a Book.

## 7. Comparing the Cost of Education in France and in North America

France is a good place to be a student. Among other things, it is surprisingly affordable: low tuition, no textbook fee, housing aid, 3-euro meals, discounts everywhere, vacation voucher, etc. I try not to take too much advantage of the French system, as I am already indebted to Canada's generosity, but I am surprised how readily I could get help as long as I ask.

I want to write a post, detailing some financial perks of being a French student. You may see in it a strange world in which wealth is only marginally related to a rewarding life. In fact, if you have financial difficulty attending a community college in, say, Corpus Christi, Texas, you may find it a much more affordable option attending the University of Sorbonne in Paris. Because while learning is a luxury in the States, it is a basic right in France; and France extends this right to French and foreign students all alike. If you love learning, then this country invites you to reclaim this fundamental right. It does not promise a *vie en rose*, but just gives you what you need so that if learning is what you want, you could have it.

### 1. Tuition:

Most French universities charge only a symbolic fee of a few hundred euros per year (around 200 euros); and this is true for both domestic and international students. Even after the Ministry of Education announced, in 2019, that the international tuition would increase to 2700-3770 euros (for undergraduate and master students), most universities do not dare to increase the tuition. The bellicose French students ensured that. (As an international student, it is very touching to see that French students would protest on our behalf, even if this tuition increase does not really concern them). In my host university, *Ecole pratique des hautes études*, for instance, the fee remains about 200 euros.

To put things into perspective, I would just cite the undergraduate tuition at my home university, the UBC, which charges international students about 42000 Canadian dollars (around 28000 euros) per year — and this is still the fee charged to those studying arts or social work; the tuition could go higher if you choose a more lucrative field. Of course, Canadian students only pay a fraction — say, one-seventh — of the international tuition, but that is still a few thousand euros per year.

American students are less fortunate than their Canadian counterparts. Even the domestic fee in the States could be quite high. Besides, for a private university, the American students pay the same exorbitant fee as the international students.

In addition, the French undergraduate lasts three years, whereas its North American counterpart is four years — therein you have the difference of one year's tuition.

But the French universities lose their financial advantages when it comes to the doctoral program, because even though the tuition is almost non-existent, there is much less scholarship in France than in North America, where Ph.D. students are well fed by the extortive tuition charged to the undergraduates. But in France, the lack of funding seems more of a problem for

the students of Humanities than those of scientific disciplines. In the latter cases, the funding is often required to launch a doctoral project.

Regarding textbooks, a course in France rarely requires one; if a textbook is required, it is usually a negligible sum. This is at least my experience. In the States, I have bought several textbooks that each cost over 100 USD. In other words, I spent more on the textbooks in the States each year than the tuition in France.

## **2. Accommodation**

The CAF (Family Allowances Fund). It is our patron saint who covers a portion of our monthly rent (typically one-third to half of the rent). It is mind-blowing to get a deposit every month in the bank account to help me pay the rent. I decided not to apply to the CAF this year, but in 2015, when I was truly broke in Montpellier, the CAF saved me times and again.

The CROUS, the student-aid organization. It has dormitories all over Paris and charges typically 250-400 euros per month. The dorm room is single, well-located and even spacious. With the benefits of both CAF and CROUS, it is possible to pay less than 200-euro rent per month living in Paris.

If you don't want to live in dormitories, you may still get a perk as a student. For landlords who rent the apartment to students, they get a taxation benefit, which, in turn, means a cheaper rent for us. This is my case. I lived in a studio three minutes' walk from the Cathedral de Notre-Dame and still paid less than an undergraduate dormitory in Vancouver or in Texas.

## **3. Food**

The CROUS owns student restaurants all over Paris that charge 3.25 euros for a full meal (with appetizer, entrée and desert!) During this pandemic period, the price is lowered to 1 euro. Near my old university, Paris 7, the CROUS even bought an entire yacht on the Seine and converted it to a student restaurant and bar.

In North America, on the other hand, living on campus usually comes with an expensive meal plan (in my residence in Vancouver, each dinner costs almost 14 euros; and we have to eat there 20 days a month), which is a reason that many students in North America prefer to eventually live off campus.

## **4. Health Insurance**

Foreign students in France could benefit from the Social Security System free of cost, and could sign up for supplementary insurances at very low costs.

Whereas in my alma mater in the States, the insurance costs 2000 dollars per year. It may sound like a lot, but 2000 dollars is as cheap as the student insurance gets, while in many other universities, it is many times more. In Harvard, for instance, insurance costs more than \$5000. Canadian insurance, on the other hand, is quite affordable. In British Columbia, the monthly fee for international students is 75 CAD (about 50 euros). For the supplementary insurance, the UBC students pay 264 CAD per year (about 180 euros). The coverage rate is also very good in Canada. The first month I arrived in Canada, I had an accident and ended up with a hospital bill



of over 8000 CAD — thankfully, every bit of it was covered. In the States, however, I remember receiving expensive bills even after the insurance coverage.

### **5. Culture, Entertainment and Vacations**

Most museums are free for those under 25 or 26 years old.

You could watch world-class performances in theatre and operas at an incredible reduced price (My ticket cost 25 euros for Opera Bastille, which normally could cost ten times more).

You can watch a film with as low as four euros. An annual subscription gives unlimited access to certain cinemas, and costs 18 euros per month.

If you are under 25, you could get a 200-euro vacation cheque every year from the National Agency for Vacation-Cheques.

And many many more.