

CAMPUS ASIA SOCIAL INNOVATION FORUM 2023 in Singapore

Photo Journal

“What is Social Innovation?” – As I embarked on my 5-month study abroad at NTU, Singapore, in August of 2022 through the CAMPUS Asia Program, I asked myself this exact question. As a math major at Waseda University’s School of Fundamental Science and Engineering, I had been training my mind to solve issues logically – the “how” if you will. However, what I lacked in my college education was the “why”. There was so much that I didn’t know about the world we live in, and I took my study abroad as an opportunity to experience anything and everything that came my way.

My time at NTU as an exchange student was unforgettable. Firstly, Singapore, as a country, was an ideal location that incorporated different technologies and innovations. Singapore adopted a cashless society extremely efficiently, incorporating QR codes for payment. Furthermore, the country and the university both embodied diversity and inclusivity through classes. Lots more women were seen in STEM classes and professors made a clear effort to group people of different backgrounds, genders, cultures, and religions and foster a colorful and fruitful discussion among students.

However, the motivation of the program still felt incomplete after the study abroad. What were we to do with the experiences we had gained? How do we share this experience with the rest of our peers and, correspondingly build from it? To this, the CAMPUS Asia program brought to us the Social Innovation Forum.



The Social innovation Forum is a four-day cultural experience where students from all the participating universities of the CAMPUS Asia program come together to discuss and create positive changes to the social issues of current diverse societies. The participating universities were Korea University, Nanyang Technological University, Peking University, and Waseda University. And what a place to celebrate the diversity and culture in all of Asia than in Singapore, the crossroads of Asia.

SOCIETY, CULTURE, HERITAGE

During my time as an exchange student, I had a taxi driver show me and explain to me what makes Singapore special – the people and their cooperation. Singapore’s population is 74.3%

Chinese, 13.5% Malay, 9% Indians, and 3.2% other ethnicities. On a surface level, the peace and safety that Singapore guarantees in its diverse population through the general mindset of people is astounding. However, there ARE legal rules to make sure that this “peace” remains. HDB have a quota for people of a certain ethnicity. Moreover, each ethnicity group has a designated area for themselves. During the forum, we had the opportunity to visit these unique cultural hubs and really witness each culture in a “diverse” setting. On the more traditional side, we visited Peranakan houses/Katong, Kampong Glam, Haji Lane, China Town, and Little India.



Peranakan houses/Katong: Super picturesque houses that made me wonder – “hmm... I wonder what the inside looks like.”



Kampong Glam: There’s so much about Malay culture that I don’t know. Lots to learn in Singapore, but next time, maybe I’ll just take a bus to Johor Bahru 😊.



Haji Lane: All I can say is WOW. The architecture is magnificent. It's a world of its own and everyone needs to go here!

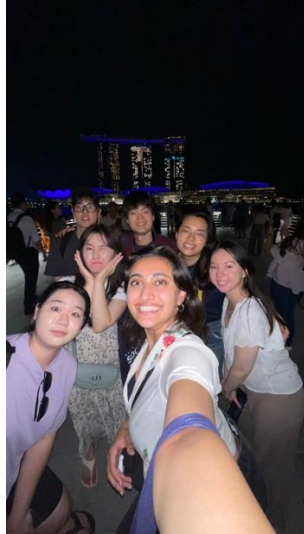
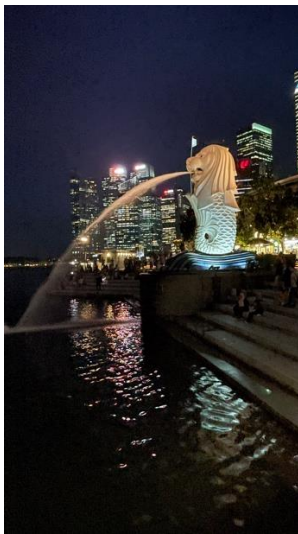


Chinatown: A different vibe from the Chinatown in Japan. Somehow felt closer to my impression of China!



Little India: Please enjoy the pictures from Diwali last year. It shocked me how much I felt like I was back in India. The lights, the noise, the shops, are all just perfect!

On the more modern side, we visited Raffles and Orchard. Singapore's brand image – the Merlion and the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) – view are all contained within Raffles.



I was told that the Japanese are obsessed with the Merlion. Can't blame them – a lion and a mermaid?!?! Also, a trip to Singapore without seeing MBS isn't a trip at all. Orchard highly reminds me of Ginza and Omotesando in Japan. So many high-end shops and stylish people. We see the influences of Japan in malls like Takashimaya – I can confirm it's also boujee-looking there as it is here.

NEW FRIENDS, COOPERATION, CONVERSATION

The relations between East Asian countries have long been characterized by ambiguity, and it is no secret that tensions often run high. However, it was precisely because of this uncertain climate that the aim of our program became even more necessary for the next generation of collaborators. At Waseda University, we had a diverse group of international students, while Korea and Peking universities had a larger number of students who were ethnically Korean and Chinese respectively. To ensure a balanced representation, we were grouped in a way that each team consisted of members from each country and university. One of the most significant aspects of this program was the series of discussions we engaged in. Each professor gave a thought-provoking lecture on various topics, including violence, peace, security, religion, and game theory, followed by challenging questions. These discussions touched on sensitive and contentious issues, such as US-China relations, religion, cultural and structural violence, and the impacts of globalization, deglobalization, and wealth disparities. We not only shared our perspectives but also learned extensively from one another. Moreover, through these intense conversations, we forged unique friendships that were built on understanding and accepting our differences. These discussions extended beyond the confines of the classroom, as we freely engaged in conversations on different topics during our free time, discussing both our common interests and more profound matters. I am eternally grateful for the friends I made during this experience and hope that our paths will cross again in the future. As someone who studied in an international school in Japan, where we all came from multicultural backgrounds, this experience was distinct. Here, individuals were deeply rooted in their respective countries and cultures yet remained open to hearing and learning from others' opinions and stories. I firmly believe that cooperation and conversation are the keys to collaboration and fostering a positive future.



Some snap shots from Lecture Day!!

FOOD, FOOD, FOOD

No trip and cultural exchange is complete without food. And trust me, NTU made sure we had plenty of food to fill our souls and bellies for many days to come. Along with a HUGE buffet for lunch, NTU gave us the local experiences of a Nasi Lemak breakfast, and a Thai-Indo Lunch, and a Laksa Dinner.



If the coconut cream with the short noodles that make up the Laksa wasn't enough, the restaurant we went to, Katong Laksa, was Gordon Ramsay approved. If you ever find yourself lost in the Peranakan houses in Katong, do try their local delicacy as well.



Although I can't speak for the taste of the Nasi Lemak as a vegetarian, I did get to understand the breakfast "culture" of the Singaporeans – going to a local Hawker center early in the morning to but some yummy, yummy food! Don't worry, I had Kaya toast, which was too good!

During our heritage tour, we were also able to explore various drinks and deserts. The Teh Tarik, a southeast-Asian drink we drank in haji lane was the creamiest milk tea I've ever had. As a self-proclaimed chai-specialist, I have given the Teh Tarik the seal of approval! Furthermore, we also had Casava, a Thai desert with a potato-like texture! Truly ambrosial!



Other than these local experiences NTU kindly gifted us with, from my exchange at NTU, I was aching to go back to HOT HIDEOUT. On Saturday night, we treated ourselves to the spiciest and most mouthwatering dry MALA with potato crisps at Hot hideout. For those new to the “MALA LIFE”, Mala is noodles where you can pick your own condiments and spice level. Sweating through the heat, humidity, and the spice was worth it!

Social innovation is a hands-on lifestyle that requires individuals to be open to experiencing different cultures and engaging with diverse people. It is through this immersion that one gains a deep understanding of the issues at hand and can innovate and find solutions. Campus Asia has provided me with the perfect platform to embrace this lifestyle. Not only have I learned about diversity, but I have also had numerous opportunities to expand my horizons and broaden my perspective. Regardless of one's major or background, Campus Asia is dedicated to enhancing worldly awareness. In other words, CAMPUS Asia has taught me that two disciplines of engineering and social sciences come hand-in-hand to develop soft skills and create a foundation for innovation that the growth of societies relies on; Where my major taught be the “how”, CAMPUS Asia taught me the why. It is easy to get caught up in our own lives, but programs like this allow us to see the bigger picture and realize how experience can inspire action. Moving forward, I hope to leverage the knowledge and experiences gained from Campus Asia to shape my future endeavours, whatever they might be. In other words, I'm out to discover the “what”!