

CAMPUS Asia Study Abroad Experience at Korea University

Introduction

First of all, I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the CAMPUS Asia Program and to study at Korea University. Every experience during my time abroad became a valuable part of my life.

In 2024, I studied at Korea University for one year (From March to December). My interest in the CAMPUS Asia Program was sparked by a question I received during the summer of 2023 when I was volunteering at a language school in Los Angeles, for one month. At that time, some of the students at the language school asked me a question about "Asia." However, I couldn't answer at all. Despite living in Japan, which is part of Asia, I realized how narrow my perspective was when asked about Asia as a whole. I felt embarrassed by my inability to answer the question. This experience made me interested in learning more about the social issues, cultures, and customs of Asian countries, as well as the similarities and differences between them and Japan. As long as I live in Japan, the international news and information I watch and listen in daily life can sometimes be biased. Therefore, I developed a strong desire to see and experience

things with my own eyes to gain a deeper understanding. This is why I decided to apply for this program.

The social issues in Asia I was aware of prior to study abroad

Before studying abroad in Korea, the social issues I was particularly focused on were the aging population and the disparity problem in both Korea and Japan. I believe that the rapid aging of society and the widening inequality are significant issues that will have a major impact on the future economic and social security systems in both countries. I wanted to understand what lies behind these issues, what the main causes are, whether the causes are the same in both Korea and Japan or differ, and if so, how and in what ways. I was also interested in learning how the social backgrounds of each country have influenced these problems, as well as whether there are any concrete measures to ease these challenges.

What I learned/discovered regarding the social issues I mentioned above

Through attending classes and having discussions with my Korean friends, I was able to learn both similarities and differences regarding the social issues that I

mentioned above. In both Korea and Japan, the causes of the serious aging population and low birth rate issues are largely related to the increase in life expectancy and the decline in birth rates. Korea's birth rate is lower than Japan's. One of the specific reasons for this difference is that the length of the education period tends to be longer in Korea compared to Japan (Due to the high rate of university and technical college enrollment, the presence of mandatory military service, as well as different timings for starting job hunting). As a result, people start working later, which contributes to the trend of later marriages. Additionally, the high cost of education for children (Korea is globally known for its significant private education expenses per child) is another key difference I learned about. In South Korea, intense competition in education, which is more deeply rooted in society than in Japan, has a significant impact and burden on the younger generation. I also learned that the high cost of education is one of the causes of the growing inequality in society. Wealthy families have access to better educational opportunities, which leads to a generational divide in wealth and education through this inequality. I think this is a common issue in Japan as well. Additionally, when focusing on the disparity between urban and rural areas, I discovered that Korea's urbanization is heavily centered around Seoul. Economic activities are concentrated in Seoul and its surrounding areas, creating a noticeable economic disparity between urban and rural

areas. In rural areas, employment opportunities are limited, leading to population outflow and stagnation in the local economy.

The social issues I mentioned are just examples of the many social problems in Asian countries. However, I have come to understand that in both Korea and Japan, various factors are intertwined, making it difficult to find short-term solutions.

How the participation in CAMPUS Asia will contribute to my future career

By participating in the CAMPUS Asia Program, I had the chance to meet many students from around the world, regardless of nationality, and have cultural exchanges. The relationships I built during my study abroad are precious to me. Every single moment was a valuable learning experience. I believe I was able to gain knowledge, experiences, and memories that cannot be obtained just by watching the news or reading newspapers. It was a year in which I was exposed to different cultures and ways of thinking, which broadened my perspective on the world. I believe I have developed a more flexible way of thinking and a broader perspective. I am confident that the experience I gained through the CAMPUS Asia Program will greatly benefit my future career. In the future, I hope to contribute to the creation of a better future and society

for Asian countries.

I would like to appreciate the professors and staff at Korea University and Waseda University, as well as all those involved in the CAMPUS Asia Program.

Memories in Korea





