

CAMPUS Asia Study Abroad Photo Journal: Dialogue Among the International Camps

2024 Fall Semester at Peking University (PKU)

The program I participated in ran from September 2024 to January 2025. I stayed in Beijing for almost five months. Looking back then, it was an exploration of a new land that I initially assumed to know a part of but in the end, had not grasped. I would like to write down my experience here for further candidates to understand better about this program and to report what I gained through the stay.

The memorable moments started from the airplane window view, which was the far-reaching cityscape of Beijing. The city was covered by slightly murky air, blurring the distance. The roads crossed the earth, with a vivid contrast of green and white, explaining the large scale of urban planning. In Beijing, the streets were wide and so were the buildings and city. I sensed the aura of the nation partially for the first time.

When I arrived in Beijing, I had a resolution in my mind, to see how the conceptualization of the national power takes place, which is a so-called “mirage” or “civilizational imagination”. In my view, such a conceptualization partially lies in any discursive conflicts among international camps. I later learned that it was an optimistic attempt based on a naïve assumption. The time in Beijing shed light on many details, fragments of the thick intersecting contexts that I overlooked before my arrival.

In this report, I will focus on three aspects of this stay: 1) extracurricular activities, 2) domestic trips around the Republic, and 3) academic discussions at PKU. The stay at PKU connected me with people and provided activities. It includes those on campus and those introduced through people. PKU’s cooperative organizations, in this case, the Maotai Group and the Tangshan local government, sponsored free trips, while I visited other regions to see my friends by myself.

I appreciate the opportunity given to me, by the financial support of JASSO and China Scholarship Council, and the dedicated support of the people at Waseda and PKU. I also deeply appreciate the sincere faculties for their time and my friends for the fruitful exchange.



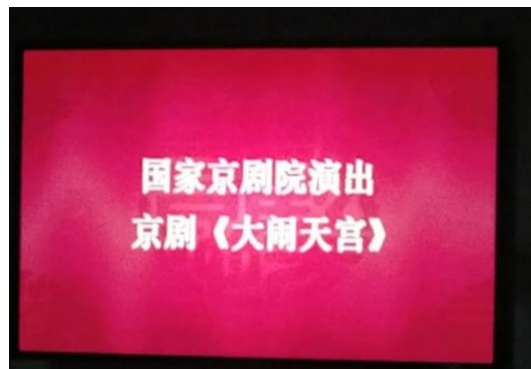
The West Gate (the left) and the Library of PKU (the right) taken by the writer

The Extracurricular Activities

I did not join any on-campus clubs, so most of my extracurricular activities are personal. There are too many to list here, so I would like to introduce particularly memorable examples: theater-going and external communities for Chinese language learning. The performances brought by PKU's affiliation with a number of drama schools and the locality of Beijing led me to touch on its cultural depth. The Beijing subway plays a promotion of intangible cultural heritages, and often elements of Peking Opera can be observed. As Beijing is the birthplace of Peking Opera, various performances were available. Yet, on campus, performances other than Peking Opera actively took place during my stay. From September to October, the school auditorium offered some performances of *kunqu* (昆曲), and later November, it offered a Chinese choreodrama, categorized into *wuju* (舞剧), which cooperated ballet movements into ancient classic narrative. I felt that the geography of the performances in certain places reflects upon the broader contexts of the artworks. The flexibility of choreography in *wuju* especially showed that cultural inheritance had changed through the transformation of modernization.



The Performances of Kunqu on Campus



The Chinese Choreodrama (the left) and a Play of Peking Opera (the right)

The connection with a person in a classroom allowed me to acquaint myself with some outer communities. Indeed, I was introduced to an outside Chinese language learning group

through a connection with a classmate. Many expatriates participated, and because of that relationship, some Chinese organizations were involved. One day, I received an invitation through the community to visit one of the factories of Jingdong Group, which is a leading domestic logistics company. It was the fruit of the Republic's development in recent decades, such as the development of AI and platform economy. Memorably, when the staff presented their strategy and technical reforms the company experienced, they oozed goodwill and self-pride toward their users. I wondered what the terms “development” and “modernization” mean for workers like them and foreigners like me.



The Entrance of Jingdong Factory in Beijing

The Domestic Trips

Before my visa expired, I had been around Beijing and many other places. In the end, I visited six regions besides Beijing on school trips and personal trips. After visiting six places, my Chinese had improved to the point where I could converse with the locals. By then, I was finally able to sense Beijing's uniqueness: the way people spoke, the flavors of their food, the design of the city, the supervision of public discipline, and so on. Initially, I had hoped to see many aspects of the Republic's development trajectory by traveling around the various regions. Ultimately, however, I was overwhelmed by the geographic scale and diversity of the Republic.

It seemed to be hardly possible to speak a particular perception of “China”. I gradually learned that perceptions toward the Republic I held before this program were shallow and too homogeneous or fragmentized, and I started to wonder if there was a way to narrate this country in a comprehensive way. The problem there was my original goal. Where do the discourses or narratives surrounding the international power of the republic emerge, as they often do between

conflicts in the international camp? On what international and social differences and phenomena are they based? What is their nature and how does it operate?



Maotai, Guizhou (the top on the left), Fengnan Hetou Old Street, Tangshan (the middle on the left), Ancient Town of Mount Hui, Wuxi (the bottom on the left), The Forbidden City, Beijing (the top on the right), The Bund, Shanghai (the bottom on the right)

Academic Discussion

The discussions in a classroom inspired me quite a lot, and at the end of the day, I used the time for reflection to sort out ideas in my mind. I mainly took courses in Marxist-Leninist Thought and diplomacy. It turned out that Marxian Thought and the diplomatic strategy of the Republic both included the national image transmitted abroad and prevailed domestically. In terms of the political direction at least, the discipline elements of the nation contained in a classroom had a force of

unification. In those classrooms, I felt a sense of familiarity partially in keeping with my perception of the Republic I had in Japan. Many of such doctrines spoke of the Republic representing their nation. At the same time, however, I felt conflict within them. Such a creation of discourse seemed variable rather than consistently unchangeable. And many discursive factions are always at play. The discursive national power conflict between international camps could perhaps be interpreted as a phenomenon of intersecting processes.

I am still in the middle of my contemplation, so I would like to avoid making definitive conclusions here. What I sensed during my stay was that, paradoxically, five months is too short a time to know something. It could be said that I saw what I need to observe in the future.

For Further Dialogue

I am proud to have spent five months in Beijing in such a wonderful learning environment. I have decided to go to graduate school to continue my contemplation described above. In practical terms, the more detailed my problem viewpoint was through the stay, the easier it was to write statements for graduate school applications. This experience also allowed me to clearly demonstrate my enthusiasm to others. It was meaningful to actually grab the opportunity and take action. As a result, the path to graduate school was opened. Nevertheless, what has been most beneficial for me is that I could question my previous frame of mind. This program showed me the complexities of understanding the other side in a dialogue.

Finally, I would like to note that the title of this program starts as follows: “The Social Innovation Program for Promoting Dialogue of Civilizations”. I hope that this report will help the readers who have read it to the end to participate in the program in their own way.