

## Field Study in Seoul – CAMPUS Asia Program: A Reflection on Social Innovation and Cross-Cultural Exchange

I am truly honored to have participated in the CAMPUS Asia field study in Seoul as a student from Waseda University's School of Social Sciences. This study trip, filled with rich academic discussions and engaging interactions, has offered me a unique perspective on both South Korea and East Asia, greatly enhancing my understanding of key themes such as international relations, cross-cultural exchange, and political economy.



While I had previously visited South Korea as a tourist, my experience this time was vastly different. As I immersed myself in the academic environment, I found myself observing Seoul not just as a tourist, but as a student, engaging deeply with the local culture and people. The program's comprehensive schedule included exchanges with students at Korea University, discussions with the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), and insightful visits to the Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency. These opportunities allowed me to learn from various professionals, scholars, and fellow students from across East Asia.

The theme of social innovation was central to our discussions, and as a student from Waseda University, an institution known for its interdisciplinary approach and commitment to social innovation, I found this especially fitting. Social innovation, in my view, goes beyond a mere abstract concept—it represents a response to global challenges such as the



United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. This was evident in the various academic sessions and hands-on discussions we had throughout the trip.



One of the most stimulating parts of our visit was the lecture by Woochang Kang from Korea University's Department of Political Economy. His insights into youth political participation in South Korea, particularly in relation to generational and gender divides, provided a thought-provoking analysis. We discussed the differences between descriptive and substantive representation, shedding light on how these factors play out in both South Korean and Japanese political systems. As someone deeply interested in East Asian political dynamics, I found these discussions especially enlightening. The political landscapes in East Asia are highly distinctive, and the contrasts between countries like Japan, Korea, and China make this region uniquely fascinating.



I am also grateful for the opportunities we had to engage with students from various backgrounds, especially those who had previously participated in the CAMPUS Asia program. Many of them had visited Waseda University in the past, making our exchanges even more meaningful as we shared our experiences and perspectives.

The visit to the Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency was another eye-

opening experience. It was enlightening to learn about the challenges faced by South Korean small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in light of the economic slowdown, currency depreciation, and rising domestic prices. These issues are not unique to South Korea; Japan, too, faces similar challenges. The discussion helped me understand the critical role of social enterprises in driving economic recovery, and I believe the insights gained will be valuable in addressing similar challenges back in Japan.

Finally, the visit to the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) was a highlight of my trip. I have long been interested in TCS and had hoped to intern there in the past. During this visit, I had the privilege of meeting several of TCS's interns and alumni, which gave me a deeper understanding of the organization's activities and its role in promoting cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea. I am particularly eager to participate in future TCS events, such as the upcoming youth ambassador program and speech conference in Beijing.

In conclusion, this field study has underscored the importance of fostering cross-cultural exchange, collaboration, and intellectual dialogue. I believe that these exchanges—whether between nations, universities, or individuals—embody the essence of social innovation. The CAMPUS Asia program, with its emphasis on dialogue and collaboration, has ignited in me a renewed passion for social innovation and its potential to address global challenges.

