

## Campus Asia in Seoul 2025

Campus Asia is a program aimed at deepening understanding between Asian universities as well as fostering social innovators. The term "social innovator" or "social innovation" is not strictly defined, but I perceive it as addressing various social issues from multiple perspectives and implementing sustainable solutions. Through this four-day program, I realized that South Korea and the three countries—Japan, China, and South Korea—are working on social innovation through both governmental and non-governmental efforts to solve various societal problems. Government projects tend to establish comprehensive and sustainable frameworks, while Korean private-sector initiatives seem to make various efforts to tackle specific issues. Below, I will describe in detail my experiences and insights on social innovation in South Korea and the three countries over these four days.

### My First Impressions of South Korea

This was my first trip abroad, and while I was quite nervous, by the time I arrived at Gimpo International Airport, I was filled with excitement about the activities ahead. Compared to Tokyo, Seoul was much colder, but the air was clear, and the night sky was clear. One striking aspect was that most of the text in South Korea was written in Hangul. While I can somewhat grasp the meaning of Chinese characters, Hangul was entirely incomprehensible to me, making it feel as though I had stepped into another world. However, what I found intriguing was that South Korea seems to value Chinese characters to some extent, as they did before King Sejong's era. While exploring Seoul, I often encountered Chinese characters. Additionally, as shown in the photo below, Hangul and Chinese characters were sometimes used together. I regret not being able to discuss with Korean students why they continue to use Chinese characters despite having a convenient writing system like Hangul. I hope to visit South Korea again soon to study its culture and history.



(In this photo, you can see that the Chinese characters "中山" and the Hangul "빌딩" are mixed up.)

## Exchange with Korea University

On the second day, we interacted with students from Korea University. The campus was vast, with students freely enjoying their academic lives. Interestingly, despite being a university, there was an underground mall-like area where I saw people apparently signing mobile phone contracts—a significant difference from Japanese universities. We had lunch with the Korea University students and visited SEOUL SKY together. One memorable conversation was with a student who had studied in Japan. She found it puzzling why pedestrian signals in Japan emit sounds. This indicated that South Korea might not be as well-equipped with auditory traffic signals compared to Japan. While this doesn't necessarily mean that South Korea is less accommodating to individuals with disabilities, auditory traffic signals are essential for visually impaired people and are worth considering for further development in South Korea.



At Korea University, we also attended a lecture by Professor Woochang Kang. He discussed "voter participation" and "voter decision-making" in South Korea, topics that are also studied in Japan. One particularly noteworthy point was the gender gap in voting behavior, including differences in voter turnout and political preferences. Additionally, South Korea's presidential system, which doesn't exist in Japan, significantly influences its political landscape, leading to higher voter turnout for presidential elections than parliamentary ones.



Taken by Waseda's staff.

## Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency

Korea Social Enterprise Promotion Agency (KoSEA) promotes "Social Economy" within South Korea by providing consulting services to social economy enterprises. "Social Economy" refers to activities that pursue social value, primarily driven by the private sector. Examples of social economy enterprises include Donggubat Co., Ltd., which employs people with disabilities to manufacture eco-friendly soaps, and Kokkiri Gongjang Co., Ltd., which reuses and donates toys to address the toy disparity among children. What stood out during the visit to KoSEA was the vibrancy of private-sector initiatives. In Japan, such activities often aren't as prevalent, possibly due to concerns about profitability. However, promoting social participation of marginalized groups can sometimes be challenging for private enterprises. They often focus on immediate profit and may struggle to maintain a long-term perspective. The sustainability of these private sector-driven initiatives is a crucial point to monitor moving forward.



Taken by Waseda's staff.

## Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat

The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat aims to improve relations between Japan, China, and South Korea, promoting cooperation in various fields such as politics, culture, and education. One memorable point was that the Secretariat highlighted common vocabulary among the three East Asian languages. During a roundtable discussion, a staff member emphasized the importance of fostering youth exchanges for closer ties among the three countries. The Secretariat organizes various exchange programs, and I found it particularly

impressive that participants delivered speeches in East Asian languages other than their native ones. This not only promotes mutual understanding but also facilitates smoother communication among the youth of the three countries.



## Conclusion

These four days were incredibly valuable, as I gained significant insights by visiting another country and learning about its culture and people. Language use is particularly crucial for interacting with locals. Even though I knew almost no Korean, just using phrases like "Annyeonghaseyo" and "Kamsahamnida" allowed me to communicate effectively. Since Campus Asia will continue to offer various programs, I highly encourage anyone seeking an international perspective to apply.