

CAMPUS Asia Study Abroad Photo Journal

2025 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.

During my study abroad, I was blessed with wonderful encounters and friends, and I believe this experience was invaluable. During the fall semester of 2025, I spent time in Korea. Though it was only half a year, I believe it was the most impactful six months of my life. I hope this photo journal serves as a helpful reference for those aiming to study abroad at Korea University in Korea.

Academic Experiences

I took six courses at Korea University and earned 18 credits. My main focus was political science courses, including classes on core political science topics (such as the political incentives driving actors' behavior), unfamiliar areas (like the relationship between cities and politics), and even a course touching on weaponry a subject rarely covered in Japan.

Beyond political science, I also took a Japanese literature course because I was honestly worried about passing an English-taught class. It was my first time taking a literature department course, and I thought the content was quite advanced for a non-native speaker. However, Korea University students are highly capable and kept up with such courses, which I deeply respect.

Particularly, while no one in Japan ever understood me when I talked about philosophy, I tried responding to a Chinese exchange student at Korea University who was discussing philosophy, and he understood me. I was incredibly happy. I also respected him for being able to discuss philosophy in his second or third foreign language. The manga-related class I took provided a new perspective that will enrich my future manga reading.

In addition to these, I also took a Korean language class. It was my first time learning Korean, but I found it easier to learn than English because it shares many similarities with Japanese. Conversely, since almost all the other students were from Europe or America, seeing them struggle made me reflect on the importance of the distance between languages.

Cultural/Daily Experiences

Honestly, I wasn't interested in Korean idols or dramas, so I didn't go sightseeing everywhere like other international students. On top of that, I didn't have summer vacation due to various circumstances, so I was extremely tired. I only did the bare minimum of sightseeing and spent my entire stay looking forward to going to local restaurants. I had a strange experience communicating more smoothly in Japanese than English with a Korean friend I became close to after he asked me about Japan during a political science class. His Japanese was so good he came to study in Japan under a preferential program, and he seemed to understand Japanese better than English. While he occasionally taught me Korean, we went out for dinner together every day after class. Since I had never really experienced Korean cuisine before, he introduced me to many Korean dishes. Because he handled Japanese so skillfully, I felt he could grasp even subtle nuances, so we also talked about political topics. Hearing about Korea's conscription, military, and social issues was very interesting.

By the way, Korea University has a student support organization for international students called KUBA. The KUBA student assigned to assist me was also a Japanese literature major and spoke Japanese well. Interestingly, both of them saw different news about a celebrity arrest playing in a restaurant and

started discussing a Korean film about a scapegoat created by prosecutors. This likely shows how shocking that film was for Koreans.



I also had opportunities to interact with international students from other countries, becoming friends with Singaporeans, Americans, and Canadians. I sometimes wondered if the soft power of Japanese anime and manga was overrated, but it seems it wasn't overrated after all.



When I went to the DMZ with a Singaporean friend to see North Korea, the bus was in English rather than Japanese, and videos and talks about World War II were shown inside, making me very awkward. While acknowledging it's a very important matter, it was still awkward. Because Singapore was also one of the

countries that fought against Japan. In Japan, the focus tends to be on relations with Korea and China, and few people, myself included, have sufficient knowledge about the battles with Southeast Asia. I felt we should also consider Southeast Asia more.



The day before the final exam, we all had dinner together and spent 4 hours at a cafe. I've never stayed at a cafe this long even with my Japanese friends.



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

Do you remember that major incident that remains in Korean political history? It's martial law. It was so shocking that I can't forget it. On December 3, 2024, then-President Yoon suddenly declared martial law, sending shockwaves not only across South Korea but also to Japan. Ultimately, President Yoon's attempt failed, and he was arrested. However, this was not the end of the story. The repercussions lingered. This incident further exposed the deep political divisions within South Korea. Moreover, these divisions weren't confined to left and right.

They manifested in various forms, dividing people across age, gender, and other lines. As a result, new political parties, not part of the traditional two-party system, gained traction by attracting support from young men. Such political fragmentation isn't unique to South Korea. In Japan too, we're seeing many emerging parties aiming to gather support from those dissatisfied with existing political parties. The arrival of new voices isn't necessarily a bad thing. However, some recent approaches involve excessive interference with people's emotions. I noticed that these challenges exist in both Japan and South Korea. I also wondered if there were differences between them, or if the South Korean situation was simply overreported. I hoped to explore this topic during my studies in South Korea.

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

Please keep in mind that this is based on limited data.

According to my Korean friend, when the leader of that new political party came to give a speech near Korea University, a line formed for people wanting to take photos with him. This suggests strong support among young men. When I asked another friend if immigration was a topic of discussion in Korea, they said

not really. Apparently, Koreans generally don't pay much attention to immigrants. I also heard other things that are difficult to write here.

Overall, while Korea and Japan may appear to share similar political issues at first glance, it is safe to conclude that they are fundamentally different.

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

My experience in Korea will be useful for my future research and career. While I haven't decided on a thesis topic yet, researching Korea would connect to my personal experience and enrich my knowledge. Moreover, the experience of sharing perspectives with Korean and other international students will provide me with a different viewpoint, which I believe is crucial in today's increasingly globalized world.