Josh Summerfield – Summer Scholarship in China

It’s fair to say that this opportunity to spend a month in Beijing has been one of the major highlights of my time spent at the University of Reading. It has been an absolute privilege to take part in such an incredible scholarship scheme.

Every morning I would wake up feeling like the day had something new to offer me. New experiences, new sights, new food or new people – anything! Over our month-long stay, there was not a single day where we were lost for things to do. Of course, there are plenty of world famous landmarks to see in and around Beijing, the Great Wall and Forbidden City being the most reputable, with the Summer Palace and Temple of Heaven standing out as another couple of names on the list of must-see attractions. Of course, with an urge to visit so many different parts of the city, you might expect it to become overwhelming to fit in alongside the time spent studying at Peking. However, while it certainly encourages you to be efficient in planning your days, this wasn’t the case. The summer school (PKUSSI) found a brilliant balance between allowing us to engage with our studies while not preventing us from sightseeing and experiencing the city.

Regarding this summer school itself, I have to say that it more than lived up to the expectations I had of a university with a reputation such as Peking’s. We were presented with a wide variety of courses, each focused on China in one aspect or another, to choose from during our application to the school, and it certainly presented something for everyone. My first choice, ‘The Silk Road: A Global History of Cultural and Material Exchanges’ perfectly both my studies in Economics and personal interest in world history. I complimented this with a beginner’s Chinese language course which was a huge help in day-to-day life in the country, one where you don’t have the comfort of being able to find an English speaker around every corner as you do in typical European holiday destinations! If neither of these courses pique your interest, there are plenty of courses on just about every topic to choose from, ranging from traditional Chinese medicine and food to business, finance and programming.

A typical course consists of eight hours of lectures a week, with weekly set work and tests or essays to complete at the course’s conclusion at the end of the month. The courses employ the use of WeChat groups (the go-to Chinese messaging service) run by a teaching assistant to ensure we can easily communicate with members of the class and that information can be conveniently shared across the group. This is something that massively helps engagement with the class and it now surprises me that something similar hasn’t been applied in UK universities. Each syllabus is comprehensive and will ensure you come out of the exchange with a bounty of new knowledge about your specific topic, taught at a high standard by well-qualified professors.

What this opportunity presents to you is the possibility to take part in a high-quality summer school on a beautiful campus half way around the world, alongside hundreds of others from all corners of the globe. During your month studying Chinese focused courses, you won’t just learn about China, but about the countries and backgrounds of all the different people you meet at the university. A truly memorable experience, I would recommend this scholarship scheme to anyone.

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