

Kraft Global Fellowship

BEIJING, MAY 2018



Cover Photo: Forbidden City, Beijing

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DAY 1: MAY 19, 2018



Our tour guide led us around Beijing, providing us with an overview of Beijing and China at large. Having local guides each day meant hearing personal anecdotes and better understanding the Chinese culture and society.



Luckily, on a clear day like this one, we were able to see the mountains in the distance. Our guide explained to us about air pollution in China. Beijing, in particular, has been successfully able to clear its skies over the past decade.



Beijing dates back three millennia and has remained the political center of the country for much of the past eight centuries. As such, it is home to a rich history and age-old buildings. This is a photo of Zhengyang Gate which was first built in 1419 CE.



Beijing is also an extremely modern and expanding city, home to twenty-four million people. The city has dozens of skyscrapers and has grown tremendously over the past two decades. This photo is just one example of a modern street view.



Zhushikou Christian Church is located near the heart of Beijing. Built in 1904, it was the first of the eight churches set up by the United Methodist Church and continues to be used today. Interestingly, Zhushikou Church has had Chinese priests since its beginning.



We stopped at the northern gate to the Forbidden City which served as the palace of the emperor and his family from 1420 to 1912. We did not formally visit the palace until the end of the trip, but since it is the center of the city, we saw the exterior on our tour.



Across from the northern gate is Jingshan Park which overlooks the Forbidden City. The former private imperial garden is an artificial hill which was constructed during the Ming dynasty from the soil excavated in forming the moats of the Forbidden City.



After hiking up the hill, we were able to see the entire center of the city from above. Beijing's architecture integrates traditional and modern designs. For instance, we were able to see both classic hutongs and recently built skyscrapers.



Our tour guide explained to us the city layout of Beijing which is constructed of concentric circular highways called Ring Roads. The Ring Roads begin with the Forbidden City, which makes up the second ring road, and extend to the eighth Ring Road currently.



We then headed to Wangfujing which is one of Beijing's most famous shopping streets. It first began as a traditional market during the Ming dynasty. However, today, it is home to Western brands as well as Chinese commercial goods.



Afterward, we headed to Tiananmen Square, well known for its 1989 protests. Originally built in the fifteenth century, the Tiananmen (behind us) serves as a southern gate into the Forbidden City. Since 1949, it displays a portrait of Chairman Mao.



The large plaza is also home to the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong, the Great Hall of the People (pictured), and the National Museum of China (which we visited later on during the trip). One of the largest city squares globally, in total it can hold up to one million people.

DAY 2: MAY 20, 2018



We woke up early to hit the road and drive an hour and a half out of Beijing to Mutianyu to visit a section of the Great Wall of China. We had to take a cable car up into the mountains since the Great Wall of China rests on top of the mountains.



Stretching at its maximum roughly thirteen thousand miles, the Great Wall of China was built between the eighth century BCE and eighteenth century CE.

The majority of the remaining sections were built by the Ming dynasty.



The Great Wall of China consists of various buildings including watch towers, troop barracks, and garrison stations. In addition to protecting the Chinese empire from invasions, it monitored trade along the Silk Road and immigration.



Much of the Great Wall of China has been destroyed or in disrepair. However, luckily for us, most of the portions north of Beijing and near tourist centers have been preserved and even extensively renovated.



In the afternoon, we visited the Summer Palace, located in the outskirts of Beijing. The Qing dynasty imperial garden is considered by UNESCO "a masterpiece of Chinese landscape garden design."



During our visit, we learned about the significance of the various sculpture around the estate. For instance, the crane (depicted above) symbolizes elite status, referring to the prestige of the royal family.



In this part of the palace, we found a bronze qilin statue. The qilin is a mythical Chinese creature associated with the arrival of a prominent ruler. The emperor commissioned the sculpture to prescribe his regime a lasting legacy.



Walking around the estate, which covers roughly 700 square acres, we witnessed the beauty of the living history all around us. We took particular note of the trees around us, which we learned have supernatural powers in Chinese culture.



Three-quarters of the Summer Palace is composed of Kunming Lake, so we thought it would be best to fully see the entire estate via boat. The lake is manmade and has an average depth of five feet.



From the boat, we were able to see Jade Spring Hill, which is home to the Yufeng Pagoda. Originally built during the Liao dynasty, the pagoda is seven stories high. While it is built of stone, it was designed to appear to be made of wood.

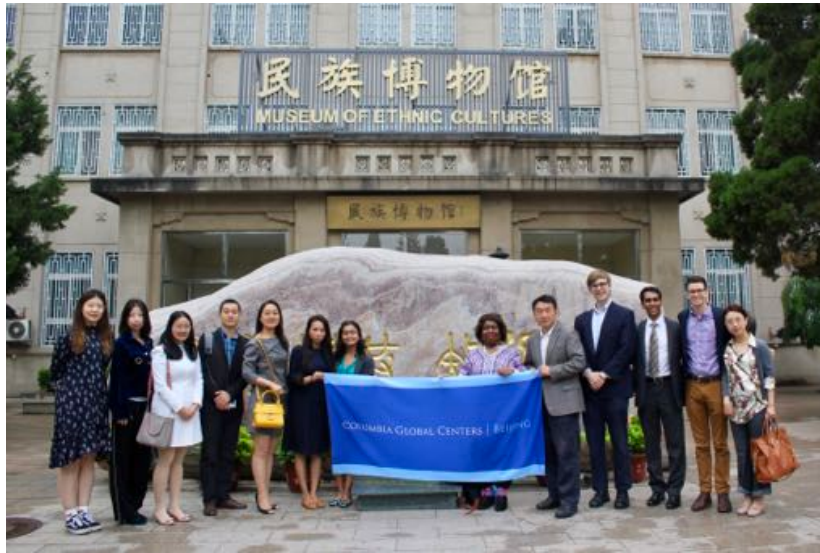


From the lake, we were also able to get a full view of Longevity Hill, which is the center of the Summer Palace. Making it the highest point on the estate, at the top of the hill is the Tower of Buddhist Incense. The royal family visited the tower to offer incense and pray.



At night, we met the staff of the Columbia Global Center in Beijing at a traditional Han restaurant. Before, during, and after our stay in China, the staff was overwhelmingly welcoming and extraordinarily helpful. We could not thank them enough.

DAY 3: MAY 21, 2018



In the morning, at Minzu University, we met with a professor, who is the father of a Columbia undergraduate student, and some of his students. They accompanied us at the Museum of Ethnic Cultures where we learned about the fifty-six ethnic groups in China.



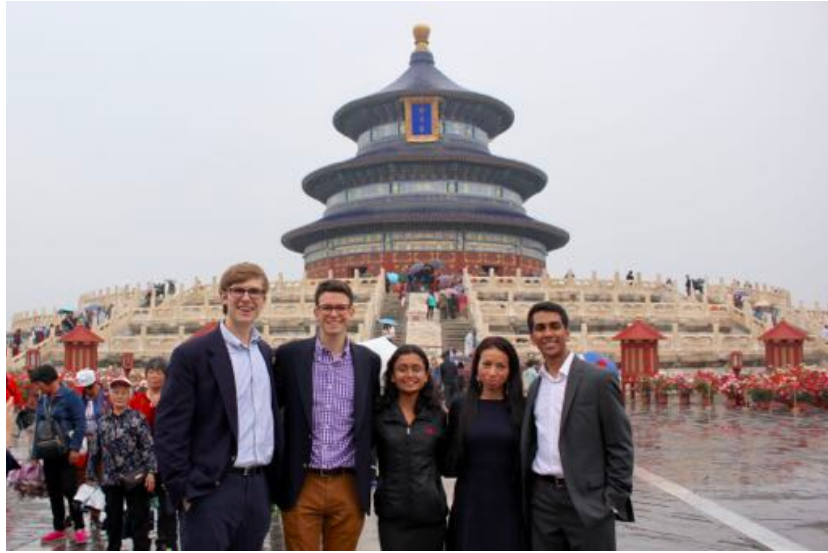
The museum displayed the distinct dress of each ethnic group in China, providing us with a wealth of information about the rich and diverse cultures of China. While we found similarities between the ethnic groups, each is unique in its own ways.



As Westerners, we tend to simplify Chinese culture and consider the Han majority as representative of the rest of the country, so it was enlightening to learn about the less-known minorities and their particular characteristics through dress.



Meeting with the professor and his students provided us with a direct channel to learn first-hand about life as a student in Beijing. Simultaneously, the students enjoyed meeting us and learning about the United States through our experiences.



In the afternoon, we visited the temple of Heaven, located in the south-east of Beijing. The Taoist temple was used by the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties for annual ceremonies of prayer to heaven for good harvest.



The temple was constructed in the early fifteenth century by the same emperor who commissioned the construction of the Forbidden City. In the sixteenth century, the estate was expanded to its current size and given its current name.



To get to the central temple, the emperors would pass through the entire estate, including the Heaven Center Stone and Huangqiongyu Hall (pictured above). Interestingly, this hall was cleverly built so that when someone speaks near it, their voice echoes.



By chance, during our visit, the beloved Beijing rose was in season. All around the city and at the Temple of Heaven, in particular, we were able to enjoy these beautiful flowers. The city has a huge flower production industry and exports thousands of roses abroad.

DAY 4: MAY 22, 2018



In the morning, we visited Xuanwumen Catholic Church, which is the oldest church in Beijing, and met with Priest Zhu at a Beijing parish major academy. The Church has existed there since 1605, and this version of the building was built in 1904.



Mass is held every day, and we were lucky to observe a weekday mass. Even though the mass was in Chinese, the Catholic Kraft Global Fellows considered it to be almost identical to the masses in which they have participated at churches in the United States.



In the afternoon, we visited and toured Renmin University. With roughly 24,000 students, the university is well-known for its excellence in humanities and social sciences, not to mention its beautiful campus and architecture.



At the university, we met with faculty from the Institute for the Study of Buddhism and Religious Theory. The professors shared with us insight about their academic fields and current research. Hearing from them shaped our understanding of interfaith relations.

DAY 5: MAY 23, 2018



We spent this day in another city by the name of Tianjin. While it is located roughly 85 miles from Beijing, we were able to get there in half an hour by taking the Chinese train. We were impressed by how modern, clean, comfortable, and affordable the train was.



While near Beijing, Tianjin has a distinct history and character. Between 1860 and 1947, much of the city was given as concessions to European countries, the USA, and Japan. While all the concessions were returned, the city still has a strong Western influence.



While incredibly modern, Tianjin also has its rustic European streets, displaying the history of concession. Interestingly, many Chinese people visit Tianjin if they want an international taste without actually leaving the country.



We visited a local incense shop and learned from skilled artisans how to make incense. Throughout the trip, we commonly smelt and saw incense sticks, especially at the Lama Temple, so it was exciting to actually learn how they are made.



In the afternoon, we visited Tianjin's Porcelain House which is a pottery museum. First developed in China, porcelain is central to Chinese culture. Previously a colonial building, its past owner redecorated his home with shards of broken porcelain.



Afterward, we took the Tianjin Eye to see Tianjin from above. The roughly 400-foot-tall Ferris wheel rests above the Hai River. From the sky, we were able to fully get a sense of technological advances and urban expansion in Tianjin, representative of China generally.



In the evening, we stopped by a local Catholic church. During the era of concessions, Christianity spread in Tianjin, and until today, many churches remain from that period. While the city has grown significantly, European characteristics remain.



Our day in Tianjin opened our eyes to China's rapid growth. Just around the corner from the country's capital, Tianjin has over twice the population of New York City but is unknown to much of the Western world.

DAY 6: MAY 24, 2018



We spent the morning at the China Tibetology Research Center learning from experts about Tibetan Buddhism and culture. In addition to religious studies, the center academically approaches Tibet socially, economically, historically, and medically.



The center also oversees a museum of Tibetan culture which seeks to preserve Tibet's cultural heritage. We were able to visit the museum and learn about the history of Tibet from antiquity until today through beautiful exhibits and a knowledgeable tour guide.



In the afternoon, we visited the Lama Temple in central Beijing. In addition to serving as a Tibetan Buddhist temple, it hosts an active monastery. Unlike the Temple of Heaven or the Summer Palace, this temple is still in use by monks and other visitors.



The estate began to be constructed in 1694 as a palace for the Qing dynasty and was converted into a monastery in 1722. From 1949 to 1981, it was closed but miraculously managed to survive the Cultural Revolution when religion was outlawed.



After burning incense, we threw them into the large burner. By burning incense, we burn ourselves, symbolizing personal sacrifice and humility. Many Buddhists believe that the smoke is a link between them and the Buddha since the Buddha will appear in the smoke.



At night, we had the privilege to dine with Dr. Guo, a professor of finance, and Mr. Luan, a businessman in telecommunications, at their home in Beijing. Chaplain Davis met Dr. Guo and Mr. Luan during her last visit to China.



The family opened their doors and hearts to us, hosting us over a home-cooked meal. Dr. Guo and Mr. Luan cooked and served an elaborate meal which took days to prepare. It was a treat and honor to have a conversation over a delicious meal with local residents.



Around the dinner table, we were truly able to learn first-hand about Chinese culture. It was fascinating to learn about Chinese trade and tariffs from an expert in her field while sitting around a dinner table. Sharing a meal is the key to cultural exchange.

DAY 7: MAY 25, 2018



In the morning, we visited the Haidian Christian Church. Founded in 1915, it is a prominent Protestant church in Beijing and was renovated a decade ago. The church has a huge congregation, with 7,000 people total attending their six services on Sundays.



In the afternoon, we visited Peking University, one of the most well-respected universities in China. We met with students at Yanchin Academy who are part of a fellowship which offers scholarships for one year of study leading to a master's degree from Peking University.



While the fellows were at Peking University, Eytan visited the Beijing Chabad to learn about how Judaism, his own faith, functions in China. Judaism is not one of the Chinese legal religions, which are Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam.



Despite Judaism's illegality, the Chabad rabbi told me that he felt safer and more welcome here in China than anywhere else in the world. Jews live in peace, and there is a substantial Jewish community in Beijing, among other cities. Eytan was able to pray as well!

DAY 8: MAY 26, 2018



In the morning, we visited the National Museum of China, located at Tiananmen Square. The museum is focused on the arts and history of China and is free to the public. It is the second most visited museum in the world, following the Louvre in Paris.



We spent our time primarily learning about the history of China, visiting the various exhibits displaying beautiful, ancient artifacts. While we were not able to visit the entirety of the country, we were able to learn from the diverse collection of pieces about China.



Our last stop on the trip was the Forbidden City, the heart of Beijing. The name originates from the fact that it was an imperial palace from 1420 to 1912 and kept its doors closed to the public until it became a museum in 1925.



The complex consists of nearly one thousand buildings, each more impressive than the last one. The estate has been kept in pristine condition so that visitors can truly imagine what life was like here when it functioned as an imperial palace.



Many thanks to Mr. Robert Kraft from Kraft Global Fellows