

SUMMER PROGRAM RETURN REPORT

Host Institution: Dalian University of Technology (DUT), China

Program Period: July 27, 2026 – August 9, 2026

Participant: **min Jo

1. Introduction

From July 27 to August 9, 2026, I participated in a two-week summer program at Dalian University of Technology in Dalian, China. As a Public Administration major at a university in Korea, I usually study subjects related to government, public policy, administration, and society. Therefore, participating in a program at a university with a strong focus on science and engineering was a new and somewhat unfamiliar experience for me.

The program was not limited to academic lectures. It included an opening ceremony, English lectures, Chinese cultural activities, museum visits, field trips, campus tours, and a closing ceremony. Through these different activities, I was able to experience university life in China from several perspectives. In particular, I had the opportunity to study subjects outside my major, experience Chinese culture directly, and communicate with international students in English.

Before participating in the program, I mainly thought of studying abroad as an opportunity to experience a different country and culture. However, after completing the two-week program, I realized that an overseas university program can also be an opportunity to step outside my familiar academic environment and reconsider what I can learn from subjects and people different from those I normally encounter. Each activity during the program provided a different kind of learning experience, and together they made the two weeks especially meaningful.

2. Opening Ceremony and First Impressions

The program officially began with an opening ceremony at Dalian University of Technology. The ceremony was conducted in both Chinese and English, which helped international participants follow the event. Several distinguished guests from Dalian University of Technology gave welcoming speeches in Chinese. Some of the speeches were quite long, but English translations were displayed almost immediately on the screens on both sides of the stage. Because of this, I could understand what the speakers were saying without having to understand Chinese.

This was one of my first impressions of the program. Although I was in a completely different country and could not communicate in Chinese, the use of English and the simultaneous translation made the international participants feel included. It also made me realize that the program had been carefully organized to allow students from different countries to participate comfortably.

During the opening ceremony, we were introduced to Dalian University of Technology and received information about the university and the program. The organizers also explained the activities and assignments that we would have to complete during the two weeks. Since this was my first time participating in a program at Dalian University of Technology, the introduction helped me understand what to expect and how I should participate.

After the opening ceremony, I became more curious about the university and the activities that were waiting for us. At the same time, I was slightly concerned about the academic lectures because I knew that Dalian University of Technology had a strong reputation in science and engineering. As a Public Administration major, I expected that some of the lectures might be unfamiliar to me, and this expectation turned out to be correct.



3. Academic Lectures Outside My Major

The academic lectures were one of the main parts of the program. Most of the morning sessions were conducted in English, which gave me an opportunity to listen to academic lectures in a language other than Korean.

The subjects covered in the lectures reflected the characteristics of Dalian University of Technology. We learned about topics related to artificial intelligence, engineering, traditional Chinese medicine, and other areas that I would not normally study as a Public Administration major. While these topics were interesting, some of the lectures were difficult for me.

The difficulty came from two different sources. First, the academic content itself was unfamiliar. My major focuses on areas such as government, public policy, public organizations, and social issues, while the lectures at Dalian University of Technology often dealt with science, technology, and engineering. Second, the lectures were conducted in

English, so I had to understand unfamiliar concepts while listening to them in a foreign language.

There were moments when I could understand individual words or sentences but had difficulty understanding the whole concept. Nevertheless, I tried to listen carefully and understand the overall ideas rather than becoming frustrated by the technical details. Even though I could not fully understand everything, I think that simply being exposed to unfamiliar academic fields was valuable.

In fact, this was one of the most meaningful aspects of the program for me. As a Public Administration student, I often focus on social science perspectives when studying problems. However, many contemporary social problems are connected to science and technology as well. Artificial intelligence, for example, can influence government services, public policy, employment, and many other areas of society. Therefore, although I was not able to understand the technical details as deeply as a student in an engineering major might, the lectures helped me recognize the importance of having knowledge beyond my own major.

The experience also changed the way I think about learning. I realized that learning does not always have to mean becoming an expert in a particular subject. Sometimes, simply encountering an unfamiliar field and trying to understand its basic ideas can broaden one's perspective. For me, the lectures at Dalian University of Technology were an opportunity to experience this kind of learning.



4. Experiencing Chinese Culture

When the morning lectures were relatively short, we participated in cultural activities. These activities provided a different kind of experience from the academic lectures because we could learn about Chinese culture through direct participation.

One of the most memorable activities was Chinese calligraphy. This was my first time actually practicing calligraphy using Chinese characters. Although I had seen Chinese characters many times before, writing them with a brush was completely different from simply recognizing them. I found it difficult to control the brush and create the correct shape and balance of each character.

Because it was my first experience, I had to concentrate carefully on each movement. It was not easy to produce neat results, but that difficulty made the experience more memorable. Rather than simply learning about Chinese calligraphy from a lecture or

watching someone else demonstrate it, I was able to experience it myself. Through the activity, I gained a small but direct understanding of the effort and skill involved in traditional Chinese calligraphy.

We also had an opportunity to make Chinese dumplings. Unlike calligraphy, making dumplings was not particularly unfamiliar to me because I had already made dumplings in Korea. Therefore, I did not find the activity especially surprising from my own perspective.

However, the activity became interesting when I observed the other international participants. Some of them had never had the opportunity to make dumplings before, and they participated very enthusiastically. They carefully followed the instructions and worked hard to make their own dumplings. I also participated enthusiastically, but seeing the other students experience something that was relatively familiar to me as something completely new made me think about cultural differences in a different way.

The same food can be familiar to one person and completely new to another. For me, making dumplings was something I had already experienced in Korea, while for some of my international classmates, it was their first opportunity to make them. Watching their enthusiasm made me realize that cultural exchange does not always have to involve something extraordinary. Even a simple activity such as making food together can become a meaningful cultural experience when people from different backgrounds share it.

These activities also gave us opportunities to communicate naturally. While working on calligraphy or making dumplings, we could talk with one another, help each other, and share our experiences. Compared with the academic lectures, these activities created a more relaxed environment in which international students could become closer.



5. Experiencing the University and Its Surroundings

The program also included various afternoon activities outside the classroom. These activities allowed me to see the university and its surroundings directly rather than experiencing China only through lectures and cultural activities.

We visited a museum and learned about aspects of Chinese history and culture. Visiting a museum was different from listening to a lecture because I could observe the exhibits directly. It helped me understand Chinese culture from a more concrete perspective and gave me a chance to think about the historical and cultural background of the country I was staying in.

We also took a bus outside the university to visit an artificial aquaculture facility. This was an interesting experience because I could see how scientific knowledge and technology are applied in an actual facility. As someone who does not study engineering or related subjects, the visit provided a perspective that I would not normally encounter at my home university.

Another memorable activity was visiting engineering buildings on the Dalian University of Technology campus. The facilities and environment were different from what I am accustomed to as a Public Administration student. Seeing these spaces in person helped me understand the university's strong focus on engineering and technology more clearly.

These activities complemented the morning lectures. During the lectures, I learned about unfamiliar academic subjects, while the afternoon activities gave me opportunities to see how some of these areas were connected to actual facilities and environments. The combination of classroom learning and field experiences made the program more diverse and helped prevent the two weeks from becoming simply a series of lectures.



6. Communication and International Exchange

Another important part of the program was communicating with students from different countries. Since the participants had different native languages and cultural backgrounds, English was often used as a common language.

For me, using English throughout the program was both challenging and useful. In Korea, I normally communicate in Korean, so having to speak English in everyday situations required more effort. Sometimes I had difficulty finding the right words, and sometimes I did not immediately understand what someone was saying. However, I gradually became more comfortable as I continued communicating with other participants.

What I learned was that communication does not require perfect English. When everyone is using a language that is not their first language, people naturally try to make themselves understood in different ways. We repeated sentences, used simpler expressions, asked questions, and sometimes used gestures. Through these experiences, I became less afraid of making mistakes.

The program also changed my understanding of English. Before the program, I often thought of English mainly as a subject to study. During the two weeks in China, however, I used English as a practical tool for learning and communication. I needed English to understand lectures, participate in activities, ask questions, and communicate with other students.

This was particularly meaningful because the English I used was connected to actual experiences. For example, while making dumplings, I could talk with students about food and culture. During academic activities, I could discuss unfamiliar topics. These situations showed me that English can connect people even when they have very different academic and cultural backgrounds.

7. What I Learned from the Two-Week Experience

As the program progressed, I began to realize that each part of the experience was connected. The academic lectures introduced me to subjects outside my major, the cultural activities allowed me to experience Chinese traditions directly, and the field trips showed me different aspects of the university and Chinese society. At the same time, communicating with international students allowed me to share these experiences with people from different backgrounds.

The biggest lesson I gained was the importance of stepping outside my comfort zone. At the beginning of the program, the engineering and AI lectures felt difficult because they were far from my major. Chinese calligraphy was also challenging because it was my first time practicing it. Even using English for everyday communication sometimes felt uncomfortable.

However, none of these difficulties prevented me from participating. Instead, I learned by listening, trying, making mistakes, and trying again. Looking back, I think these unfamiliar experiences were more valuable than activities that would have been easy for me from the beginning.

As a Public Administration major, I also came to think more seriously about the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives. Public Administration deals with real-world problems, and real-world problems rarely belong to only one academic field. Government and public policy are increasingly connected to technology, science, healthcare, the environment, and many other areas. Therefore, even though I found some of the technical lectures difficult, I believe that being exposed to those fields will be useful in developing a broader perspective as a Public Administration student.

The cultural experiences also taught me something about how easily we can take familiar things for granted. Making dumplings was not particularly new to me because I had done it in Korea before. However, watching international students make dumplings with great enthusiasm reminded me that something ordinary in my own life can be a meaningful cultural experience for someone else. Similarly, practicing Chinese calligraphy allowed me to experience a traditional activity that was completely new to me.

Through these experiences, I was able to look at both Chinese culture and my own culture from a slightly different perspective.

8. Closing Ceremony and Overall Reflection

The two-week program ended with a closing ceremony, where we received certificates of completion. Receiving the certificate was a meaningful moment because it represented the completion of all the lectures, cultural activities, field trips, and other experiences that we had shared during the program.

When I first arrived at Dalian University of Technology, the university, the academic environment, and the language were all unfamiliar. However, after two weeks, the environment had become much more familiar. The program had gone by quickly, and I found myself looking back on the different experiences we had shared.

Overall, I am very satisfied with my participation in the Dalian University of Technology summer program. The program gave me opportunities that I would not normally have at my home university. I was able to study subjects outside my major, experience Chinese culture directly, visit university facilities and an aquaculture facility, and communicate with international students in English.

Most importantly, I learned that an overseas program is valuable not simply because it allows me to visit another country, but because it puts me in situations where I have to learn and communicate outside my familiar environment. The difficult lectures, unfamiliar Chinese calligraphy, and English communication were all challenges, but they also became opportunities to develop myself.

The experience also encouraged me to think more broadly about my future as a Public Administration student. I do not want to limit my knowledge to the subjects directly related to my major. Instead, I would like to continue learning about different academic fields and understand how they are connected to society and public issues.

The two weeks from July 27 to August 9 were therefore more than just a short visit to China. They were a period in which I learned about a different academic environment, experienced Chinese culture, met people from different backgrounds, and reflected on my own perspective as a university student. I believe that the experiences I gained at Dalian

University of Technology will remain meaningful in my future studies and will encourage me to approach unfamiliar opportunities with greater confidence and curiosity.