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Nanjing: Where History Meets the Future

This summer, I was fortunate to participate in an educational trip to one of the most significant cities in China — Nanjing. It was not just tourism or a recreational excursion, but a full-fledged cultural and educational practice organized as part of a university program. The main goal of the trip was to deepen our knowledge of Chinese history, culture, and technological achievements, as well as to develop intercultural competence, which is especially important today for students studying abroad.

From the very beginning, the trip promised to be eventful: the program included not only museums and architectural monuments but also modern scientific facilities, parks, traditional neighborhoods, and temples. Preparation started in advance — we were told about each planned place, explained cultural norms, and given advice on how to behave in different situations. For me personally, this trip became an opportunity not only to see famous sights with my own eyes but also to reflect on what I had read in textbooks on Chinese history, culture, and social studies.

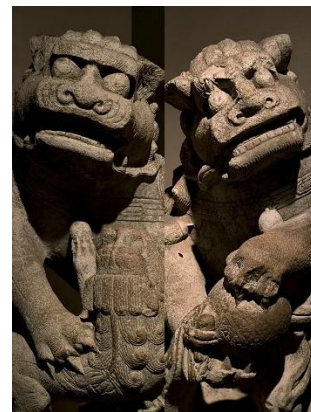
Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu Province and one of the four ancient capitals of China. Its history spans more than 2,500 years. Over the centuries, it has repeatedly been the political, economic, and cultural center of the country. The city is located on the southern bank of the great Yangtze River and is distinguished by its rich cultural heritage, numerous temples, palaces, memorials, and universities. Nanjing holds an important place in the history of both Eastern and modern Asia. The combination of tradition and innovation makes it especially attractive for study.

When we arrived in Nanjing, the first thought was: "What a spacious, green, and well-organized city!" Although it is a large metropolis, there is no sense of chaos here. The city's architecture harmoniously combines ancient and modern elements: skyscrapers stand next to traditional pagodas, and old streets transition into modern squares. The space is organized in such a way that even in the city center, you feel comfortable. I was also pleasantly surprised by how much they honor history here: buildings, monuments, and parks are all well-maintained, neat, and accompanied by explanatory information.

One of the most memorable places was the Nanjing Museum. It is not just a museum in the usual sense — it is a true cultural and historical complex. The building itself impresses with its architectural design — the combination of traditional Chinese elements with modern design makes it not only interesting to visit but also visually striking. Inside, there are several pavilions, each dedicated to a specific theme: ancient history, ethnography, fine arts, bronze artifacts, ceramics, jewelry, costumes, and much more.

The bronze vessels from the Shang and Zhou dynasties, as well as ceramics from the Tang dynasty, made a particularly strong impression on me. It was the first time I saw jade items handcrafted many centuries ago. In each hall, it was possible not only to view the exhibits but also to learn their history through multimedia screens, 3D models, and narrated descriptions.

This was not just a tour, but a true intellectual journey through time.



After that, we headed to the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum. The climb to it was quite tiring but absolutely worth the effort. The mausoleum is located in a picturesque area at the foot of Zhongshan Mountain. The combination of its solemn architecture, the white-and-blue colors of the buildings, the surrounding pine trees, and the peaceful atmosphere makes this place especially noble and symbolic.

Sun Yat-sen is a figure of immense importance for China — the founder of the republic and the inspirer of revolutionary transformations. He is respected not only as a politician but also as a thinker, philosopher, and patriot. I felt how deeply the Chinese honor their leaders and how much meaning they put into the architecture of memorials — everything is carefully thought out, down to the number of steps, the symbolism of colors, and the directions. There was a strong sense of historical grandeur and tranquility there.



The next day, we visited the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre. It was a difficult but necessary visit. The museum is dedicated to the tragic events of 1937, when the city was occupied by Japanese forces and more than 300,000 civilians were killed. The exhibition is presented with a high degree of authenticity, using real documents, photographs, and testimonies from survivors. One of the halls features a reconstruction of a mass grave site, which leaves a profound impression.

Emotionally, it was not easy — there was a strong sense of tension, sorrow, and compassion. However, I truly believe that such museums are essential: they prevent us from forgetting the value of human life, the importance of peace, and the necessity of historical memory. I left in silence, but with a clearer understanding of how vital peace, kindness, and mutual respect among nations truly are.



One of the most unexpected but particularly fascinating parts of the trip was the excursion to the company 拓攻机器人 (TopXGun), which specializes in the development of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). This is a modern, high-tech enterprise where we saw how drones are designed, tested, and used in a wide variety of fields: agriculture, environmental protection, logistics, and emergency monitoring.

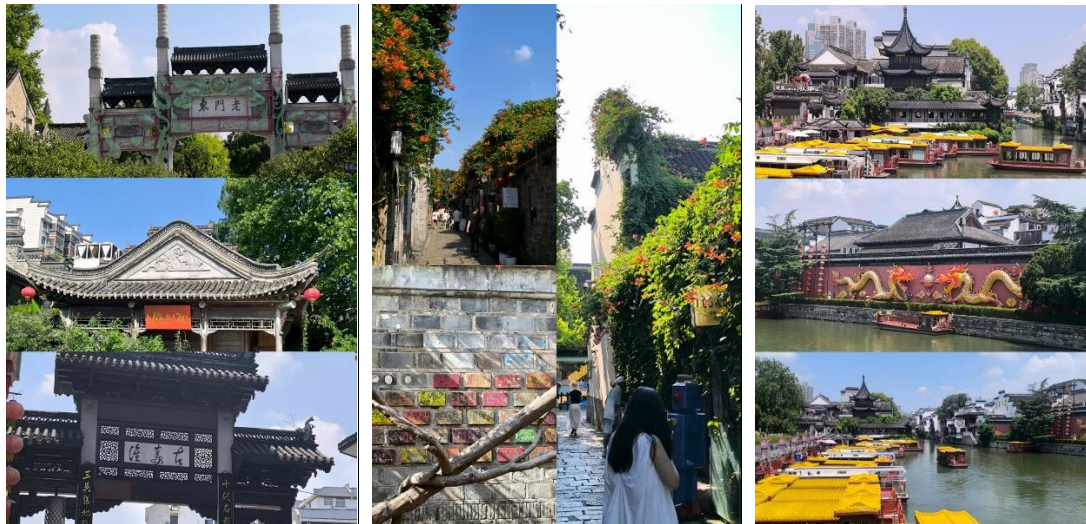
The engineers explained how artificial intelligence works, what kinds of sensors are built into the devices, and how neural networks are trained. For me, as a student from a non-technical background, it was a real eye-opener — the technologies I had only read about in the news turned out to be real, practical, and incredibly useful.

I was especially inspired by how such innovations can help address societal challenges — from environmental conservation to public safety. We even had the chance to operate the drones ourselves. That was the moment I truly felt how strongly China is moving toward the future, and how important it is to be a part of that progress.



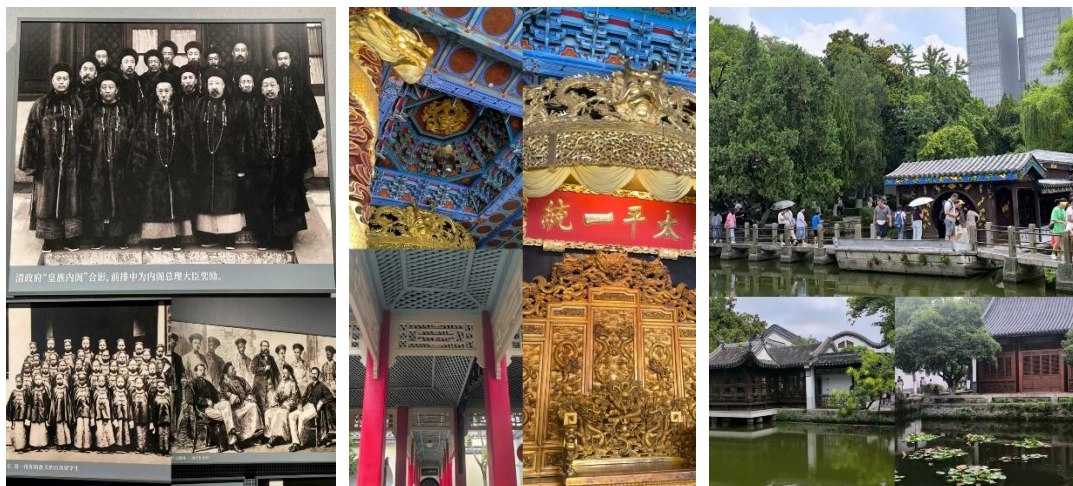
It's impossible not to mention Laomendong — a district where time seems to slow down. Walking through its narrow streets felt like a true immersion into the atmosphere of old Nanjing. There are no bright advertisements, tall buildings, or noise here. Narrow alleys, red lanterns, wooden doors, the scent of spices and traditional food, souvenir shops, tea houses, and artisan workshops — all of this creates a living museum of urban life.

I tasted local sweets and took photos of hand-painted shop signs. It was like stepping into a fairy tale — one of those moments when you don't want to speak, you just want to watch and take it all in.



The next day began with a visit to the Presidential Palace. This place turned out to be incredibly fascinating — not only from an architectural perspective but also from a historical one. Throughout different eras, it served as the residence of emperors, governors, and presidents. The complex consists of several buildings, gardens, halls, and archives. History here seems to be layered: every corridor represents a different era.

What stood out to me the most was the hall where meetings were held during the period of the Republic of China — everything has been preserved almost in its original state. There were also displays of documents, clothing, maps, and newspaper replicas. It was a wonderful opportunity to connect with the history of the 20th century.



Another place that left a strong impression on me was the Jiming Temple, one of the oldest Buddhist temples in the city. The atmosphere there was incredibly peaceful. We arrived in the late afternoon, just as the sun was setting, and the light beautifully illuminated the pagodas and trees. Inside the temple, there was silence, and the air was filled with the gentle scent of incense.

I wasn't just observing — I found myself mentally attuned to calmness and reflection. The temple is located on an elevated area, and from its tower, there is a view of Xuanwu Lake and the city. That landscape stayed in my memory forever — it was both majestic and serene.

We later took a leisurely boat ride on the picturesque Xuanwu Lake, enjoying the calm surface of the water and the fresh air. The atmosphere around us was peaceful, and we spent that time in a truly wonderful way, filled with joy and tranquility.



Throughout the entire trip, I tried not only to listen and observe but also to ask questions, record my thoughts, and compare what I saw with what I had known before. I realized how important cultural sensitivity is: respectful behavior in temples, attentiveness to traditions, and understanding the context make a trip not only educational but also deeply personal. I learned to notice nuances, appreciate details, and find beauty in simplicity.

In conclusion, I can say that the trip to Nanjing became a truly significant experience for me. It wasn't just a visit to another city — it was a real journey through time, thoughts, and emotions. I saw China from a different perspective: not as a foreign student, but as someone who genuinely strives to understand, feel, and absorb the culture they are living in.

I am grateful to the Northwest A&F University and the College of International Education for this opportunity. Trips like this shape one's worldview, broaden horizons, and foster growth — both as a student and as a person.