

TRAVEL REPORT
PRAGUE SUMMER SCHOOL 2012
“CHINA: A WORLD SUPERPOWER - MYTH OR REALITY?”

From the 30th of June to the 7th of July 2012 I spent a week in Prague on a short and intensive summer school about China and its future on the world stage. Located just west of Prague's centre in district 2, and held primarily at the Vzdělávací Institut, the course was organised by the Centre for Public Policy (CPVP) in cooperation with the Institute for European and National Strategies (InStrategy). The program's main goal was to explore the facts versus the fiction of China's increasing economic power alongside looking at the truth about its political system, away from the confusion and misconceptions that often accompany the portrayal of Chinese development in Western media. I hope to examine aspects of Chinese development as part of my studies in social anthropology, so it was this chance to learn about China's past and present - and debunk the myths - that attracted me to take part. The course was made up of around 30 students from around the world, the majority of whom had completed their bachelors and were beginning to study for masters in international relations or politics.

The bulk of the course was given by Dr. Zhengxu Wang, an Associate Professor of Contemporary Chinese Studies and Politics at the University of Nottingham. We studied the history of China's political economy of reform from 1978 to present, the politics of uneven development such as rural and urban poverty, labour politics, rural life and governance and the politics of governance, as well as a background introduction to the Chinese political system and a more in-depth look at The Party, its ethos and methods, elite politics, and citizen values and public opinion. In my first year of studying social anthropology I felt fascinated by China's complexities but too confused by them to confidently pursue my interest, but through learning about the political and economic history of such a vast and geographically diverse country I was able to form a more concrete understanding of how China functions, and why it functions in that way. As well as highlighting the importance of having a precise knowledge of a country's history, this gave a factual backbone to my interest in the people of China, which I am certain will benefit me when I return to my studies. Interestingly, Dr. Wang had recently completed a 1.43 million-euro research project examining Chinese perceptions of the EU, which I found thought-provoking as a reverse enquiry of my interest in EU perceptions of China. Talking to Dr. Wang about his project led me to appreciate anthropology's approach and I realised that there is not a divide between studying people's *lives* and studying the economic/political *history* of their country: rather, the latter can and does inform the former.

Further, the cultural exchange that formed the basis of the summer school enabled me to meet interesting and inspiring people from countries other than my own, and to make friendships that I would not otherwise have had the chance to. For example, I am now good friends with two girls that I met on the summer school, from Denmark and Belgium, who are both studying for masters in international relations. After meeting in Prague we met again in Copenhagen in late July, and have firm plans to spend next summer together doing a mix of travelling, volunteering and interning in Southeast Asia. I have also applied for a BBC MediaAction internship for this easter, citing the things I learnt in Prague about rural poverty in China as a large part of my curiosity in this field, and I am grateful to the Pembroke Grant Scheme for enabling me to discover this new interest as well as developing a more concrete comprehension of China, a longstanding interest of mine.