

## **Gansu International Fellowship Programme Report**

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My recent visit to China's Gansu Province for a fellowship programme was one of the most enthralling visits of my life. The programme was sponsored by the Foreign Affairs Office of Gansu Provincial People's Government (hereafter GSFAO). The aim of the programme was to open Gansu Province wider to the outside world, and to explore communication and cooperation abroad in the fields of economy, trade, science and technology, education, culture and etc.

The Gansu province is located in the northwest of People's Republic of China. Surrounded by Mongolia, it spans Inner Mongolia, the deserts of Xinjiang and the high mountain wastelands of Tibetan Plateau, it is considered as one the birthplaces of Chinese civilization. I had heard that Gansu was the least developed province of China. However, my first impressions of the provincial capital Lanzhou and Lanzhou University dispelled most of such notions. The city has an excellent infrastructure and is full of life and activity.

### **The accommodation**

The GSFAO provided all the delegates with comfortable rooms at the Lanzhou University Dormitory. This not only gave me the opportunity to enjoy the hustle and bustle of university life but also interact closely with the fellow delegates from 17 different countries.

### **Lanzhou**

Living in Lanzhou provided me ample openings to closely observe the different facets of Chinese culture and everyday life.

Visitors and students from different parts of the world could be seen in the city and at the university. I felt right at home in Lanzhou. I loved walking through the streets, exploring new places and downtown shopping areas with my friends. Wherever I went, I saw that everything was quite systematic, if not exceptionally advanced and orderly. It was nevertheless unfortunate to see the city draped in a haze every time because of the industrial pollution. Lanzhou has a very well established public service infra structure. One can go anyplace, anytime in the city through the local buses or taxis. During my stay, I never came across a single law and order problem.

The first part of the fellowship programme focused on learning basic Chinese language. Learning Chinese language was not an easy task; however, the language sessions were full of enjoyment. Our teacher, Hu Laoshi, successfully guided the delegates through their efforts to learn and pronounce the characters.

Experiencing various kinds of Chinese cuisine was a lot of fun. I especially loved the food street in Lanzhou city's Night Market. It somehow reminded me of the famous food

street in Lahore. Gansu has a huge Muslim population; therefore, halal food was not at all a problem. Moreover, Muslim restaurants are famous for offering delicious Gansu food prepared in a traditional way.

I was fortunate to have met a lot wonderful and intelligent Chinese people during my stay. I have been most impressed by Chinese peoples' hard work and dedication towards their professions. While travelling, I always found people smiling, exchanging greetings with one another, or conveying warmth, especially towards foreigners. However, Language can be an obstacle in communication with people. So, the best option to ward off a problem situation is to either have a guide or a language/information directory with you.

Living with other international friends has been an exciting experience. Through our regular meetings, conversations and class activities, I learnt so much about their homelands and cultures. It was so interesting to note that people, everywhere in the world, are so similar yet so different.

Alone in my room, I got enough time here to introspect and weigh the positive and negative aspects of both the Chinese and Pakistani cultures. I felt that there are a lot of similarities in the socio-cultural set ups of both the Asian nations, for example, family is as much a priority for an individual in China as it is in Pakistan. Like many, I also see China as the best model of economic success in the Asian region. Through increased cooperation, Pakistan can learn and benefit from China, especially in the field of Information Technology and from greater exchange of alternative sources of energy (PV technology and wind power, etc). I observed that a lot of textile business exchanges take place between the two neighbours. But what is lacking is structured and frequent formal exchanges between Pakistani and Chinese fashion designers and textile experts, an aspect that could erect new foundations for Sino-Pak fashion vista.

### **Travel through Gansu**

Sightseeing is one of the most magnificent experiences in Gansu. I explored Lanzhou city to my heart's contentment. Our group visits to cities outside Lanzhou, such as Dingxi, Muslim and Tibetan autonomous prefectures of Linxia and Gannan were quite impressive. The countryside tours provided an insight into the traditional Chinese lifestyle. It was wonderful to have a glimpse into Tibetan culture in Labrang area in the Xiahe County (Gannan); and simple yet neat Muslim dominated Linxia region.

The Trip to Hexi Corridor was a memorable journey. Never have I come across such a striking combination of green lands, snow-capped and colourful mountains, deserts and streams, all in one province. I will always remember the hospitality of our hosts in all the cities. I particularly loved the picturesque Zhangye Danxia Landscape and Mingsha Hill and Crescent Moon Spring areas, which reminded me of one of Li Bai's poem, whose English translations is:

You ask me why I dwell in the green mountain;

I smile and make no reply for my heart is free of care.  
As the peach-blossom flows down stream and is gone into the unknown,  
I have a world apart that is not among men.

The train journey back to Lanzhou was another terrific experience.

### **Internship**

I have had the opportunity to do a week's internship with Gansu Association for International Friendly Contact (GAIFC). Nonetheless, I felt that it would have been nice if at least two weeks long internships were arranged for all of us with the relevant organizations. That way, we would have been able to learn more about the working of the respective institutions.

### **My experiences otherwise**

I will always treasure my meeting with delegates from other countries especially Kata, Titi Ratana, Yukari and Dinesha whom I will always remember for their kindness and love.

I have also made some interesting and a few disappointing observations. I have seen that a lot of Chinese keep themselves abreast of the current global affairs. However, very few actually know about Pakistan and those who do, largely hold "biased" views about the country. For example, I was asked by my acquaintances if women were allowed to go to universities or for shopping alone in Pakistan; whether women are treated well in a male dominated or (as is perceived) an "extremist" society? Or whether "Taliban" will take over Pakistan? Even more, some of them were quite surprised to know that we have almost all the international brands, fast food and hotel chains in Pakistan. I also studied people and their daily life styles in China and found that the younger generation is less formal, more open and accepting. I felt that foreigners are much welcomed. I happened to meet many Kazak and Uzbek students and felt that they too, enjoy their life in China.

All in all, I truly benefited from my stay, with so much new to see and learn.

Long live Pak-China Friendship!