I was lucky to be one of the QMUL students selected for the University Immersion Programme 2019 which took place at the Sichuan University in Chengdu, China. I want to thank the QMUL for the opportunity and the Sichuan University which organised the two-week programme. A special thanks to the nice and kind student volunteers who made special the experience.

Once we arrived in Chengdu, we participated in the UIP 2019 opening ceremony. We watched some performances of traditional Chinese dances and the famous Chengdu opera – the actor can change his mask in a jiffy!

The day after our arrival, we were welcomed by the School of Public Administration staff and professors. The programme well combined academic lectures, cultural classes and the visit to Sichuan main attractions. We attended some lectures - which took place in the three campuses of the Sichuan University, Wangjiang, Jiangan, and Huaxi - and I did not find any big difference with British ones.

The cultural classes were the most interesting. We had a Chinese language class, in which we (tried to) learnt some basic words and expressions in Chinese – with little success. We played the Mahjong, in its simplified version of Chengdu, in a tea house – my favorite cultural class. Moreover, we learnt about Chinese philosophy, trying to solve the Confucian puzzle, and we wrote Chinese characters with the traditional brush during the calligraphy class.

Due to the trips, I visited incredible places. We visited the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, where we saw many pandas, included the red ones – which I did not know. On the same day, we also visited the Jinsha Archeological Museum. Then, we explored Quincheng Mountain, a famous Taoist mountain with several temples. We arrived at the Laojung Pavilion at 1260 mt – lots of steps, but the Pavilion and the view were amazing. After a typical lunch, we went to the Dujingyan Dam -an irrigation system created in 200 BC! – and the nearby village.
During the second week, we visited the Sichuan Disaster and Prevention Reduction Education Center. Sichuan is an earthquake zone – there was an earthquake in Chengdu on the 4th of July. The center was built after the terrible earthquake which took place in 2008, and it explains the different types of natural disasters, raising awareness about them through videos, explicative panels, and interactive activities.

In my free time, I explored Chengdu and its surroundings with the QM group. We traveled for two hours by train to reach the Giant Buddha in Leshan. The statute is 71 mt tall and is located in the Mount Emei. We visited Chengdu far and wide. We had shopping the world largest building, New Century Global Center – which hosts a swimming pool, a shopping mall, a cinema, two hotels, and a church – Jinli Road – a traditional Chinese market – and Chunxi Road.

I also tried two of the most popular things Chengdu: food and tea. Sichuan food is known for being China most spicy food. And it is true. In particular, I ate the famous hotpot, chicken with peanuts, and I could taste the Sichuan pepper which is widely used. Sichuan is well-known for tea and drinking tea is part of the Chengdu lifestyle. I tried different types of teas, jasmine tea, green tea and black tea – one of the green teas I drank tasted like corn, whereas another one like fried beans: incredible flavors!

I want to conclude by saying that I feel enriched by this experience. I had the possibility to visit China and learn something more about its culture and history. Moreover, I met incredible people - the other students from the QMUL and the Nottingham University, the Sichuan University the students and the staff, the tour guides, the volunteers in the temple– which contributed to making the experience unforgettable. Hope to see them again in China or somewhere else in the world!