

MR DONG LUOJIE

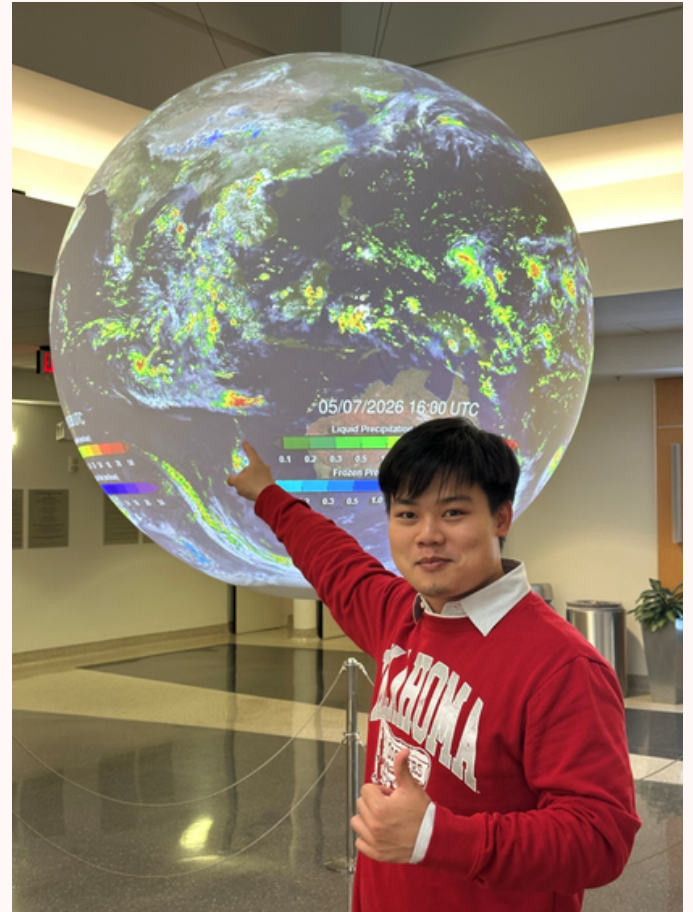
2nd Year PhD Student
(Humanities & Social Studies Education)

Meet Dong Luojie, a 2nd year PhD student from the Humanities & Social Studies Education Department (HSSE) who attended a summer school in the United States of America (USA) between 18 to 22 May 2026.

Hi Luojie, welcome back! Please share with us more about the summer school you attended.

The ARM 2026 Big Open Data Science Summer School, at the National Weather Center, in Norman, Oklahoma, US, was hosted by the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) User Facility, focusing on open science practices and working with atmospheric observational data.

ARM was formed more than three decades ago in 1989, aiming to tackle the lack of continuous, comprehensive observations of atmospheric processes, with a particular focus on how clouds and aerosols influence solar radiative energy transfer.



Sounds interesting! What did you do during the five days you were there?

Over the week, I worked alongside fellow students, researchers, and scientists, using machine learning methods and open-science tooling on real atmospheric datasets from the ARM User Facility and had an opportunity to visit one of the field measurement sites.



My objectives were to learn, to mingle, and to experience. I wanted to come away with new methods, new contacts, and a broader sense of where my work sits in the field. I also hoped to achieve three things: the scientific methods and tools used by a leading research community, a different way of approaching problems than what I was used to, and the working culture of an international scientific environment. The technical content mattered, but I was equally curious about how researchers elsewhere actually operate day to day.

How did the summer school experience benefited you?

I learned a lot. Just to mention some of the things I took away: a refresher on AI/ML techniques (thanks to Robert Jackson!), a crash course on cloud microphysics (thank you, Andrew Dzambo!), and a clearer understanding of data quality control (thank you, Adam Theisen!), and many more. Of course, I was also thrilled by the tour of the Advanced Radar Research Center (ARRC) in the University of Oklahoma and the ARM's Southern Great Plains site! It was interesting to see where the data originates, rather than only working with it downstream.

Sounds like a fruitful experience! Were there challenges?

There were indeed a few. The schedule was intense, which was demanding after the long journey. Jet lag compounded that in the first days. Socializing took deliberate effort, since I was meeting an entirely new group of people.



The programme was well-balanced between work and rest, so I was able to recover after long days, which helped with both the schedule and the jet lag. On the social side, I found that everyone was warm and approachable, so I simply approached each person with the same openness, and it came naturally after that. From this experience, I learnt that I could be warm and approachable to people even if they hadn't been that warm. After all, we came to learn!

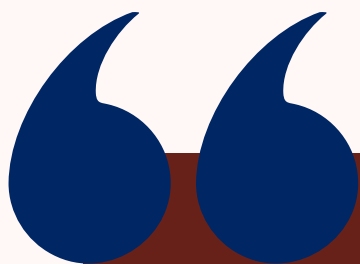
I was fortunate enough to become friends with quite a few, and having meals and hanging out with them after the long day finishes helped greatly too.

I see! What were some of your best memories?

Looking back, a gift exchange stands out. Someone gave me a pair of slippers that I needed, which hotels there usually do not provide, and I gave snacks from Singapore in return. It was a small thing, but it captured the spirit of the group. The site visit and the project presentations were also highlights, both for the science and for the sense of having produced something concrete.



What would you say was the most rewarding takeaway?



The most rewarding part was discovering that I could hold my own in an international setting, by contributing to discussions, presenting my work, and connecting with researchers I would otherwise never have met, not inferior to anyone from within the country. That confidence is something I will carry forward.

Any advice to students who look forward to international experiences and exchanges?

Talk to your supervisor early. They often know about opportunities you are not likely to find on your own, and their endorsement matters. Then, look at the programmes run by the major research bodies in your field. Many are open to international applicants (even though they might not explicitly say it!) and are more accessible than they appear.

Expect it to be demanding. The schedule could be very full, you could be very tired at some point, and you perhaps will be meeting many new people at once. If you are on a solo trip, expect even more challenges, especially when you're on the move. But these are places where the good part comes in. You could spend so many hours in a day, with a crowd so dedicated in a field so similar to yours, to learn so many new things. Plus, coming from different places, you are likely to meet so many interesting people! The combination of technical learning and human connection is hard to replicate at home.

Sort out the logistics well in advance, such as flights, accommodation and administrative documents, because they might take long. Depending on the destination, time zones might need to be carefully managed. I had to transfer flights many times. Boarding passes are usually shown in local time zones so they could appear very confusing. It is worth spending a few hours before the trip to enter the details of activities, such as flights, onto your mobile calendar with the time zone information embedded. In this way, wherever you are, you can stay confident and organized knowing what is coming up next and when.

Beyond logistics, go in with an open attitude. Bring small tokens such as snacks from home for any gift exchange, as it is a simple way to connect across cultures. And be ready to rest when you can, because the pace is real.



For more information on the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programme, please visit <https://ntu.sg/nie-phd>.