

JENESYS Programme 2008

Reflection

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Thousands of thanks to the Japanese government for arranging such a memorable 9-day trip. With the country's warmest welcome, we had lots of chances to experience and in return, we could tell our new friends a lot about our culture and hence deepened our understanding to each other. Their hospitality and interest in Hong Kong were definitely beyond my imagination. I am sure both countries benefited from this program and we, especially, realized that we have much to improve.

Our observation - we have to do a lot better

It was the first time I had been to Japan and the country's first impression to me was, "Wow, it's just so clean and green!" Everywhere was so neat and tidy that we could hardly see any litter in the streets. The green affairs were also very impressive. When I arrived at Kobe, the very first thing I spotted was an advertising board with cute cartoon showing people practical methods to help slow down global warming. After lunch, we visited a recycling center. I was very surprised to see how serious they were and how many resources and effort they put in helping to reduce waste. Once I saw many elders getting off their coach. To my greatest surprise, many of them took their used bottles with them and went for a recycling bin nearby. The whole country, including the elderly, really pays their greatest effort to do something for the planet they live on. In Hong Kong, though the policy always focuses very much on green affairs, we are never too serious about improving our environment. If we really want to live in a better world, we have to take action seriously. Everyone, from kids to the elderly, should be involved surely.

When we travelled around the city of Tokyo, we could see that there were many historical buildings. As a Hongkonger, I am sorry to tell that our city is rather irresponsible in preserving old sites. Tokyo is also a city with limited land but great demand for development. Still the people there are trying their best to preserve their culture. Take the Old Ministry of Justice Building as an example, even a new building was built, the old one is still kept and utilized so as to "preserve the appearance of the Kasumigaseki district"¹. It was even elected to be one of the Important Cultural Properties of Japan. I know it is always very difficult to balance between development and preservation. But if there is a country on earth that can do it so well, why can't we

do so? The Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Uno, also told us that schools started to teach students traditional Japanese cultures like music when they were small. I think that's the reason why we could enjoy many nice taiko shows when visiting different schools on the trip. They are really proud of their culture and understand that culture only survives if there are people passing it on generation after generation. Their enthusiasm is something we miss in preserving our own culture.

Their success in green affairs and culture preservation highly depends on their seriousness about everything, which was fully shown in their time-management on the trip. Whether it was a timetable for trains, or the arrangements for this program, everything was planned and well-prepared. “五分前集合” (To gather 5 minutes in advance) was something that our tour guides kept reminding us on the trip. More surprisingly, once when we arrived at our destination 15 minutes earlier, our coaches just waited on the roadside for about 10 minutes and entered the high school only 5 minutes to the arranged time. Their concept of “time” is something I admire so much. After this trip, my sense of time has improved a lot and I am sure this new sense will benefit me much.

Another thing I admire much is the elders' sacrifices to their country. The tour guides in Kobe Resource Recycle Center as well as Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution we visited were all retired old people. I remember the tour guide in the recycling center was so enthusiastic when explaining how the plant worked that we couldn't help paying full attention. From his splendid eyes, we could tell that he was very proud of his work. Out of my curiosity, I asked the tour guide who explained the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake to us why he took his voluntary work. He just answered, “Because I have time.” This answer was so simple but very true. In Hong Kong, few old people are involved in social affairs. Many old people think that they do not have contribution to society and are hence very depressed. A sense of personal worth is really important to them. We should reinforce the involvement of the elderly. I hope when I am retired, I can still get involved and help make a better society.

Chats with people I met – learning how to appreciate my home city

I was rather lucky to meet different people and have nice chats with them on this trip. They included our tour guides, my host family, my host friend's English teacher, students, elderly volunteers, the Japanese TV crew and even an Iranian visitor. They had different views on Japan and they reminded me that Hong Kong was still the nice city as I had thought.

I spent quite a long time talking with “Dad” during my home stay. Many people agree that most of the Japanese are quite weak in oral English. So when we chatted,

we needed Yukiko, my host friend, to help us translate. But Dad had no problem reading my school magazine, which was in English, when I tried to explain more about my school. It seems that their English isn't that poor. Maybe they are only weak in oral because they don't have chances to practice. I appreciate that we have a lot of chances in Hong Kong and so many people speak English quite well. We have no difficulties in using this universal language and hence it is easy for us to keep our city international and competitive.

Yukiko's English teacher always goes to travel with her husband. She has been to Hong Kong and some other cities of China. Before the lesson started, she told me that she didn't like Shanghai very much because of the poor air quality there. She said Hong Kong was a beautiful city and hoped I could do my best to keep it clean and pleasant. I think that message is really important. Hong Kong is never a pleasant place without a nice environment. It is lucky that the environment is still not too bad and so we must really take action to protect our city.

I think it was really fortunate that I met an Iranian visitor in the hotel's souvenir shop because he had a totally different view of Japan from mine. He was quite bored with the country and thought that there was no surprise in Japan. There was black and white only and everything was the same. Personally I praise the order and discipline of the country much. It was quite a surprise to learn that some foreigners, especially the Westerners, did not appreciate that kind of obedience. This obedience may not be absolute, but many Japanese are actually suffering from it. They have many rules and norms to follow and these give them great pressure. It is easily proved by the popularity of many relaxing activities like karaoke. So it is so great that Hong Kong is much more "colorful" and lively. We do have norms but not as many as Japanese do. People appreciate our diversity and that makes Hong Kong an interesting and pleasant place to live in.

A fruitful trip

It is always great to travel. We can learn a lot from the country we visit, improve ourselves and be a better person. It is also a nice chance for us to understand our strengths and appreciate ourselves. And I think the best thing of all is to travel with friends. Thank the organizing parties so much for arranging this gorgeous program and offering a chance for me to meet many friends. I can feel that all of my friends and I have improved a lot. Hope we can make good use of what we have learnt and make the two countries, China and Japan, more pleasant places.

ⁱ *History of the Ministry of Justice Building* (Source: The Ministry of Justice, Japan <http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/hmjib-01.html>)