

Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths Programme (2019)

Student-delegates' Report

Topic:

By comparing the characteristics of extracurricular activities in secondary schools, evaluate its effect on personal growth of youths receiving secondary education in Japan and Hong Kong.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Through Japanese comics and manga, it is obviously shown that Japanese schools are packed with various extracurricular activities (ECAs). From Kenjutsu to baseball, students' school lives are filled with excitement and adventures. In the following report, we will study how Hong Kong and Japanese schools differ at ECAs. Regarding Japanese students, we will investigate the reasons for which Japanese students join ECAs, and what drives them to pursue the same ECA year after year. As East Asian students with largely similar academic cultures, these topics are largely relevant and of personal significance to us.

B. BACKGROUND

In Japan, most extracurriculars are school-based¹ with a variety of clubs offered. These cover both physical and aesthetical development aspects, allowing students to join clubs of their interest freely. Some of these activities are influenced by traditional Japanese culture and history. Some commonly known examples include Japanese Tea Ceremony (chadou) and archery (kyuudou).

As Japanese after-school clubs hold meetings nearly every day, the club that a student joins can be defining to their school life. Relationships between club members are close-knit, as students bond over common interests.

Besides allowing students to enjoy fun times with their friends, students also take these extracurricular activities as part of their high school life. Therefore, these extracurriculars could also reduce behavioural problems as their discipline has been developed by participating in the extracurricular activities seriously.

¹. Nakazawa, Atushi. "Seeing Sports as Educational Activities: A Postwar History of Extracurricular Sports Activities in Japan." *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 45 (Tokyo: Hitotsubashi University, 2014), p. 1-14

C. POINT OF INTEREST FOR INQUIRY

Extracurricular activities (ECA) are important for youth's all-rounded development. Local culture, interpersonal relationships of participants and the support of teachers are the factors affecting the experience of teenagers. Therefore, by conducting this study, we would like to find out the relationship between the characteristics of ECAs, students' competitiveness and future dreams. For example, we are investigating in how students who participate in their ECA clubs would change their mindsets of their career and ability. This can be found by doing research on the information about Japanese students' enrollment in universities, as well as subjects they are most familiar with at the moment. Through comparing the ECAs between Hong Kong and Japan, this would improve our understanding of the two different cultures and education.

D. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We will use observation as one of our research methods. As time is limited in Japan tour, observation will be the most efficient way to obtain first hand data. We will try our best to collect as much data as possible, such as the architecture of different buildings, school environment, local Japanese culture and so on, through conversations with local guides, visits to local high schools and host-family staying.

In our following report, we are also planning to use interview as one of our methods to obtain first-hand information. With interview, we can adopt a wider range of questions and facilitate a deeper understanding towards the issue through asking students directly. It will also serve as a complementary effect for observation since the data collected from observation may not be comprehensive enough. We do realise that interview will be time consuming, and not suitable for the packed schedule of ours in Japan. To improve the efficiency of the interview, we will plan the questions beforehand, and try to reduce the time used for the interviews so that we can better enjoy the tour.

E. SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Extracurricular activities of students have a long-lasting impact on their characters. They also help students explore interests and develop essential life skills, such as time management and problem-solving skills. In addition, extracurricular activities greatly influence the mental health of students. For example, if students are passionate about their activities and enjoy the activities to a large extent, they will feel emotionally satisfied. Their pressure due to academic studies can be relieved by these activities. To conclude, extracurricular activities have great impacts on personal development of students, and are significant in affecting the quality of the young generation of the society. Thus, by comparing the extracurricular activities in Hong Kong and Japan and evaluating their effect on students, we can reflected in what way the extracurricular activity system in Hong Kong can be improved with reference to Japan.

F. FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Similarities and differences in the characteristics of extracurricular activities between Japan and Hong Kong.
2. Impacts of extracurricular activities on adolescents' personal growth in Hong Kong and Japan.
3. Suggestions and obstacles on how Hong Kong secondary schools could learn from Japanese education curriculum in terms of extracurricular activities.

G. RELATED CONCEPTS AND KNOWLEDGE

1. Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities are one of the forms to facilitate and to promote life-wide learning at school. They are conducted through diversified mode, for example, co-curricular activities, uniform groups, interest groups etc. They serve to complement school-based curriculum in promoting life-wide learning.² In Japan, club activities have been embedded in part of the official education curriculum.³ It is believed to let children learn emotional stability, values, love of their hometown, and social skills to live in harmony.

2. Personal growth

It is the process of understanding and developing oneself to achieve a person's fullest potential. It is the foundation of emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual health. It is essential for a person's growth, maturity, success and happiness, and it causes a deep effect on every single aspect of people's life.⁴

3. Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships are the social interactions and affiliations between two or more people. This play an important role in the personal growth of adolescents. There are several types of interpersonal relationships, such as parent-child relationships and peer relationships. In this study, we will focus on investigating effects of extracurricular activities on peer relationships of students.

4. Socialization

Socialization⁵ is the process in which an individual is taught to behave in and adapt to a certain manner that is acceptable to the society they are living in. These include the dynamic between different social classes, work ethic and practices, cultural traditions et cetera. It prepares the individual to participate in a society such that they can contribute in an effective, suitable way.

5. Public Health

² Stephen Yip, "The notion of Life-wide Learning", Retrieved November 12, 2019, from https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/life-wide-learning/lwl_notion.ppt

³ Daisuke Kimura and Madoka Tatsuno, "Advancing 21st Century Competencies in Japan", The Center for Global Education of Asia Society (February 2017), Retrieved November 18, 2019, from <https://asiasociety.org/files/21st-century-competencies-japan.pdf>

⁴ World Minded Team, "Why Is Personal Growth so Important?", World Minded, Retrieved November 12, 2019, from <http://worldminded.com/why-is-personal-growth-so-imortant/>

⁵ "Socialization." Encyclopædia Britannica, Retrieved November 12, 2019, from www.britannica.com/science/socialization.

Public health is defined as "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting human health".⁶ It can be divided into mental, physical and social aspects.

Intensive extracurricular activities help adolescents to maintain body fitness and mental health. In the study, we are going to investigate how extracurricular activities affect Japanese adolescents' health. It is also closely related to economic status and level of cultural, social and environmental development of country, city, town or even village. We can observe how these factors affect adolescents' development.

⁶ "Public Health Services" World Health Organization (2019), Retrieved November 18, 2019, from <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Health-systems/public-health-services/public-health-services>

H. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BETWEEN JAPAN AND HONG KONG

Similarities

Extracurricular activities often serve as a platform for students to learn social skills, develop hobbies and unleash their potentials. In both Japan and Hong Kong, schools have been encouraging students to participate in clubs and teams in order to seek for an all-rounded personal development. In the case of sports, it is generally believed that school-based extracurricular sports activities (SBECSA) could contribute to not only increase in physical fitness but also to school performance⁷. Both places also aim at striking a balance between academic results and extracurricular activities.

Differences

Yet, the mode and the variety of extracurricular activities differ in Hong Kong and Japan due to their different cultural backgrounds, and the focus of students varies. In Japan, most secondary schools only focus on one club only, and has a long-lasting continuity. For instance, students may join a string orchestra, and have it as their ECA for the rest of their secondary school life. While in Hong Kong, we have greater flexibility. Students are allowed to switch from one club to another in a free manner, and without much resistance from school teachers or club advisors.

In addition, Japanese ECAs are more culture related. Clubs such as Kyudo (弓道), Ikebana (華道／花道), Chado (茶道), Hyakunin isshu (百人一首), which all reflect the rich and deep traditional culture of Japan, and how schools act as a medium to preserve and inherit these intangible cultures. Meanwhile in Hong Kong, although there are also some culture related ECAs like Chinese calligraphy, these ECAs are just the minorities. Most of the clubs are not Chinese culture related. Clubs and teams such as string orchestra, choir, robotics, and more westernized and without much relationship with the traditional Chinese culture.

Apart from the nature of the club, ECAs in Japanese secondary schools are also more student initiated. Most of the activities are organised by students and rarely do they need involvement of school advisors. They may only do so when activities require specific authorisation for the use of equipment, or requiring dedicated professionals to organise an activity. On the other hand, in Hong Kong, students are more passive when it comes to activity organisation. Teachers take control and are usually in charge of the whole situation, while students aren't acting as the role of a planner.

⁷ Kenryu Aoyagi, Kaori Ishii, Ai Shibata, Hirokazu Arai, Chisato Hibi and Koichiro Oka "Correlates of engagement in school-based extracurricular sports activities among registrants of sports leader banks", Retrieved June 25, 2013, from http://www.efsupit.ro/images/stories/JPES%20nr%202%202013/art%201.Vol%2013%20_2_%202013.pdf

The difference is more apparent in sports clubs. The development of sports teams and local competitions in Hong Kong mainly focuses on internationally recognized sports, such as basketball and volleyball. In Japan, there are more club activities based on traditional national sports. Take archery and kyoudo as examples. As kyoudo is the Japanese martial art of archery hence carries a great historical value, kyoudo clubs are set up more commonly than archery, where competitions would be based on Japanese traditional regulations. Although some elderly practise Chinese traditional martial arts tai chi, it is not as common in teenagers when compared to its popularity in seniors. Also, there are not many interest classes and clubs teaching Chinese traditional sports to the youth.

But the most significant difference lies in the venue and time constraints. Regarding the locational difficulty, Japanese schools often have bigger campus than schools in Hong Kong (since more land are available in Japan). This allows secondary schools in Japan to organise large scale activities, and allow different school teams to work together during the same period of time. For example, since there are multiple playgrounds, sports teams such as basketball team and football team can have their practice together during the same period of time. While in Hong Kong, most campus aren't big enough to fit multiple teams together, and not all sports team can have their practice every single day. This clearly explains why Japanese schools has more regular sports practices on average (6 times per week) than Hong Kong schools do. They even have sports practices during the weekends, and trained for long hours every day. While in Hong Kong, schools rarely have practices during the weekends, with most training concentrated during weekdays after school. Concerning the time constraint, with many tutorial classes for Hong Kong students, it would be hard for them to squeeze out time for extracurricular activities every single day, and training for everyday wouldn't be feasible. While for Japanese students, their timetables are much more relaxed and without such a hectic schedule. Naturally, they can spend much more time on ECAs and practise more — even every single day.

Schools play an important role in inheriting traditional culture and nurturing talents. Despite the differences in organization of extracurricular activities in Hong Kong and Japan, students are seen enjoying the extracurricular activities and achieving the aim of a comprehensive personal development.

I. IMPACTS OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ON ADOLESCENTS' PERSONAL GROWTH IN HONG KONG AND JAPAN

Japan

During our visit at Sakurazuka High School, we were able to inquire about their school's view on the impacts of their club activities on students. They replied that extracurriculars were in line with one of their school's main aims: to improve their students' all-round skills, particularly communication in this case. Communication and cooperation with fellow club members, as well as teacher advisors, are involved in the day to day workings of clubs.

The dynamics between senior and junior members within a club is a notable characteristic contributing to extracurriculars' impact on students. This can be attributed as an example of socialization in teenage years for Japanese students. Club presidents organize activities independent of teachers' assistance, allowing a higher degree of freedom for students, which in turn requires more responsibility considering the workload. Senior members usually hold more responsibilities, and juniors hold a lot of respect for them. This correlates to workspace dynamics in Japanese society, where juniors are expected to behave obediently towards senior officers. Within a club, members set their own rules and traditions to follow. This concerns the discipline and dedication of the members, as they are expected to pass down traditions as seniors graduate. Japanese society as a whole value their traditions greatly, as seen in various traditional extracurriculars that are still vastly popular to this day.

Since students usually only participate in one club, club activities are quite specialized, allowing students to make the most out of their strengths. Through club meetings, students can hone their skills. An important part in improving themselves is the model of peer learning. Since there is usually no adult in charge of the clubs, students learn through practicing together, and from each other. Another aspect of Japanese workplace culture is collective improvement. Colleagues will tend to offer help to group members, such that they can work at the same pace. It can be seen that extracurricular practices aid Japanese students in developing suitable interpersonal skills for later life, making it an essential aspect of their high school lives.

For senior students, expectations to perform well in their university entrance exams are high, given the similar societal expectations in East Asian societies. As club activities are conducted every day, this can strain students as they enter the final preparation periods for their exams. The results of this are increased stress and anxiety, due to academic pressures to enter ideal universities and prepare for later life. However, as Japanese students feel strong connections to their clubs, it is unlikely for them to give up participating in extracurriculars. From an interview with a Japanese student, she reported that her schedule was very busy and that club activities did

take away some of her self-study time, but she enjoyed the activities nonetheless. Therefore, perseverance can be trained from the balance of schoolwork and extracurriculars.

Hong Kong

To encourage students' all rounded personal growth, educators have been providing an array of extracurricular activities for students in academic, aesthetic, and physical aspects. It is common for students to join multiple extracurriculars, whether for personal interest or building up portfolios. Besides being able to train different skills, time management becomes a very important quality as students have to balance their schoolwork, extracurriculars, and personal lives. This becomes a precursor to later life, such as university where students a higher degree of freedom. Students will have learnt to use their time wisely and accordingly, achieving a high degree of efficiency and maintaining a suitable lifestyle.

Some extracurriculars that are becoming increasingly popular in Hong Kong, such as Model United Nations (abbrv. MUN), can effectively increase students' international-mindedness. Hong Kong students, having the advantage of being fluently bilingual or even trilingual, can confidently participate in activities involving delegates from all around the world. In MUN, participants are required to represent a foreign country in various councils such as the Security Council, or Human Rights Council. Students can learn about other countries' history and cultural practices through in-depth research, and about current affairs in the world.⁸ Along with the Liberal Studies curriculum, this can serve to increase students' awareness of current affairs, and broaden their worldview. Additionally, they will get the chance to meet and work with foreign students, training their interpersonal communication skills.

Besides the positive impacts aforementioned, there are some negative impacts that are brought to students by extracurricular activities. The Hong Kong education system covers a wide array of knowledge spanning across different modules, so students usually have busy study schedules and even tutoring. Other factors affecting students include societal expectations to excel all-round, expectations from parents, etc. However, most students persevere in their ECAs, due to personal interest and other benefits. Their resulting lifestyles are very busy, and in the long term, this can lead to stress and mental health issues. For students who are more prone to academic pressures, mental health issues are becoming increasingly common. Students must learn to balance different aspects of their lives in order to achieve success in school and later life.

⁸ 'What is MUN?' Hong Kong Model United Nations Club, Retrieved January 24, 2020, from <https://www.hkmunc.org.hk/what-is-mun>

Summary

Both extracurricular activities in Japan and Hong Kong place high requirements on students, with Japan leaning towards dedication, and Hong Kong requiring time management skills. Extracurriculars offer opportunities for students to develop skills outside of the classroom, and improve interpersonal communication skills. On the other hand, while Japanese clubs have a large emphasis on passing down cultures and practices, Hong Kong's activities aim to incorporate its students into the greater world. Japanese and Hong Kong students commonly share busy schedules in their senior years, but this serves to train skills in balancing their lives and perseverance. All in all, extracurriculars play an important part in training students for later life.

J. SUGGESTIONS AND OBSTACLES OF HOW HONG KONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS COULD LEARN FROM JAPANESE EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN TERMS OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Suggestions

The most important aspect that Hong Kong secondary schools can learn from Japanese secondary schools are the factor of continuity.

Without a doubt, Hong Kong's secondary schools' extracurricular activities lack continuity. It isn't mandatory for students to join a certain amount of ECAs during a school year, and students can quit whenever they want to. On the other hand, in Japanese secondary schools, an ECA is a commitment throughout their whole term, or even their entire secondary school life. Once they join a particular club or a society, there's no going back, they will continue to pursue in that direction for a long period of time, and specialised in that particular area of sports or music..... This is the continuity that extracurricular activities in Japan have, and what Hong Kong doesn't.

The reasons why Hong Kong secondary schools should learn from this area are: Firstly, it allows students to establish a greater bond between one another, and establish long lasting friendships through these clubs and activities. If Hong Kong secondary schools can adopt such method of extracurricular activities, students who have the same interest will become friends together due to their common interest. And unlike in the past, this kind of friendship would be able to last for a longer period of time, since students have to keep on the same kind of extra curricular activities for their next few years of schooling. A much deeper bonding between peers can be formed, and it would definitely enlarge students' social circle and make them more prone to socializing with others.

The second reason why Hong Kong secondary school students should learn from this area is to make them learn that they should be responsible for their choices, and not to easily give up on something. Many students in Hong Kong have a tendency to quit societies or sports team if they ever stumble onto even a tiny little bit of obstacles. Their mindset is that they can always easily quit a society, so it doesn't bother them on their choices. They may not think twice when they join a club, and do it recklessly. If Hong Kong secondary schools can learn the aspect of continuity from Japanese schools in terms of extra curricular activities, students would learn to be responsible for what they choose for their interest since their choice would directly affect what they would do for the next 5~6 years or so. And since the extracurricular activities now can't be quit so easily that easily anymore, they would learn not to back down so easily whenever they stumble onto challenges, and fight their way through it.

Obstacles

However, Hong Kong schools would definitely face challenges when they are attempting to make such a change.

To commence with, compared to Japanese students, Hong Kong students have much busier daily lives. Due to the great emphasis put on examinations results by the current education system, many are required to take tutorial classes every day after school to prepare for internal examinations and HKDSE exams, and many find themselves suffocating from the heavy workload of school based assessments and extra work from school.⁹ A call for a dedicated extracurricular activity for 6 years of secondary school life would mean immense work for Hong Kong students, and would definitely receive much resistance from students.

Secondly, Hong Kong schools lack certain resources for developing extracurricular activities. For instance, compared to the large fields in Japanese high schools, there is very limited space in Hong Kong schools for training of sports teams such as football and baseball teams. In addition, most of the capital in Hong Kong schools are allocated to academic teaching, and little is left for the development of extracurricular activities. There are professional coaches for each club and team in Japanese high schools, while most of the teachers in charge of clubs are committed to several other tasks in Hong Kong. Less effort can be contributed for improving the clubs' or teams' performances. All of the above hinders the development of extracurricular activities in Hong Kong. As the functioning of the clubs or teams cannot be facilitated, the incentives for students to join these activities will be greatly lowered, which makes it pretty hard for schools to maintain the continuity of ECAs in Hong Kong.

In conclusion, the aspect of continuity is much worthwhile to be learned by Hong Kong schools, and can nurture a sense of belonging and responsibility among students in Hong Kong. If Hong Kong schools can apply the mechanism of the way Japan treats the extracurricular activities, both students and schools can be benefited on various aspects as mentioned above. Despite the possible obstacles, we are sure that one day every school in Hong Kong would accomplish the way of treating extracurricular activities like Japanese schools do, all committed to it with full effort.

⁹ Paul Yip, 'When will Hong Kong realise that its exam-focused culture is failing our children?' Retrieved January 24, 2020, from <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1906669/when-will-hong-kong-realise-its-exam-focused-culture-failing>

K. CONCLUSION

This investigation has closely studied the culture and practices of extracurricular activities in Japan and Hong Kong. From the perspective of students, Japanese and Hong Kong students share similar situations, having to balance busy academic obligations, ECAs, and their personal lives. However, the differing characteristics of our respective ECAs have significant impacts on students' development in their teenage years.

A notable portion of Japan's ECAs have traditional roots, their origins dating back several hundred years. Their passing down of traditions have taken hold in schools, while Hong Kong's activities are more contemporary. In Japan, their attitude of living manifests itself in the practices of after school clubs, training teenagers to be prepared for later life in a distinctly Japanese society. For Hong Kong, activities connect students to the international stage, allowing them be prepared to work in a multicultural society. Commonly, as East Asian societies, students both have busy schedules and high expectations placed on them. As a result, students are taught to persevere and have adequate time management.

An admirable quality of Japan's ECAs is their culture of continuity, particularly the students' commitment towards their clubs. This affects students' attitudes towards other goals in life, specifically their ability to persevere through challenges. The continuity in Japanese ECAs has helped shape strong bonds between club members, encouraging their belonging to the school. Hong Kong schools would do well to reference this culture, which would ultimately benefit their students.

All in all, this investigation has been an insightful study into the similarities and differences between Japan and Hong Kong's cultures. It has allowed us to reflect on the impacts and meaning of ECAs to us as students, and pushed us to improve the cultures and practices of our respective extracurriculars.

L. REFERENCE

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M. REFLECTION

CHUNG Yiu Fung Nixon (St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School)

Through this exchange program, I have surely learned a lot. Before this program even started, we have been training almost every week with my lovely teammates, I am really grateful that they are one of my teammates, it is kind of unexpected that we could have been that close with each other, but through the 9-day experience, we have experienced a lot, and that's the reason why we ten students from different schools could become one of my bestfriends that I have never expected.

Not only do I get the chance to know my teammates, we have visited different attractions in Japan namely the Todaiji, National Science Museum, etc and also we get to have the opportunity to stay in a host family in Japan. These experiences that we get through together are surely carve a new page in my life and I will never forget this special opportunity, especially the experience that I have when we visit the Japanese schools, I was one of the students that had prepared a speech in front of everyone. Although I was a little nervous, but as time goes on, I have made it through and started staying calm so as the performance that we have prepared for Japanese schools.

For these nine days, I have learned so much and will definitely treasure it, thank you for giving me the chance for visiting Japan and the experience.

CHENG Chak Yi (ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School)

First of all, I would like to thank the teacher and the organizer for giving me this precious opportunity to participate in Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) Programme 2019. This is undoubtedly an opportunity for me to have a better understanding of Japanese traditional culture and campus culture. JENESYS aims to promote mutual understanding among the East Asia region, and to deepen my understanding of Japan's culture and lifestyle through a series of activities under the proposed exchange programme. And I did learn a lot from the nine-day trip.

We had visited the National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo, Panasonic Museum in Osaka Prefecture and Ehime University Museum in Ehime Prefecture. The National Museum of Nature and Science offers a wide variety of natural history exhibitions and interactive scientific experiences. During the visit to the museum, I saw many interesting documents and rich collections. We also visited Nijubashi Bridge, Todai-ji, Kashiwara Shrine and Matsuyama Castle. They are all full of cultural atmosphere and appreciation value. In the process of inspection, I realized that field inspection -- seeing with my own eyes and perceiving with my own heart -- was quite different from what I had learned in books.

More importantly, I have built a deep friendship with my teammates and host families in Japan. This is my biggest reward in this journey.

Thanks JENESYS again for giving me this opportunity to learn.

CHAN Hin Yin (Queen's College)

The JENESYS programme was really a rare and precious learning opportunity. Apart from getting a taste of lifestyles and cultures in Japan, I also made a lot of friends and built up priceless bonds with them.

To commence with, I was pretty amazed by the great hospitality shown by Japanese people. During our visit to a local high school, we saw Japanese students lining up in rows to welcome us once we stepped into the school entrance. Despite the huge language barriers, the Japanese students still introduced their school and Japanese school cultures to us proactively. Also, during the extracurricular activities session of Kendo, Japanese students explained the rules and taught us the techniques for Kendo patiently, even though we were beginners and were completely not familiar with Kendo. In addition, during our stay in the host family, the hosts bought unique local snacks, such as Japanese chips and chocolate for us. They were so friendly and nice to make us feel at home. The hospitality and warm welcome offered by Japanese people made me feel a surge of warmth in my heart.

Another thing that deeply impressed me is the politeness of Japanese people. Every time they meet each other, they greet each other with friendly and warm smile. For instance, they will say 'ohayou gozaimasu' in the morning and 'konbanwa' in the evening. They will say 'itadakimasu' before the meals and 'gochisousama deshita' after the meals to show their gratefulness and gratitude to the ones who have prepared the meal. This really inspired me to be a more polite person in the future.

To wrap up, the trip was very satisfying and allowed me to broaden my horizons and enrich my life experiences. I am really grateful to be a participant of the JENESYS programme, and I will never forget the heartwarming memories with my groupmates and teachers.

FUNG Hok Ching Harold (St. Paul's College)

The JENESYS programme was definitely a once in a lifetime experience, and through the trip I had a thorough experience of what real Japanese culture is like.

One of the most unforgettable memories is the homestay with host families. In the past, I never had any homestay experience before, and this was a brand new experience to me. The Japanese family greeted us with great hospitality and we even got to enjoy watching a football game during our visit. And during the whole visit with the family, my group mates and I had a chance to try out some authentic Japanese food, and test out what a regular Japanese family would eat on a daily basis. The experience definitely broadened my horizon. Their healthy diet and lifestyle shows why Japan is one of the countries in the world with the longest life expectancy. Their hospitality also reflected the traditional culture of Japan, and it's definitely something that we Hong Kongers could learn from. We should also respect all the people around us and treat others at our best. Just like how the host families treated us strangers with their greatest hospitality and respect. We barely know each other at the beginning, but regardless of that, we eventually became great friends with each other despite our cultural and language differences.

Another indelible experience from the trip was the Science museum. I myself am not too much of a science-person, and not too enthusiastic about the museum tour at first. The idea of visiting a science museum bored me from the start. However, the exhibitions really blew my mind. The museum showcased a wide range of specimens, ranging from butterflies to fossils from dinosaurs, and are definitely something that none of us group members ever expected to see during this Japan visit. I was truly amazed by the exhibitions, not just because of their wide range of display, but also because of their detail of each showcase. I recalled that during one of the exhibitions, it was a bunge of butterfly specimens, ranging around 100 of them. Each butterfly was so detail that I was even able to see the patterns of their wings if I go up close. I was absolutely amazed by their effort in creating all the wonderful displays, and truly admired their work.

The visit to the waste management facility was also unforgettable. At there, we had a chance to see the behind the scenes of all the recycling in Japan, including how they turn unused bike compartments into a brand new bike, or the 12 categories of recycling. In Hong Kong, I was never aware that environmental protection was such an important issue. Perhaps I was not alerted as how our surroundings has been severely influenced by global warming and climate change. The tour made me realise that I can also make a change to our world's ever-changing climate too. If everyone is willing to make a small sacrifice, e.g recycling paper or tin can on a daily basis, we may make the world a greener and better place, and reduce the ever-increasing pollution rate around the world. One small step for us, is a much greater step for humanity.

By and large, the tour to Japan was one of the best trips I've ever had. Not only did I have the chance to experience what true Japanese culture feels like, the whole experience was inspiring and amazing.

KWOK Sze Yu (Munsang College (Hong Kong Island))

The JENESYS programme really inspires me and gives me an unforgettable memory. In this programme, there are many moments that I like very much and this trip to Japan had definitely widen my horizon.

I like chatting with others and understanding their feelings. So, I enjoy the time that I spend with the students in Japan. They are kind and we became friends very quickly. We shared our school lives. We found some of our common hobbies such as playing table tennis and listening to the music. Although we had some language barriers, we still chatted happily and tried our best to share our feelings by paintings and hand gestures.

It was a remarkable memory at school. I tried kendo and it is really interesting. That was the first time I tried this Japanese sports. The students taught me patiently and I can feel that they really enjoy playing kendo. After this programme, I will also search for more information about kendo as it is quite new and interesting for me.

Another unforgettable memory is the homestay with host families. We helped them prepare our dinner and we also shared our cooking experience with each other. They treated us like their own children and I can totally feel how much care they gave us. I will remember every moment that I spent with them and treat everyone nicely like how they treated us.

JENESYS programme have successfully inspired me. I will surely remember all these memories and share them with my friends. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to explore, understand the culture of Japan and meet new friends!

LEE Yan Lam Esmond (SKH Tang Shiu Kin Secondary School)

The Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths' (JENESYS) Japanese tour was actually my first overseas study tour in ever. I have never thought that a single tour could have inspired me that much. The weekly practice with groupmates and other JENESYS members are really unforgettable, for that i have never prepared a dance performance before.

For the time being in Japan, to be honest, it hadn't been that surprising or fascinating as much as I expected it to be. The trip, especially the school visits, were still inspiring and remarkable. It was a precious opportunity to experience Japanese education. Local students were very friendly and nice. Despite our language barrier, we still managed to exchange a lot of ideas and fun facts of our life. I had never imagined that I could experience what Japanese novel depicted.

The trip's most liked part of mine would be the time sitting on the coach, listening to the tour guide, telling us the stories behind historical sites, meaning of Japanese phrases. Their initiative and keenness toward learning Chinese culture are well appreciated. Remember that there was once my groupmate, Alina, asked about the relationship between Japanese craftsmanship and Chinese Taoism. They raised questions about Taoism afterwards. Their eagerness to comprehend Chinese culture really impressed me. I have really learnt a lot from the two Japanese translator and tour guide, and would like to address special honour and thanks to two of them here.

More than those I got from Japanese students and two professional tour guides from the Japan-China Friendship Centre, I have also shared my life in Hong Kong, my photography pieces and my hobbies with my Japanese peers. I guess that we both find there are actually more similarities between Hong Kong and Japanese students than we expect.

This tour has really inspired me a lot, no matter on my understanding to Japanese culture, on my social skills and circles and future career development. Thanks JENESYS for such a great trip.

LI Ching Yi (St. Paul's Secondary School)

This is my first time travelling overseas. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Education Bureau and Japanese government for giving us a precious opportunity to explore the beautiful sides of Japan.

Before joining the trip, I often heard from my classmates that people in Japan are very polite. I can really feel their politeness during these nine days. For example, when we start our lunch or dinner, we have to say 'itadakimasu', when we finished our dinner, we have to say 'gochisousa madeshita'. As Hong Kong is a fast-paced city with busy and hectic lifestyle, we often neglect the etiquette that we should follow when we see our parents and elders. Even though the staff members are in the same position, they will also bow to each other when they meet each other for the first time. Perhaps I can learn to be polite from them. There is a Chinese saying which means that courtesy costs nothing. People will not blame you for your politeness, but will appreciate your courtesy, or even makes a good impression on you. They also inspired me to be a more polite person in the future.

In addition, I have learnt a lot from the Japanese culture. They emphasize a lot on accuracy and punctuality. The most memorable reminder made by the tour guide is that we are required to sit inside the coach on or before 9:05am. We may question why the time should be five minutes past nine but not nine o'clock sharp, but this show the consideration and accuracy insisted by Japanese. They had estimated the time well for our meal, and allow us to benefit the most in the shortest period of time. Therefore, being late is not acceptable. In Hong Kong, we often be late for our family gatherings and school meeting. People in Hong Kong may not care a lot about it, but Japanese people do care. Since then, I have learnt the importance of punctuality by arriving five minutes earlier than the stated time. This habit will be sustained when I returned to Hong Kong and I will encourage my family and friends to be punctual as well.

Moreover, I have learnt to prepare well. Through attending seminars and having meals, I can see that the staff has a thorough preparation for the activity. On the other hand, most people in Hong Kong, especially secondary school students, are 'last minute fighter' that they will not prepare themselves well until the last minute. This can be shown by the frequent updates of our speeches until the last minute before standing onstage. This shows a big contrast between people in Hong Kong and Japan. I understand that there are a lot of uncertainties that we cannot be prepared before the activity, but I believe that preparation is still important such that the programme can run smoothly and efficiently. After the trip, I reviewed myself that I often did inadequate preparation, causing inconvenience to participants and obstruct the activity to run smoothly. As there is a club activity which will be held in February, the experience during this trip always reminds me to prepare and rehearse well before showing to others.

Last but not least, I have gained a lot from the trip and I treasure the memorable moments with my groupmates and staff. The trip is not the end, but the start of my learning journey in Japan.

LIU ON Ying (Lingnan Secondary School)

Before the exchange program started, we already looked forward to it as we all realize the friendliness of Japanese. Training once a month and making friends with my groupmates before the trip gave me a sense of belonging and I felt that I am part of the program already. All those experiences motivate me to be more serious in Japan while participating in every activity.

At the beginning of the trip, we went to several attractions in Japan, such as the Todaiji, National Science Museum, etc.

We got used to the life in Japan with ease as we made a visit to the high schools there as exchange and home stay with our host family. All these new experiences are profoundly memorable to me. From how to start a conversation with classmates timidly then talk about everything with them to finally say goodbye to them unwillingly, every experience is so valuable.

All the students who represented Hong Kong put a lot of effort in planning, including giving speeches to Japanese and spending time on the project.

I believe that every challenge is an opportunity for us to equip ourselves. As long as we try our best by mustering all our strength and passion, nothing will be too difficult to overcome. What I experienced has broadened my horizons a lot. Thank you for giving me the chance to visit Japan.

LOO Jor Tsz (St. Stephen's College)

This exchange tour has been a transformative experience. Being vastly different from regular tourist itineraries, I got to experience Japan in an entirely new light. The tour blended experiences of tradition and innovation, allowing us to enjoy the best of Japan's distinctive qualities. I could feel that extra care was taken to give us an authentic experience, from our stay at a host family to the washoku banquet.

Of course, one of the highlights of the tour were our visits to local high schools. We were greeted with amazing performances of music and traditional arts such as shodou. Three girls, dressed in kimono and hakama, performed calligraphy on a piece of paper akin to a stage, matching the rhythm of an upbeat song. It was my first time seeing shodou incorporating modern elements, and it was wonderful to see the synthesis of new and old culture. In classes, students had prepared presentations on Japanese lifestyle for us in their English class. Their colourful posters and improvised drama skits were a breath of fresh air from our usual English classes. I also got to participate in the kyoudou club after school. Being in my school's archery team, I did have some prior knowledge, but I found out that kyoudou was still vastly different. Modern archery has a lot of equipment involved, but kyoudou sticks to its ancient roots, and only involves the bow and arrow. It turned out to be rather challenging, and required quite a bit of strength. After the session, I gained even more admiration for kyoudou athletes and the club members.

Some of our fondest memories were definitely with our host families. I was delighted to find out that Yamaguchi Chouko-san, our hostess, spoke English wonderfully and even a little bit of Chinese. We were taken around the village, which had a long history, housing one of Japan's oldest shrines. It was a lot of fun listening to our hosts share stories from when they visited Hong Kong over 20 years ago, and they were amazed at how much the city had changed since. We made a lovely dinner of ehomaki and steamed vegetables together, before getting the chance to try on yukata. Chouko-san shared how she always had a few sets ready, as she regularly hosts students like us from other countries. We enjoyed wearing the yukata a lot, admiring the beautiful patterns and accessories. Later, we prepared the next day's breakfast, which was one of Chouko-san's original dishes. It consisted of chopping up leftovers and stuffing them into aburaage pockets to make fukubukuro, akin to the New Year's food. Our overjoying experience with our hosts really made our whole trip that much more perfect.

Other interesting places we visited include the National Science Museum, and the Shinagawa Disaster Prevention Centre. These were valuable learning experiences, especially for disaster prevention, as we do not have similar organizations in Hong Kong, being less prone to natural disasters. The National Science Museum offered the 360° theatre, in which we watched videos about the creation of the Universe and marine life. The Science Museum synthesized technology and art to present pictures of prehistoric life and the development of creatures into their modern day form, which was a very immersive experience.

All in all, this trip to Japan deepened my understanding of the country's traditional cultures, and their day to day lives. My appreciation for their lifestyles and preservation of traditional practices

has raised. Since returning, I have shared stories with my friends and family of the trip, to their great interest. To me, this tour will be unforgettable in the years to come.

TAI Cheuk Wing (Ying Wa Girls' School)

The once-in-a-lifetime experiences in the JENESYS programme were beyond my expectations, especially how close we could get to observe their life and talk about local customs and school life with the Japanese host family and schoolmates. Throughout the programme, I have transformed from someone who could be shy and unable to start conversations with foreigners to a confident girl who speaks out her thoughts and shares opinions with them.

Meeting Hong Kong students all from different schools allowed me to know more about the organisation of extracurricular activities in their schools. Through the programme, I have found a platform to bring about discussions among us and reflect about education in Hong Kong. We have also unleashed our potential in performing and presenting through practising together, which is undoubtedly memorable.

While our group mates have been trained together for a month, a step further of exchange would be chatting with Japanese schoolmates and host family. Even though most of Hong Kong students in the tour do not speak Japanese fluently, the Japanese people tried very hard to understand our English and warmly welcomed us to join their discussion. In the school visits, not only did I discover and practise how to communicate with foreigners without being interfered by the language barrier, but also learn the importance of team spirit, cohesion and courage.

When I first joined their music lesson, it was an immediate relief that the teachers and students were harmoniously joking around and had radiant smiles on their faces. Students would teach their teacher the English words to instruct us what to do and help him translate for us. Even when students chuckled due to the mispronunciation of the teacher, he would not feel uncomfortable and laughed along. With the harmonious atmosphere, we were able to join in the laughter as well as discover the joy of learning in their classroom. Another great scene to witness was Hong Kong students teaching others how to clap according to the music sheet. Through music, we struggled and solved rhythm problems together. The cohesion and chemistry between teachers and students facilitated the learning and development of character of students.

On top of that, courage is the key to discovering new fields of knowledge. While the host family knows some English and Putonghua, she was not afraid to translate some Japanese words to English or Putonghua for us, even though she was not sure. Besides, she insisted on recreating a welcome card with our names in traditional Chinese characters in it. Her dedication and courage have been very touching, and urged me to learn to be as committed and brave as she was.

Never could I experience such warmth and learn the qualities of Japanese so closely. After the exchange, I would observe more and apply the attitude I learnt from the Japanese to serving others and responding to people in my life.