

Sino-Japanese Youth Conference 2019

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Introduction

The Sino-Japanese Youth Conference (SJYC) is an annual event held at Li Po Chun United World College since 2008. The seven-day conference invited up to 50 participants from Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Mainland China this year. It is not only about discussing Sino-Japanese issues and developing our critical thinking, but also about making friendships between teenagers from four different regions, regardless of race, background or culture. Another interesting fact is that the conference is completely student-led. Even the organisers are students themselves, so there is no generation gap and we can express ourselves more comfortably.

Before the Conference

I joined the conference because I was interested in Sino-Japanese relationships even before learning about it in school. To be honest, I thought the conference would only be an ordinary history session about Sino-Japanese issues, and also on making some friends. I was not expecting that the conference would have much profound influence on my entire life.

Theme — ‘Empathy and Equality’

In recent months, years or even decades, Sino-Japanese relations have aggressively deteriorated. For example, official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine from the Japanese Prime Ministers and the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands disputes. Different regions have different interpretations on these issues, some aimed to intensify conflicts between Japan and China. Also, older generations of Chinese may be biased against Japan, as the Japanese killed many people in the Nanjing Massacre. But we should not blame our Japanese contemporaries for what their ancestors did. The conference believes that dialogue and a ceaseless effort to understand and communicate allows us to share a common vision for our future, which is *peace*. It is therefore important to engage teenagers in these international issues as we will be the future leaders of our regions. If we could solve these misunderstandings and walk in one another's shoes, or even put our hatred aside, we could improve Sino-Japanese relationships and promote peace. It may seem unrealistic to believe that a youth conference would change the world. However, the conference believes every small footstep is the key to success. The message of peace could be spread out to the entire world through our mutual effort.

Aims of the Conference

1. To have a direct impact on Chinese and Japanese youths' perceptions of each other's cultures.
2. To convey the importance of critical thinking to participants by challenging their sources of knowledge.
3. To help participants learn the importance of being open-minded by offering them a place to interact with peers with different points of view.
4. To raise awareness about the importance of dialogue and communication in contributing towards a constructive future.
5. To encourage Chinese and Japanese youths to contribute to their society in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan through youth initiatives and community service.
6. To provide opportunities for Chinese and Japanese ambassadors to experience the international environment of the United World College Movement.

Buddy Group System

We participants were assigned to a buddy group of seven to eight participants, including participants from different regions. Buddy groups serve as direct support for participants throughout the conference. It also allows participants to have more in-depth and personal discussions with each other, since we would have buddy group meetings every day, sharing our thoughts and feelings. Buddy group leaders are students as well; some of them are even the same age as the participants. Participants and group leaders are therefore just like friends: we could chat in a casual way without feeling awkward at all.

Activities

Welcoming Dinner

We participants were required to wear our own national costumes, as a preliminary understanding of Chinese and Japanese cultures. Moreover, the organisers of the conference performed different dances — Chinese and Japanese — to break the ice between participants.

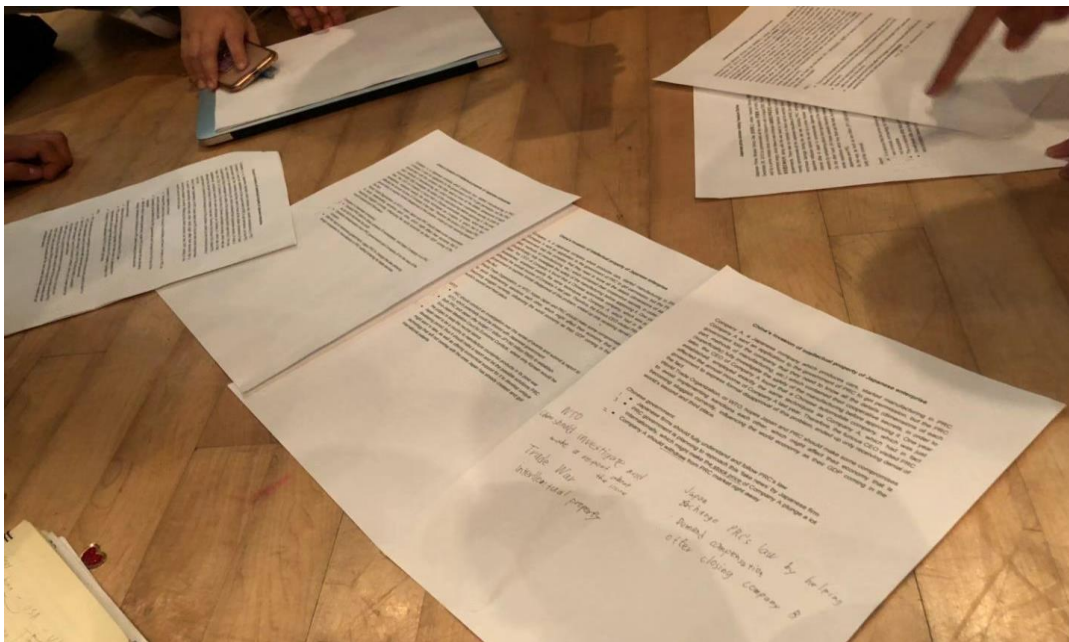


History Session

Before the conference, we were reminded to bring our own history textbooks. During this session, we had to compare and contrast the contents from history textbooks of different regions. After that, we even had to create our own textbooks by eliminating biased views in the history textbooks. For example, the Nanjing Massacre, in mainland Chinese textbooks, was described in great detail, including estimates of people killed, and even different methods of killing used by Japanese soldiers. However, in Japanese textbooks, the incident was only briefly mentioned, and there was barely any detail about the incident. As for the Marco Polo Bridge / Lugouqiao Incident, in Japanese textbooks, its cause was not stated. But in mainland textbooks and Hong Kong textbooks, the cause was given: the Japanese military made an excuse that a Japanese soldier was missing during a drill, and requested for allowance of searching in Chinese territory. Then the incident suddenly broke out with a bomb explosion. In this session, we understood that there exist political influences in education as well. The party / parties in power tend to hide or make up stories to benefit their rule. Moreover, we found out that we cannot believe everything other people tell us. Critical thinking is essential against biased and misleading information.

HK Exploration

This event is an exploration tour around Hong Kong. The aim is to experience Hong Kong's culture and to bond with fellow participants. At first, participants were required to reach a few checkpoints and to complete tasks in groups. Then, we decided on where we want to visit ourselves. As a Hong Kong participant, I had to be like a tour guide, showing participants from

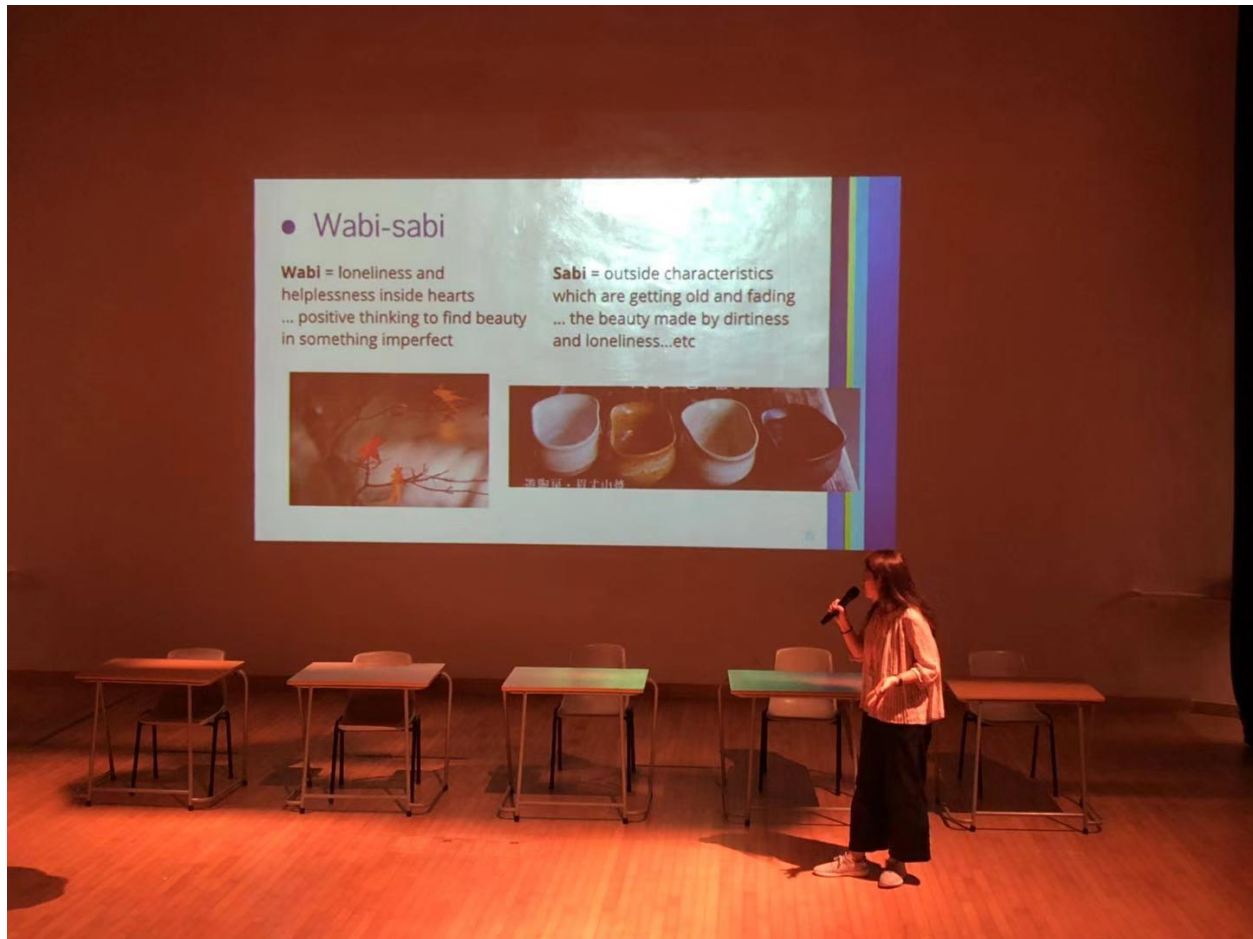


other regions around Hong Kong. Although I am a Hong Konger, it was not easy reaching all the checkpoints because of the time limits and me not necessarily knowing every checkpoint. In this event, I had to act as a leader, doing all the decisions myself, which was not easy at all. To most participants, this might be their first time to Hong Kong and I felt obligated to do a good job without ruining their first impressions. After this event, I realised the importance of having faith in yourself. Confidence makes everything easier.



OC Night Talks

This event is a presentation of different cultures and it lasted for three days. In the Japanese night talk, the Japanese organisers performed a drama to explain Japanese culture. For instance, different degrees of bowing have different meanings in Japan. Traditional Japanese food was also introduced during the night talk. Same foods may bear different meanings in different cultures. For example, in traditional Chinese culture, to eat fish signifies 'may every year end with ample surplus', as 'fish' is pronounced similarly to 'surplus'. In Taiwanese culture, they worship Mazu. Mazu is the goddess and patroness of the sea. She is believed to protect fisherman and sailors. There are many Mazu Temple in Taiwan for worship.



After the Conference

I realised I was wrong before the conference. SJYC is not just a youth conference, but also a bridge, connecting different people from different regions. I had never imagined that bonds between people can be that strong. During the conference, whenever we encountered sensitive issues, like the Japanese invasion of China, the Japanese participants always felt guilty in some way. They thought they had to be responsible for that ruthless war. I felt bad for them as well, as they are under so much pressure. At that moment, I felt like we were no longer restricted by the identity of 'Chinese' or 'Japanese' anymore, we were just friends. The ties between people can remove hatred and turn them into peace and love.

Conclusion

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to join SJYC. I would also like to thank Miss Cheng for suggesting this conference. It may be just a seven-day camp, but it can also influence many people's lives. We have to continue our own life in different parts of the world, and might not see each other for a long time. But the friendships will last forever, and it is always possible to meet again. Even until now, SJYC feels like yesterday for me. I will never forget the meaningful and precious memories. SJYC is definitely a once in a lifetime experience that would make a big impact on your life. I strongly recommend our fellow schoolmates to join the conference. You would love it, for sure.

-THE END-