
2017 JENE SYS

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A report...
what I've witnessed
thought and learned
throughout the
journey





PROLOGUE

JENESYS

...is the abbreviation of the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths Programme.

With promoting mutual understanding and friendship within East Asia as its aim, 6000 youngsters from member states of the East Asia Summit (EAS) has come to Japan annually through the programme since Japan announced it in January 2007 during the second EAS and the Hong Kong delegation has taken part in the programme in 2008-2011 and 2014-2017.

JENESYS aims at promoting mutual understanding among the East Asia region and deepening youths' understanding of Japan through activities such as field visits to research institutes, museums, organizations etc., interaction with Japanese youths through debates, attachment to schools etc., and cultural experience by home stays, visits to traditional cities and historical sites.

JENESYS  2017

The Beginning of the Journey

When Ms. Wong, my history teacher, asked me if I was interested in an exchange programme to Japan called JENESYS, I had my worries. I was worried that I would not be good enough to pass the interviews. I was worried that me lacking knowledge of Japan will make this trip a hard time. I was worried that I will miss too many lessons and cannot catch up. However, if I skipped this chance, I might not find another opportunity to participate in an activity of this magnitude in the future. Besides, the programme could enlarge and enhance my worldview which will be useful in my future. So I filled out the application form, passed the initial selection, went to the interview, and became one of the 63 Form 5 students chosen to represent Hong Kong in the 2017 JENESYS programme.

Before the trip, we had to attend a few workshops and preparatory sessions. As it turned out, there were much more to prepare for the trip Japan than I had imagined. Aside from learning essential knowledge about different aspects of Japanese culture like language, architecture, education system and such, we also had to prepare a performance for the welcoming ceremony and school visits, souvenirs for our host families and the Japanese students, and more. The month before our departure was packed with rehearsals, Japanese lessons, and curiosity on what will happen in Japan.

Then it was time to go on the trip. We went to Japan during 10-18 December and it was an eye-opening experience. The highlights of the tour were the two school visits and the night of homestay, where we gained a glimpse into the life of the Japanese and the differences in daily life and society between Japan and Hong Kong. Not only was it different from all the other trips

that I've had in my life so far, but the hospitality of the Japanese made our journey much more convenient than it would have been and we are all greatly thankful for their generosity.

This report is a recollection of what I had seen, thought, and learnt throughout my 9 days in Japan with a few words accounting the highlights of the trip, and also some photos I took during the trip.

But first, I must express my most heartfelt gratitude to everyone who had made this trip possible. First and foremost, my teacher Ms. Wong for introducing and nominating me to the programme, giving me immense support throughout the programme and helping me deal with my accumulated workload after my return, and the Principal Mr. Yuen for approving my application and penning the recommendation letter to the Education Bureau. Additionally, I would like to thank to all the staff and teachers from the Education Bureau who helped and took care of us in our journey, and my groupmates in Group 3 for making this trip particularly memorable, and last but not least, to the staff and tour guides from the Japanese authorities for preparing such a memorable experience for us. Without all their efforts, this trip would not be possible.



TOKYO//.....
.....**BASKING IN DUSK**.....

TOUR ITINERARY

How I Spent my 9 Days in Japan

This is how I spent my time in Japan throughout these 9 days.

Day 1 (10 Dec): Flight to Tokyo Haneda airport, had light dinner on the tour bus and stayed at Tokyo Prince Hotel.

Day 2 (11 Dec): Morning talk on art restoration by Mr. Taizo Kobayashi, founder of Kobayashi Art and Science, at the Japan China Friendship Center. Lunch at a tempura restaurant near the Senso-ji temple. Afternoon visit to the Senso-ji temple and Tokyo Skytree. Had a welcoming dinner hosted by the Japan China Friendship Center in the Banquet Hall at the Tokyo Prince Hotel, with the Hong Kong delegation, Macau delegation and the Japanese students in attendance.

Day 3 (12 Dec): Traveled by tour bus to Chiba to visit the Matsudo International High School. We had PE and geography lessons and lunch with the students at MIHS. There was also a yukata experience session organized by the MIHS students. After a tea ceremony session, we left the school for dinner at a washoku restaurant.

Day 4 (13 Dec): Traveled to Kyoto via Shinkansen. We then traveled to Kashihara, Nara. We met with our host families in the Kashihara Shrine and then toured the town of Kashihara and the Asuka Villiage with our host as our guide. We stayed with our host family for the night.

Day 5 (14 Dec): WWe bid our hosts farewell at the Ishibutai Kofun and thanked them for their hospitality. After that we travelled to the city of Nara where we visited theTodai-ji temple inside the Nara Park. We then visited the Kiyomizudera temple in Kyoto. At the evening we arrived at an onsen-ryokan hotel in the mountains and enjoyed a full Japanese washoku banquet.

Day 6 (15 Dec): Visited the Kyoto Prefectural Hokuryo High School where we joined their students in a few English lessons and some exchange sessions. We also toured their campus and observed their extra-curricular activities. After a Japanese barbecue dinner, we were dropped off at the hotel and went shopping in a nearby mall.

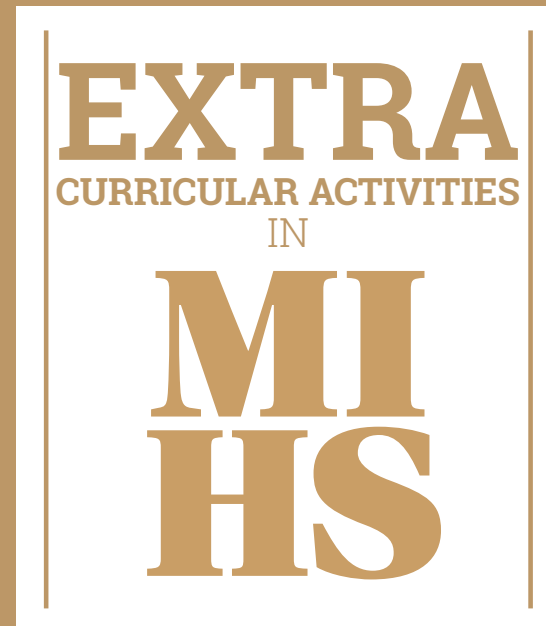
Day 7 (16 Dec): Morning visit to Arashiyama where we had a short hike in the famous bamboo forest footpath and strolled around the nearby village. We then went to a traditional Japanese art studio to experience yuzen, a kind of cloth painting art. In the afternoon, we paid a visit to the Miyako Ecology Center and the Kyoto International Manga Museum to understand Japan's environmental conservation work and manga culture.

Day 8 (17 Dec): We returned to the city of Tokyo by Shinkansen in the morning. We visited a few shopping malls and commercial facilities in Tokyo including the VenusFort and Lalaport. Afterwards, the Japan Chinese Friendship Center held a farewell dinner for us in the banquet hall of our hotel.

Day 9 (18 Dec): Woke up on 5 a.m., traveled to Tokyo Haneda Airport for our departing flight. The journey ended when we landed in HKIA and were dismissed in the airport.

SCHOOL VISIT

Matsudo International High School



Matsudo International High School was the first high school we visited in our trip. Before we went there, one of our teacher supervisors had already reminded us that although MIHS claimed to be highly international and focus on global culture, our expectations should not be too high since Japan itself is a cultural homogenous country, and MIHS would not be more “international” than most secondary schools in Hong Kong. And this is true according to our observation. However, what makes MIHS different is its rich and diverse extra-curricular activities provided to students.

Overall, there are two major types of extra-curricular activities in MIHS: sports and art. Aside from kendo, baseball, archery, and other common clubs in Japanese schools, there is a special club in MIHS --- the tea ceremony club. The “tea ceremony” is a unique part of Japanese culture that brings the preparation and presentation of matcha into a form of art. In our visit to MIHS, the tea ceremony club gave a demonstration of a tea ceremony for us and let us experience the unique Japanese ritual. The tea ceremony club is run by around 20 students and is led by an experienced Japanese lady as their teacher. In the demonstration we all tried the ceremony with the students guiding us through every step. We feel that the students are very experienced in tea ceremony, because the Japanese way of sitting on our knees is really hard and tiring!

There is also a Japanese culture club in MIHS. The club is also led by an elder well-versed in Japanese traditional rituals. They organized a yukata trying session for us and taught us how to wear a yukata in the correct way. These experiences told us that even in school extra-curricular activities, Japanese traditional culture still has a heavy presence. Through my student guide, I learnt that the women's basketball team of MIHS is very popular in the school. They also have a weightlifting club, a rarity in Japanese high schools. The cheerleading team of MIHS is also taken very seriously and is popular among girls.

Although there are not a lot of clubs in MIHS, the diversity of the clubs’ nature is rich, allowing for lots of unique experiences available to students. Participation in clubs are also taken very seriously: every student is required to join at least one club and the last period of each day is allocated to club activities before school is dismissed. Each club is also led by a specific teacher or coach who provides training for club members. I was told that this practice is common in Japanese schools. Under such a system, students can use their spare time to develop their own interests or talents. This benefits their personal development and also helps to relieve stress from studying. timeto develop their own interests or talents. This benefits their personal development and also helps to relieve stress from studying.





OBSERVATION

Religion, Conservation & JAPAN'S TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

In the modern world, a large group of Japanese architects are creating numerous world-famous designs and have earned a high reputation for Japanese architecture. They work for projects around the world and people have high expectations when they know that their buildings will be designed by Japanese architects. Even one thousand years ago, Japan was already constructing man-made wonders that would earn people's adoration and generate high amount of tourism for the country in the future. Hongkongers are doubtlessly already familiar with the golden structure on the side of Kyoko-chi Pond in Kyoto, known as the Kinkaku-ji Temple or the Golden Pavilion. Thanks to Japan's high awareness on conservation, these historical structures are preserved and maintained well. Through visiting different temples in Japan, such as the Senso-ji temple, Todai-ji temple, Kiyomizu-dera temple etc., I have gained a deeper appreciation in Japan's traditional architecture and its religious influence. With my JENESYS groupmates, we have researched and written a report on this topic. What we've found out was no surprise, with Japan's longstanding tradition of delivering greatness with its delicate and genius structures on the hazard-prone and unstable tectonic plates.

We visited many historical structures throughout the trip, including the Senso-ji temple in Asakusa, Tokyo, the Todai-ji temple in Nara, the Kiyomizu-dera temple in the eastern side of Kyoto, the Tenryuji temple in Kyoto's Arashiyama district, and the Togetsukyo bridge close to the Tenryuji. Most of these sites are built as a place of worship and many of Japan's historical architectural wonders are temples (for Buddhist worship) and shrines (for Shinto worship). From this we can see that the original cause for building architectural wonders are religious. Even today, Japan remains a highly religious country, with over half of the population following Shintoism, which is the foundation of Japanese history and culture. Buddhism is the second-most followed religion in Japan, imported through China during the 6th century.

The introduction of Buddhism to Japan resulted in significant changes in Japan's architectural styling over time. For instances, the luxurious styling in Buddhist temples was also reflected in Japan's imperial palaces. At that time, Buddhism was very popular among the Japanese and limited the development of Shinto. This disparity can be reflected in the different architectural styles and philosophies between temples and shrines; Within Asakusa's Senso-ji complex, the Senso-ji temple contrasted strongly against the Senso Shrine next to the temple. The temple is large, freshly painted, with bright and golden adornments, packed with visitors attracted by its marvellous and stylish looks. On the other side of the plaza, a small, plain-coloured shrine sits behind a tall tree, with a brown, wooden tori in the gate. Not many tourists noticed the Shrine, and a few old men were sitting in front of the shrine, taking a rest under the trees. From the architectural style of the religious buildings alone, we can tell that Buddhism enjoyed a much higher social status than Shintoism.

The Senso-ji refers not only to the temple itself, but also the cluster of religious buildings surrounding the temple, including Kaminarimon, the famous gate with a huge red lantern, some monasteries and a five-storey pagoda tower. The bright red pagoda is the tallest building of all, with a roof similar to that of temples and pagodas found in China. This construction style drains water away, and avoids any erosion on the rooftop. As can be seen, along with Buddhism, early Japanese architecture also took cues from classical Chinese designs. This applied not only to Senso-ji, but also another legendary temple,

the Todai-ji temple, which we will explore later.

The history of the Senso-ji temple is also fascinating, as it had gone through multiple mishaps. In 1865 the wooden structure of the main gate was destroyed in a fire. Reconstruction of the gate only started in 1960, almost a century later. Also, the temple was also burnt in 1945 during the Second World War, bombed by the U.S. Army Air Force. It was restored in 1958, and the wooden structure was changed into a steel and cement structure for higher resistance. In fact, a lot of reconstruction projects for traditional buildings built around then aims at replacing the old wooden structure with a modern one, improving the longevity of the building.

Another example is the Todai-ji temple in Nara. Nara was the first capital of Japan during the Nara Period of Japan (710-794 AD). The ancient city was filled with historic treasures, with some temples designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO as the "Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara". The religious influence was so strong that later in 784AD, the emperor moved the capital to Nagaoka due to heavy threats from the powerful Buddhist monasteries. Todai-ji is one of the Heritage Sites. It is home to the world's largert bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocano, in one of the world's largest wooden structures. The temple and the statur of the Buddha was largely made from bronze and gold. Such was its cost that the empire faced a serious financial crisis upon their completion. Its layout was designed according to the Chinese theory of fengshui, with the main temple placed in the North, surrounded by walls with a large garden in the middle. This is another example of Chinese influence in Japanese architecture.

The main temple had gone through several reconstructions. Earthquakes and fires struck the temple multiple times and it was reconstructed in 1206 and 1692. Notably, after the reconstructions, the size of the temple had shrunk to two-thirds of its original size. Even so, it remains the largest wooden structure in the world.

Interestingly, the southern gate of Todai-ji was also reconstructed and renovated several times, and the latest renovation was done by a Chinese architect, who used ancient Chinese methods and Chinese materials to renew the gate. There is a reason behind this: the materials for the gate were in fact brought in from China in the 12th century. The two stone lions sitting on the two sides of the gate were also recently found to be made identically to other sets of stone lions



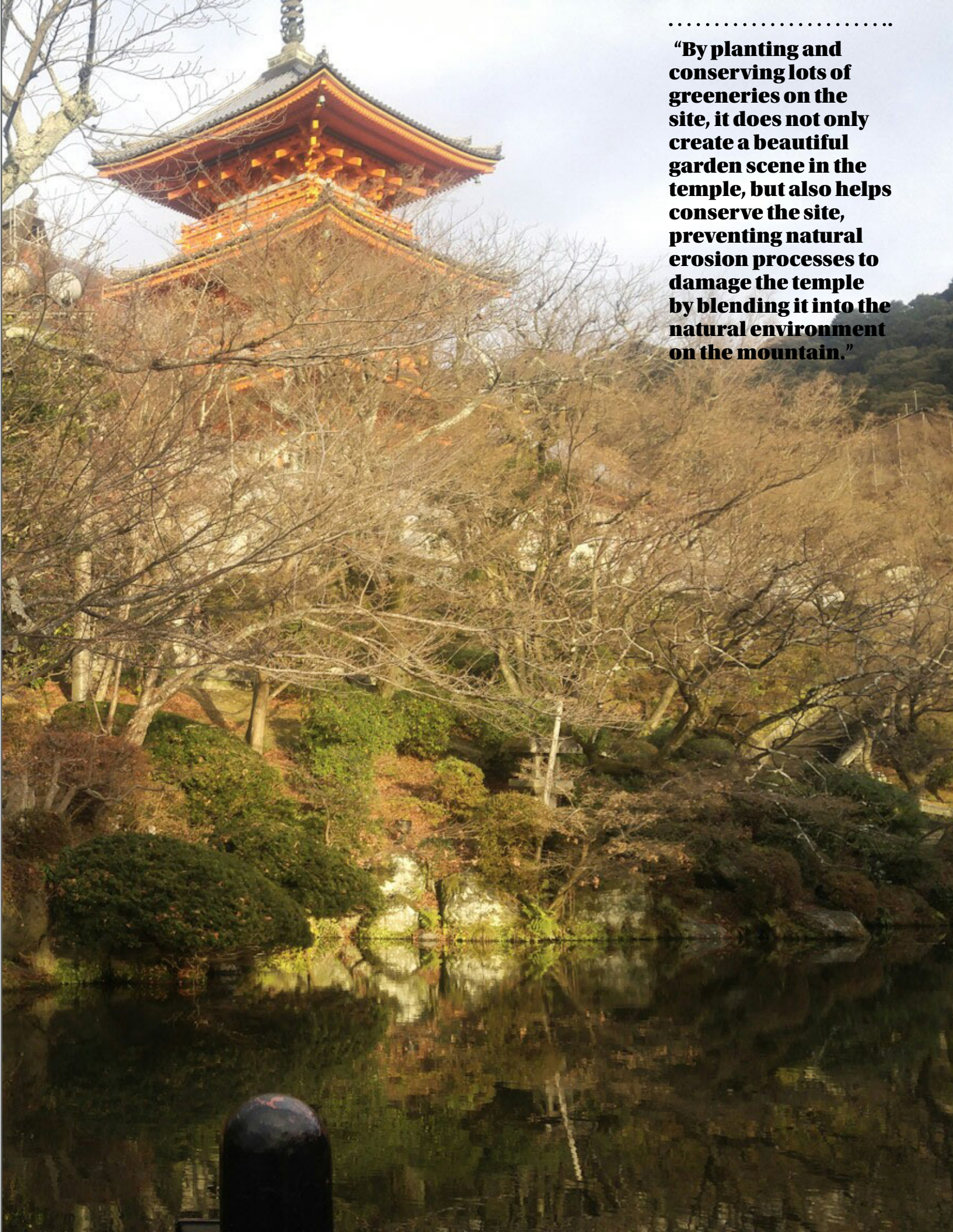
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“The pagoda is the tallest building nearby, and was painted with red with a Chinese-style rooftop. This architectural style is parallel to that commonly found in Chinese temples and pagodas”

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“**Todai-ji is one of the Heritage Sites. It hosts the world's largest bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana, in one of the world's largest wooden structure.**”

in China. Historians suggest that these stone lions belong to the same collection crafted by the same Chinese mason. Some also claim that Chinese workers were used in the construction of the gate. This shows the importance of China in constructing, designing and conserving the historic architecture in Japan.

The delicacy of architectural conservation was on full exhibit in the Kiyomizu-dera temple in Kyoto. built in the 17th century, the main hall of the temple was the most visited building of the temple, because of its uniquely grid-structured wooden veranda. The main temple is built on a steep slope, and 139 wooden pillars were laid out in a grid structure supporting the hall by pinning it firmly to the slope surface. The most stunning part is that the wooden pillars can slide across each other but still remain solid as an overall structure. This helps to prevent the temple from collapsing during an earthquake, since the grid base structure helps alleviate external forces. Thanks to this ingenious design, the building has been firmly attached to the slope for 400 years despite being hit by natural disasters such as earthquake, flooding, typhoon and so on. Such a structure ensures that the temple with withstand the tests of time and sets a well-executed example of early building conservation.

The Kiyomizu-dera temple covers a large area on the mountain. By planting and conserving lots of greeneries on the site, it does not only create a beautiful garden scene in the temple, but also helps conserve the site, preventing natural erosion to the temple by blending it into the natural environment on the mountain. This method of conservation is becoming more and more common nowadays.



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The beauty of
.....**//the sun**

What My Homestay in Japan Told Me About Life and Success

On Day 4 of the tour we split into groups of 3-4 students and spent a whole day with our separate host families in the Asuka village, one of the earliest settlements of Japanese civilization. I stayed with the Sakota family, which was a young family despite the fact that the majority of the population in the Asuka village is made up of elders, since the young tend to migrate to the city. The father, Akinobu Sakota, told us his family of three's story of living in this historical village and is quite inspirational. As we stayed with a "modern farmer" in a village with a long history for the day, what we learnt is well beyond historic heritage or Japanese culture.

We sat on the rear seat of Aki-san's five-seater as he drove us through the brown fields of the Asuka village, heading towards the nearby town of Kashihara. He asked us about our lives in Hong Kong and what differences we think there are between life in Hong Kong and life in Japan with his fairly fluent English. After a brief stop at a Lawson for coffee, he told us that we'll be harvesting potatoes in his farm on the hills.

Aki-san began to tell us about his story in Asuka Village. A farmer and hunter, he lives on a house on the hills. After graduating from university, he moved to the village from Kyoto and had been staying there for 3 years. He was married to his wife around one year ago and lives a merry family life with their 3-year-old daughter. He told us that his wedding was held in the Kashihara Shrine, and that it is common for Japanese to organize their weddings in shrines.

The car stopped in front of a small plot of farmland. Aki-san gave us some farming gloves and soon we found ourselves pulling potatoes out from the soil and putting them in a basket. The basket full of potatoes were driven to a local marketplace selling only local farmers' produce.

After loading off the potatoes, we took a

twenty-minute drive to Aki-san's home. Upon stepping into the front door, Aki-san's curious daughter stepped out of the house to the icy cold marble floor barefooted, greeting us joyously in Japanese. Aki-san took her up and carried her up on his back. Her mother came out from the kitchen and welcomed us. She guided us around the house and told us where the essentials are. Then we prepared dinner together with the family. It felt so much like home.

After a full dinner of mashed potato and tofu stew pot, Aki-san took us to a local bathhouse for a wash. We all know that the Japanese loves their baths due to the comfort and warmth it brings about in the snowy winter. The steamy bath and sauna were so relaxing that I wish such baths existed in Hong Kong. We all eased ourselves off the stress and fatigue of travelling. The locals are so lucky to have such an important amenity in their neighbourhood.

We drove to Kashihara town centre for shopping at night. On our way there, we spotted an enormous mansion lit up by shining golden lights. Aki-san told us that the house belongs to a powerful local yakuza (gang) leader. When we asked him about these local gangs around, he told us that they pose no threat to the town's safety and they act more like a large financial corporation than spending time fighting on the streets.

By the time we got back, beneath the shooting





stars, Aki-san carried the tired girl back upstairs to her room. It reminds me of my father putting me on bed after a day of intense outing when I was a young child. We sat on the garden outside the house looking at the shooting stars, in the middle of a snowy winter night. The experience was unforgettable.

Aki-san, to me, is the most inspirational person I have met in this tour. As a university graduate, he chose not to follow the mainstream choice of working in the city, but to get married and settled in a rural village that most young people in Japan are leaving from, taking up farming as his occupation. In Hong Kong, teenagers my age often are often worried about their future planning, asking questions to themselves like “What should I choose to study in university so I can have the highest-paid job in the future?” But after this trip, especially this homestay, I was more relieved that no matter what path we end up choosing, we should always bear in mind that a blessed life with good balance and personal wellness does not depends on a “high salary” or “getting rich”, despite what the materialistic value that the mainstream society in Hong Kong nowadays appears to favour.

Looking at the wall at Aki-san’s house, we saw lots and lots of photos of his family with visitors that stayed with them in the past. I realized what a truly meaningful life should be like: Doing things that connect you with more people, things that bring you true happiness, things that usual people don’t do in their

lives, and things with people that bring joy and colour to you every single day. Surely a lifestyle like that would bring much more value to you than a repetitive, predictable lifestyle based on materialism and opportunism. From what I saw in my homestay, perhaps a mindset open to all opportunities would bring genuine happiness to one than a mindset of stubbornness and short-sightedness. This is the reason why we need to travel: to see what the world is like with lots of different people and lots of different opportunities, instead of being confined to one’s own comfort zone, thinking wrongly that the life one leads is the only way how things can be.

Waking up early next morning, Aki-san drove us back to the Ishibutai Kofun, an ancient stone tome of an early Japanese emperor, which was the meeting place for us to bid farewell to our host families. There were lots of emotional farewells from the others, but we know that we need not shed tears because for us, there was nothing to cry about, but plenty to laugh about, and now I think I have a better idea of what a meaningful and joyous life means, thanks to Aki-san.

SCHOOL VISIT

KYOTO PREFECTURAL HOKURYO HIGH SCHOOL

FRIENDSHIP & HOSPITALITY

Our tour buses steered into the school gates and stopped in front of the main entrance of the school. I glanced outside the windows with my tired eyes, feeling sleepy after only four hours of sleep last night. I could see some KPHHS students walking in the school corridors, looking curiously at our buses. A few student representatives were waiting for us in front of the school entrance. As we walked down our bus, dazzled by the sunlight, they greeted us with firm handshakes and bright smiles. We felt refreshed as they led us through the maze-like corridors. After a few twists and turns, we walked into the school hall, with students sitting on the floor clapping their hands as we walk through the middle to the front row seats.

Two KPHHS students came forward to the stage and gave a welcoming speech and a presentation on the school life of Japanese students. Although their English ability was limited, they still tried their best to convey their message to us and we still can understand their main ideas. Then four of our representatives came on stage to present a slideshow on Hong Kong’s education system and students life. It was a successful exchange and I was able to get to know more about the education system of Japan.

After a performance by the school band, we were After a performance by the school band, we were led by our corresponding student ambassadors to the classrooms where we had our English lessons. I was sitting with a group of senior year 3 students. They were very passionate and welcoming towards us. The teacher asked us to do a self-introduction and discuss our hobbies and other things we like. Instantly we were surrounded by KPHHS students who were not afraid to ask us questions and show confidence in using English to communicate with us. I felt overwhelmed by the excitement of the students and we had a really great time. Some girls asked me what songs I usually listen to and I showed them my playlists, they knew some songs in it and we sang different songs together. They also shared

their talents and interests with me. One of the boys was named the “school comedian” by the other boys and he told us his hilarious jokes, while one of the girls was a brilliant guitar player and singer and she showed me a few videos of her singing and I was surprised by their talents. I was not expecting such a fun and easy-going group of high school students and I can say that we really had some great time together.

After a buzzing lesson full of laughter and selfies, my student ambassador toured me around the campus. I had a lot of questions for him about the school but unfortunately he cannot speak English quite well and we had a difficult time understanding each other. At one point, he even tried to use translation software. We still managed to understand each other for a bit a last, but it was such a funny way of communication that it remained strongly in my memory.

We visited the practice session of their school band. Interestingly, during their practice, no music teacher was present in the rehearsal room to monitor their practice. Instead, they carried out their practice on their own, and the

whole session ran like clockwork. Such levels of self-discipline of Japanese students was something I had only previously heard of.

I took a walk around the playground with a couple of my new friends and saw a lot of club activities going on at the same time. As the football team and baseball team were practicing on the grass field, the athletics team were running around the campus for warm-up, and some of the basketball team members were peeking out from the gym. During the club activities period the school seemed to have transformed into a city, with different people doing different things.

The school visit in KPHHS gave me a chance to make new friends in a foreign place within a short period of time. I wish I could stay longer there and get to know more about the students, but out of these few hours, we celebrated our newfound friendship.





reflection.....
.....//**upon nature**

