



Sino-Japanese Youth Conference 2017

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Venue: Li Po Chun United World College

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Introduction

SJYC (Sino-Japanese Youth Conference) is an annual event held at Li Po Chun United World College. On 21 July to 27 July 2017, the ninth SJYC was held. There were participants from Hong Kong, China and Japan. The conference aims to contribute to a better Sino-Japanese relationship in the future through communication and mutual respect between teenagers from the two countries. This year, the theme was a quote from Lester B. Pearson, “How can there be peace without people understanding each other and how can this be without knowing each other?” Activities in the conference ranged from lectures to sharing to sight-seeing. The participants enjoyed the conference and learnt a lot more about others’ culture.

Applying for SJYC

Part 1 — Application Form

I first knew about SJYC in assemblies at school, where past participants shared their experiences. Though interested, I had never thought about participating in it. In Form Four, I was recommended to apply for the conference by my history teacher, Miss Flora Wong. So, I checked the application form, but it was much longer than I expected. Completing the application took weeks, as I thought about what answers I should give to let the organisers think I would be suitable for the conference. However, as a pacifist, I do not really hold strong political views towards Sino-Japanese issues, and filling in the application form was difficult. In the end, I decided to just write truthfully. I remembered writing that both countries need to compromise to solve problems, and that China and Japan should develop the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands together, etc. To me, however, those seemed like immature and unrealistic ideas, and I thought I would not even get the chance for the interview.

Part 2 — Interview

As it turned out, I was given the chance to attend the interview. During the interview, the organisers asked me a lot about my idealistic hopes for the Sino-Japanese relationship. I explained my views towards the issues. During the whole time, I was not confident that I would be given a spot in the conference, since I would imagine the organisers would pick people who have more patriotic and nationalistic views, so that it would be more eye-opening for them. After the interview, I was certain that I had no chance to attend the conference. Then, one day an email from SJYC was sent to me, and the first word I saw was “congratulations”, I was so excited. Since then, I

realised the organisers had no problem in accepting different political viewpoints. It gave me confidence in expressing my own self to other participants in SJYC.

Activities in SJYC

Opening Ceremony — *Kicking off*

The very first activity after arriving at LPCUWC was the Opening Ceremony. We all dressed in our national costumes that represented our own culture. It was a truly amazing scene. There were all sorts of clothing such as qi-paos, Chinese tunic suits, Tangzhuangs, etc. for the Chinese, whilst the Japanese participants wore kimonos, school uniforms, Japanese fisherman costumes, etc. Since it was the first time we met each other, conversations were sparse and awkward. During the ceremony, the organisers performed lion dance, dragon dance and pop music from the three regions. Though they might not have grown up with it, their performance was really good; they really knew about each other's cultures.

Cultural Session — *Starting to understand more about each other*

During the cultural Session, we learnt more about the cultures of the three regions. We got to try performing lion dancing and dragon dancing ourselves, which was much more physically demanding than I thought. The fact that I have only seen, but have never tried the dances myself did not help. We also learnt about each other's music, including what pop songs were considered iconic to them. It was a rewarding session, and this cultural exchange also readied us for the events up ahead.

Soft Skills Session — *How to not create chaos when discussing controversial issues*

Before discussing Sino-Japanese issues, the organisers taught us how to have a civil discussion, and how to solve conflicts peacefully. These became very useful when talking to people from different regions.

Media Literacy Session — *Learning about media in different regions*

In the Media Literacy Session, we analysed and compared commercials from the three regions. It was a new experience for me. Commercials were something I have taken for granted, and I found out that commercials can also contain elements of the region's culture.

History Resolution Session — *Bias in textbooks*

The organisers told us to prepare history textbooks for the conference. I was looking forward to seeing how other nations narrated the events of the Second World War. The History Resolution Session gave us the opportunity to compare each other's textbooks. I found it surprising that for the same historical events, there could be so many different accounts, and having all of them making sense. For instance, with regards to the Nanjing Massacre/Incident, the Chinese textbooks focused on Japanese atrocities, and included in depth descriptions and photographic evidence. The Japanese textbooks, meanwhile, said that the number of victims was unclear, since the figures appeared many years after the war ended, and the event itself was not known to the public until many years later. It also stated that the victim count might also have included Japanese casualties. Together, these three textbooks raise one question: What actually happened? The answer may be that all of them are wrong. I learnt more about bias through comparing the three textbooks, and that the bias can come from both the author and the reader: after seeing one version of events, we would then be more inclined to dismiss other versions as lies, since they differed from what the version we first saw. The session changed my habits of acquiring information from the media, books, and the Internet. Before having any judgement on an issue, I will read information from different sources first. Then, by removing emotional phrases and accepting alternative perspectives (even if—especially if—they prove my previous assumptions wrong), I can gain a clearer picture (or pictures) of the event.

Hong Kong Exploration- *Showing others around my home*

As a Hong Kong participant, during Hong Kong exploration, I had to lead and plan the trip for my buddy group members and show them around Hong Kong. Going around Hong Kong in a day was exhausting, but I found joy in showing others the beauty and culture of the Pearl of the Orient. I also learnt that I lack knowledge in getting around Hong Kong. I constantly had to look at online maps to search for the checkpoints and got lost many times. I felt very sorry for my group mates for that.

Final Event — *Stepping into diplomats' shoes*

In the Final Event of the conference, we were divided into two groups, each playing the roles of the Chinese and Japanese governments. We had to look after the needs and requests of citizens and stakeholders from our own nation, the opposing nation and the United Nations. After this activity, I realised how just how difficult politics and diplomacy were. I was part of the Chinese representatives, which was good and also bad for me. The good news was, I did not need much aid in role-playing, being

Chinese myself. The bad news was, though being Chinese myself, I did not feel much else towards this national identity. When I saw my fellow participants defending their countries with great passion, I felt ashamed. It was a painful lesson in the truth, as the organisers let us know how difficult achieving peace between nations is, and how complicated reality can be. At some points in the conference, I thought peace was easier than everybody else thought; though we each had our own opinions, we were open-minded and willing to listen and learn new things. However, people in the real world are very different from the people I have met in the conference. Due to the complicated relationship and past conflicts between China and Japan, it was very hard for the people to empathise with each other. But without understanding, we will never be able to solve the conflicts and peace will be impossible. Therefore, it is important for us to spread the news of peace to people around us. Slowly but surely, develop a more accepting worldview, and maybe one day, we can understand and respect each other.

Peace Initiative — *Efforts towards peace*

The very last activity of the conference was the Peace Initiative, in which we went outside the campus and spread messages of peace in the community. We went to Sai Kung and gave free hugs to strangers, asked them about peace and also sang songs of peace. It was fun and meaningful, as we applied what we have learnt in the conference. However, when we were walking around, a man scolded the Japanese participants. It was both shocking and sad to see. I understood that many Chinese have a bad view towards Japanese because of what happened in the Second World War, but even so, I felt very sad, since I saw how the past can still prevent us from having good relations with each other. It was sad because I saw how the past can still fuel conflict and antagonism today. One of the organizers told me that that was why we had the conference, that was why we were there. It is true that we should bear in mind our sad pasts, but it should not be what hinders our improvement in relations. It is also true that it is hard to change the mindset of the people at the present. That is why we, youngsters, need to start changing *our* mindset. If we change now and work together, peace will be achieved, even if beyond our lifetimes.

Day Room — *Socializing with other teenagers*

Ironically, we usually spent our nights in the Day Room. The Day Room was the common room for the participants to meet each other. After serious topics in the conference, we talked about casual topics in the Day Room. I made a lot of friends through chatting with others in the Day Room. I learnt about their hobbies, cultures, etc. Despite learning about Sino-Japanese relations, I think I also learnt a lot about the teenagers' lives in other places. It was a very comfortable experience, and we learnt that we shared a lot in common. After all, all of us were teenagers.

Closing Ceremony and Farewell — *Happiest and saddest moment of the conference*

In the closing ceremony, we all had to perform something. It was the funniest part of the conference. It was completely different from the Opening Ceremony; instead of awkward silences, we chatted and enjoyed our time with each other happily and perhaps a bit too loudly. However, it was also the very last thing to do in the conference. It was so hard saying goodbye to the people in the conference. We only met for seven days but acted as though we knew each other for years.

Reflection

SJYC was a life changing experience, and I learnt a lot from it. Most importantly, I learnt about peace and the means of (hopefully) achieving it. Some say that peace is unattainable, others say peace is actually simple. In my opinion, attaining peace within a conference is not hard. However, I would like to set my sights beyond the conference. I feel inspired to try and see if world peace is attainable or not. It is definitely not easy but it will never be impossible as long as we try to understand each other and respect each other's views. Therefore, I have set goals to spread messages of peace to the people around me. I believe that one day, peace will come through slowly changing society, one bit at a time.

I want to thank all the participants and the organisers here for making this experience so enjoyable to me. We became close friends and I hope we will have the opportunity to meet again. I also want to thank Miss Flora Wong for recommending and supporting me in joining this conference. SJYC is definitely a once a lifetime experience, and I strongly recommend others to join. If it is possible, I would also want to be one of the organisers in the future.