



**Japan-East Asia Network of
Exchange for Students and
Youths Programme
JENESYS 2.0**

Tokyo, Kyoto and Nagoya
Japan

Kwok Hay Yan, Daniel

Background

At the Second East Asia Summit (EAS) held in January 2007, the Japanese Government announced a 35-billion-yen youth exchange programme to invite about 6,000 young people from EAS member states (including members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Australia, China, India, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea) to visit Japan with the aim of establishing pan-Asian solidarity through youth exchange. Subsequently, the Government of Japan launched the Programme in 2007. Hong Kong was first invited to participate in 2008.



Members of the EAS

Introduction

As Hong Kong is one of the participants of the East Asia Summit, the Japanese government invited the Hong Kong Government to form a delegation to join the exchange. This year, sixty-three F.5 students and four teachers from schools across Hong Kong participated in it. During the 9 days, students had field visits to research institutes, museums, and specialist organizations. In addition, there was also a chance to know local students better through attachment to their schools. Moreover, we had cultural experiences through home stays, visits to historical cities and sites. Before departure, students were required to attend training sessions to prepare for the exchange.



Group photo of JENESYS
(Hong Kong delegation)

Day 1: Hong Kong → Tokyo, Japan

On 13th December, we assembled in the airport in the early morning for the first day of our exchange, landing in Tokyo after a five-hour flight. After a briefing session in the evening, we were exhausted and had a nice rest in the hotel.

Day 2: A talk on Japanese comedy and visiting Sophia University

One of the highlights of the day was attending a talk about Japanese comedy. We were very surprised that the speaker is a professor who is familiar with the development of comedy in Japanese comics (manga) and cartoons (anime). During the talk, he suggested reasons on why anime and manga have become hugely popular and managed to spread outside Japan. He listed out several examples such as *Doraemon* and *Detective Conan* etc. Although he spoke neither Chinese nor English, his talk was really fascinating and easy to understand, since we already knew most of the comics and series he mentioned, and now we understood their appeal better.

After having lunch, we visited the Sophia University (上智大学), located in central Tokyo. Though not a big university, the school campus was impressively clean and comfortable. After a brief introduction, we were split into small groups, and the students there gave us a tour around the university. My group was lucky enough to have been assigned a student from Taiwan, so communication was not a problem. He said that the school life was enjoyable, and that he had broadened his horizons and met new friends here. As we walked past a recycling bin, we learnt that the school adopted an environmentally-friendly policy, whereby all the rubbish collected would be sent to the recycling centre instead of the landfills. I was really impressed by the school's efforts and the government for their commitment towards environmentalism.



Photo with the Taiwanese student



Recycling bins in the University

Day 3: Tokyo→Kyoto, Visiting historical sites in Kyoto

In the morning, we took the “bullet train” from Tokyo to Kyoto. As a railroad enthusiast myself, I was looking forward to the trip. Before we boarded, we witnessed the amazing efficiency of the cleaners: each coach had to be cleaned and cleared of litter within ten minutes, and there were only two cleaners per coach! The speed of the train was such that I could not even see the buildings outside the train clearly. It took only two hours for us to reach Kyoto, and it was a fantastic journey.



Waiting to board the train



The bullet train

We visited the Rokuon-ji (鹿苑寺) (better known as Kinkaku-ji 金閣寺) and the Fushimi-Inari Taisha (伏見稲荷大社) in the afternoon. These two places are popular tourist spots in Kyoto due to their beauty and history. The appearance of the Rokuon-ji is worth mentioning since most of the temple is gilded. The Fushimi-Inari Taisha was also interesting since the structure is like a tunnel made of thousands of pillars. Though the visits were brief, we enjoyed it, since such architecture is becoming increasingly rare in Japan today.



Kinkaku-ji



The Fushimi-Inari Taisha



It is like an endless tunnel!

Day 4: Visiting Enryaku-ji and exchange with high school students

In the early morning, we visited Enryaku-ji (延暦寺) on Mount Hiei (比叡山). The temple is located at the top of a mountain. Although it is not as famous as the Kinkaku-ji, the structure of the temple is very attractive and there were some local Japanese coming to worship the gods. As the temple is located at the mountain, the temperature was very low and we were able to see snow covering the trees. I was really excited since it was my first time seeing snow which was beautiful. It was an unforgettable experience.



The snowy mountain



Snow behind me!



Plants covered with snow



Musical performance in the school campus

After leaving the temple, we arrived at the Kyoto Murasakino High School; in Chinese characters, 「京都市立紫野高等学校」. This was one of the major highlights in this trip, since we only had two chances to exchange with Japanese high school students. Once we arrived at the school, each of us had a buddy and we had to follow them during the school visit. My buddy was a nice, handsome and easy-going student, and we chatted about the differences in everyday life between Japan and Hong Kong.

During the school visit, we had a chance to wear “kimono”, which is the traditional dress of Japan. Wearing kimono is a difficult and complicated process, since it involves multiple layers of clothes, and the trickiest part is tying the knot at the end. Difficult though it may seem, with the help of the buddy and teachers, I finally managed to a traditional kimono! I really enjoyed the process and my buddy was really helpful and friendly.



Students wearing kimono



Photo with my buddy

Before leaving the school, we had a look at the extra-curricular activities of the school. The school campus is larger than I thought. There are even three standard tennis courts in the school! We stayed in the gymnasium for a while, where the girls were practicing their cheerleading. I was surprised at the amount of self-discipline seen; they all took cheerleading very seriously even though there were no teachers giving instructions.



The Cheering Team

Day 5: Homestay at Hino

In the afternoon, we gathered at a community centre to meet our host families. We were all very nervous but excited. There were four boys including me in our group. We stayed with a nice senior gentleman named Mr. Horiguchi (堀口). We headed off to his home, and his wife was waiting for us by the door. The six of us sat down in the living room and introduced ourselves, but it was not easy since neither of the Horiguchis spoke much English. Luckily, one of us knows some Japanese and we were able to communicate with simple sentences.



The name of our host

Although we were guests, we still needed to help them to prepare dinner. Fortunately, it was not as difficult as we thought. We had tempura with different ingredients including shrimp, sausages, pumpkins etc. We asked questions and tried to learn more about them, but sometimes we struggled to understand what they were saying. Despite this, we had a very nice time together. That night, we slept on beds atop the *tatami* floor.

The homestay was definitely the most thrilling part of the exchange programme, and it allowed us a genuine experience of living in a Japanese household.



The main entrance

Day 6: Homestay at Hino, Hino → Nagoya

In the early morning, we had a delectable traditional Japanese breakfast including rice, salmon and udon. After that, Mr. Horiguchi taught us how to make chopsticks with bamboo sticks.

Being an engineer, he had all kinds of tools in his backyard. He took out a sharp knife and a thick bamboo stick from his truck. Even with his big, sharp knife, the stick was so unyielding that a great amount of force was required to cleave the bamboo. He demonstrated it to us and we had to do the same. It was not easy at all and two of us nearly cut our fingers! After splitting the bamboo stick into smaller pieces, we had to use a smaller knife to peel the stick into a chopstick. This took us a lot of time and we were exhausted after making all these but it was definitely worth it! Sadly, time flies, and after lunch, we had to end our stay with the Horiguchis. We thanked them for their preparation and allowing us to stay at their home for a night. It was an emotional moment.



Photo with the host



The chopsticks



Displays in the museum

We left Hino, and headed towards Nagoya, where we visited the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology. Though now the largest manufacturers of automobiles in the world, Toyota was once known for producing other products, such as looms and sewing machines. The museum is enormous and there are a lot of cars and machines in the exhibition hall.

Day 7: Exchange with Japanese High School Students

We had another exchange with the students at Nagoya City Meito Senior High School (名古屋市立名東高等学校). Compared with the exchange in Kyoto, we spent a longer time there since we arrived early in the morning.

We had lessons with the local Japanese students. The first lesson was Physical Education, which turned out to be a football match between the Hong Kong and Japanese students. It was fun but exhausting as well. During lunchtime, we had lunch with our buddies in their classroom. The Japanese students were excited to see us, and we tried our best to communicate, despite the language barrier between us.



Physical Education lesson

After lunch, we had a History lesson, and the teacher told us to introduce ourselves and she even invited us to introduce a bit about Hong Kong to the whole class. I was really nervous and scared because it was not something we had expected. I tried my best to briefly introduce the history of Hong Kong to the Japanese students. Although the students seemed puzzled, they nevertheless remained attentive, and the teacher also tried her best to translate it to Japanese. Luckily, our improvised presentation was successful and it was a memorable experience.



Photo with the whole class



The corridor at school

The last lesson was English. The teacher invited the whole class to practice English through playing games. Although the games were a bit childish, the Japanese students really actively participated and they treasured the chance of practicing English with each other. This experience was unforgettable.

That night, we had a delicious dinner with lots of Japanese traditional food and enjoyed a comfortable hot spring bath!



The restaurant



Delicious food

Day 8: Nagoya → Tokyo

We took the bullet train back to Tokyo and we finally had time to do shopping. We bought a lot of food and souvenirs.

Day 9: Tokyo → Hong Kong

We arrived at the airport early in the morning and landed at Hong Kong in the afternoon.

~End of the trip~

What I have learnt during the exchange programme

This exchange programme taught me a lot, especially having the exchange with the Japanese high school students. Most of the things learnt in this exchange could not be experienced through normal lessons at school.

First of all, I have learnt the importance of self-discipline. When we stayed in the Nagoya City Meito Senior High School, I noticed that students were allowed to use their mobile phones in school. I was really shocked because most schools in Hong Kong required students to turn off their mobile phones while on campus. However, I understood why the students have this “privilege” after the exchange with them. It is because they are highly self-disciplined. During the lesson, I found that most students paid close attention and nobody used their mobile phones to play games during the lesson. Most of us would think that the aim of setting up school rules is to prohibit students from wrongdoing. However, I found out that the purpose of school rules there is to protect students.

After this trip, I realised that we should treasure every chance that we have in learning and communicating with other people. I was really surprised that Japanese students were very eager to learn new knowledge, especially English. When we were having lunch with them, the students actively tried to communicate with us. Although sometimes we did not understand them, they never gave up and tried their very best to let us understand. During the English lesson, students followed all the instructions given by the teacher and I felt that all of them wanted to grasp every chance that they had to practice English. I realised that before this exchange, I sometimes ignore opportunities in learning, thinking that better opportunities will come up later, but I learnt from the Japanese that grasping every opportunity is a vital part towards a proper learning attitude.

Last but not least, I also learnt a bit about etiquette in Japan. Through speaking a lot with the Japanese, we found that Japan places great emphasis on etiquette, and that all people follow these social rules. For instance, you have to bend your knees while eating, and it is taboo to stick chopsticks vertically in a bowl because this represents an offering to the deceased.

Feelings

I was excited to have this opportunity to join this exchange programme organized by the Japanese Government. The exchange programme was definitely different from travelling to Japan as tourists. This programme was unforgettable and memorable.

One of the most unforgettable experiences was the home stay. As mentioned before, the hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Horiguchi had difficulties in communicating with English, which personally was a surprise, since I thought host families were able to speak simple English. However, in the end we were able to converse and understand each other, through other forms of expression such as gestures and writing. Therefore, it turned out that the language barrier was not a big problem after all. After the home stay, I asked myself, “How come Mr. and Mrs. Horiguchi were willing to be hosts despite not speaking English?” After the exchange, I realised the answer was simple: they too wanted to broaden their horizons through meeting and knowing more about foreigners. Though communication was not easy, we saw that they did not mind this “challenge”, and I could see they were willing to try and interact with us.

The word “exchange” has gained new meaning to me. Before joining, I thought that “exchange” simply means that you would know more about foreign cultures and lifestyles through interacting with the locals. After this exchange programme, I learnt that exchanges not only give “input” but also require an “output”: not only do we learn more about others, we also have to let others learn more about us. When the Japanese History teacher asked us to introduce Hong Kong in front of the class, I realised that this was “exchange” in action.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Principal, Mr. Yuen for approving my participation in this exchange programme to broaden my horizons and gain some other learning experiences. And special thanks to Ms. Flora Wong and Ms. Cherry Wong for nominating and supporting me. This exchange programme was definitely a valuable learning experience and I will never forget it!