

Reflection Journal

Exchange Programme: Outbound trip to Sasebo NIT- 20 to 26 June 2016

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I would first like to extend my gratitude to Mr Goh Say Seng for spending the time planning the trip and taking care of us while we are in Japan, and to Singapore Polytechnic for making this memorable trip possible.

When I first reached Fukuoka Airport in Japan, the place seems strangely familiar. As it was my first trip to Japan, my first impression was that Japan seems like a mixed of Malaysia and Taiwan. Without a doubt, my current impression of Japan is drastically different from what I had initially. Throughout this week long experience, I have learn a lot more about the people, culture and beauty of Japan.

My first interaction with a Japanese (aside from the professor from NIT guiding us) was with a cashier. On the way from the airport to our hotel in Sasebo, we had a pit stop at a tiny grocery store. I brought a bottle of water for consumption as I was thirsty and also needed small change. During the transaction, I noticed a small tray at the cash register. I came to realize the small tray is for the purpose of monetary transaction. Customer will put the paying cash on the tray while the cashier will place the change on the tray. This allows for a neat transaction where coins doesn't scatter around the desk, and for a clear view of the amount transact. When I was receiving my change, the cashier politely counted out to me the change I was receiving back, ensuring I was not short changed. She proceeded to hand me the change through the tray, smiled, and thanked me in Japanese. As I was still not used to communicating in Japanese, I return the thanks in English.

My first interaction with that cashier left a good impression on me. The cashier was polite and thoughtful of the customer, and really treated them with respect. I can feel that the cashier was really passionate in her job, and her service really brighten me up. In contrast to Singapore, I personally feel that service like this are rare.

We continued our journey towards our hotel after the pit stop. Throughout the journey, I was enjoying the view of Japan from the window. The view was simply magnificent, not something that can be replicated in Singapore. I can see hills up in the distance, so tall that clouds and mists surrounds the top. Rows of houses lined up across the roads, reminded me of cartoons (Doraemon) I watched as a child. It is unlike the urban concrete jungle of Singapore.

Upon reaching the hotel, we put down our luggage and headed out for lunch. There was a mall nearby called "Go Ban-Gai" which we had our lunch at. I choose to have my meal at Subway as the menu looks interesting. Thankfully, the staff there are able to converse in English which made ordering Subway much easier. Unlike Singapore where clearing our own table and trays are only encouraged, cleaning up after one selves are mandatory in Japan. There are signs with instructions to do so at the walls of Subway. I feel that Japan have the right idea in mind for doing so. Not only is cleaning up one selves a basic discipline, it helps save on manpower required to do so. This made me reflect upon the return tray initiative of our polytechnic, and makes me feel that we as a polytechnic are heading in the right direction.

That night while we were dining at a local restaurant, an elderly woman seated next to us tried engaging conversation with us. As we are not that well-verse in Japanese, we utilize a translator

application to aid us. She is very kind and even offered us a coupon to get a discount of our meal. This really showed me how friendly and generous the Japanese are even to complete strangers.

On the second day of the trip, we visited Sasebo College, National Institute of Technology. There we met with the principal, and we introduced ourselves individually. He asked of our comforts in Japan and we chatted about Singapore too, its weather and environment. After the meeting, we headed off to have a tour around the school dormitory, which is split between the genders. Their dormitory consisted of a study area, and a communal area where they can relax. After the short tour and our lunch, we headed off to the classroom where the students have prepared presentation for us.

The students were all very friendly and welcoming. I was really impress by their presentation, which they have conducted in English. I really appreciate the effort they put in as I felt the tremendous amount of effort they took to do the presentation in a language foreign to them. Unlike in Singapore, the students in Japan does not start learning English at a young age, the period where language development is the most crucial. I cannot imagine myself conversing, let only give a presentation in a language that I did not picked up at a young age. I learn a lot from the various different presentation, from Japanese Kanji which are similar to Chinese characters, to the food and lifestyle of Japan. They are creative in their presentation, with interesting quizzes put into the mix.

Kanji are adopted from Chinese characters and are used in modern Japanese writing. Although the pronunciation are different, the meaning are quite similar to its Chinese character counterpart. This understanding helps me a lot while I was in Japan, as I could through Kanji approximate the meanings of some Japanese writing. Through the presentation, the student taught us how to pronounce a couple of Kanji characters. In return, I taught them the pronunciation in Mandarin. Through the presentation, we also learn more about their culture. They talked about the beauty of having picnic during Cherry Blossoms season, using heated table to stay warm in colder season, and of tradition such as rice throwing in the New Year; to ward off evil spirits and bring in good fortune.

After the presentation, we are given time to socialize with the Japanese student. I met a student who has been to Singapore before. She was in Singapore for a study trip to Nanyang Polytechnic. Hearing her talk about the beauty and fun of Singapore, made me realized that Singapore is indeed a tourist paradise.

After the whole exchange, a member of our group put out a performance for the students and the staff. Shannon showcased his beatboxing talent to the amazement of the audience. Each beat he put out is met with applaud and admiration. Mr Goh took over after the performance, thanking the Japanese for hosting us. And I handed out souvenirs we brought from Singapore to the students there.

That night, my roommate Shyan Jie and I, went to Sushiro, a sushi restaurant recommended by many of the students. Each table is placed beside a sushi conveyer belt, and each table will be designated a colour. We are free to pick from the conveyer belt any sushi, except for the special order. Those special order will be placed on coloured tray, corresponding to the colour of the table that ordered them. Due to our lack of understanding of the guideline, we accidentally made the mistake of taking somebody's order. We were deeply embarrassed by our mistake, and that incident has further prompted and encouraged me in learning written Japanese. Thankfully we realized our mistakes soon enough, and recovery were made. We tried ordering some of the special orders through a tablet installed beside the table, similar to those used in Japanese restaurant in Singapore. When the special order is being delivered to us, a notification on the tablet will notify us, and when the order is picked up by us, the tablet will update the kitchen too. We were fascinated by how it

works, and through investigation, we found a sensor like device installed in the bottom of the plate of sushi.

I am impressed by the ways technology has been incorporated into the handling of simple tasks in the restaurant. The whole ordering process has been made into a smart system. With the ordering of food done through electronic tablet, delivering of food through conveyer belts, and sensors handling of delivery statuses. This not only save cost in manpower, but also eliminate the chances of human error. So far, I rarely see this type of concept applied in Singapore. Ironically, for a country progressing towards a "Smart Nation", I have only seen the system utilized in Japanese Restaurant located in Singapore. Understandably, there are financial constraints and applicability of such system, we can still learn from the Japanese in our journey in becoming a "Smart Nation".

Another area where I noticed technology is applied in Japan is their toilet. I am really impressed with the cleanliness and "quality" of the toilet in Japan. Most toilets in Japan are equipped with a variety of functions. There are built in bidet which are controlled by buttons. Temperature and intensity and also be controlled. There are even some toilet which are able to play the radio or music. In each of the toilet cubicle, there will be a variety of amenities too. There are toilet cover to cover the toilet with, antiseptic wipes to clean the toilet with, and hand sanitizer dispenser. Even Sir John Harington will be proud of what the Japanese have accomplished. However what truly captured my attention is the cleanliness of each toilet I have used while I was in Japan. It is one thing to have a "high-tech" toilet, but it is another to ensure such property are not misappropriated and made unusable by inconsideration. There is a sign in each cubicle which says to utilize the toilet while seating down, to ensure "misses" will not dirty the toilet. The cleanliness of toilet reflects a lot about the people in Japan. It shows that they are responsible and considerate people. They are able to utilize a toilet like what a civilized human being should, and not make it an inconvenience to the next user. Considering the conditions of public toilet in Singapore, I do not think that these "high-tech" toilet will be a feasibility. Embarrassingly, this is an area where we can learn a lot from the Japanese.

The third day of the trip, we took the public bus to Kujukushima Aquarium at Ninety-Nine Island. There is a dolphin show where the dolphins performed adorable tricks. There is also an exhibition of bioluminescent jellyfish on displayed which I find truly beautiful and fascinating. Aside from the display of the many wondrous marine life, the aquarium also talks of its conservational efforts and the importance of it.

After the Aquarium, we finally have a chance to try the famous Sasebo Burger that many have talked about while we are there. Sasebo burger are hand-made burger that can contains a variety of ingredient, from the classic beef and steak, to bacon and soft boiled egg. After our meal, we headed out for a boat ride which cruises around the blue ocean surrounding Ninety-Nine Island. We learned and witness for our self, the reason of its namesake. There are indeed many islands around the area, in fact way more than "Ninety-Nine" islands. The scenery is beautiful, and the islands magnificent. The names of those islands are interesting too, being given name resembling to their appearance, such as a sleeping lion cub, or a giant crab.

For the last event of the day, we went to the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces (JMSDF) Museum to have a look around. There we learned that the JMSDF is the naval branch of the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF). Following the fallout of the Second World War, Japan implemented Article 9 of its constitution, which prohibits Japan from possessing an army. However Article 9 does not prohibits Japan the rights to self-defence and thus the JSDF were formed. We also learned of many of the naval battles throughout the history of Japan, even before JMSDF was formed. This includes its activities during the Second World War such as the Pearl Harbour Bombing. Although the

museum is educational and I am respectful of their acknowledgement of their actions carried out during the war, I personally felt that many of the articles in the museum are biased in that they are one-sided accounts. Overall the trip still serves its objective, and I learn a lot more of Japan.

The following day, we went to the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb museum. Outside the museum were many tributes from all across the globe, dedicated to Nagasaki and peace. Inside the museum, we learned more about the effects and fallout of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. There were also pictures of the victims on display, to serve as a reminder, of the importance of upholding peace. It was a really heart wrenching journey, but highly educational. I consider this a very valuable learning opportunity, as it covers more than just what we learn from books during Social Studies and History lesson. It also drives home strongly a message, on the importance of peace and nuclear disarmament. It is scary to see how when great minds are put together (the Manhattan Project), they are capable of creating a device of such pain and horror. Ironically, nuclear deterrence has helped maintain peace to a certain extent in our modern society, in fact Japan is protected by USA under their nuclear umbrella. However, many of the power nations still possessed more warheads than required for the purposes of nuclear deterrence. Fear is not of any one nation launching a nuke on purpose, but of launching through accidents, such as the 1983 Soviet nuclear false alarm incident; which could potentially cause the death of millions. Carrying more warheads than required for deterrence only increases the chances of a malfunction and accidents from repeating. This is why there is such an urgent need for disarmament, lest a repeat of the horror of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Most of the things I have learnt from the previous two museum, sounds familiar to me. That is when I realized that a video game I used to play has touched upon such subject. The game is produced by Konami Production, a company based in Japan. This shows that how the nuclear bombing, and the actions during the war has deeply resonated within the Japanese, that even in the medium of video game, such topics are discussed and touched upon.

We also went to the "Mitsubishi Museum" at Nagasaki Shipyard & Machinery Works Main Plant. There we learn about how Mitsubishi first started as a shipping firm, and we learn of the various mechanical machinery used in ship work. There are various model replica of the large scale mechanical machinery that they employed back in the times. It is amazing the feat of engineering it takes to design and build them without modern day technology. Unfortunately we are unable to watch them in operation, which I believe will be quite a sight to witness.

For the fifth day, we went back to Sasebo College, National Institute of Technology. The students there presented to us their graduate research, which includes testing the fragility index of certain materials used in mechanical work, and of research done on Hydrogen Fuel Cell. We were then split up and given a tour of the school, MAE students to the mechanical side, EEE students to the electrical side. As a student under the school of EEE, we are given a tour of their various labs and equipment. One of the professor showcased to us a device that is capable of detecting the exact location infrared lights falls on, although he confessed he has not find a practical application for it yet. Another more noteworthy device is one made of multiple sensors that are able to pin point the centre of gravity of objects placed upon it. These are all done by a combination of programming and IC chips. Another professor at the institution showcased to us a patent designed of his. It is a sterilization system that utilizes plasm in killing off bacteria and germs on the surface of produce. Though much was learn during the tour, I will have preferred to be able to tour around the mechanical schools too, and I wish the Japanese students visiting will have an opportunity to tour both school of EEE and MAE this coming September. After the tour, we attended one of the classes where the Japanese student bound for the visit to Singapore are expecting us. There we answered

the questions they have about Singapore, giving them a better understanding of our country and polytechnic before they visit this September.

The sixth and final day of our trip, we went to a theme park at Huis Ten Bosch. We took a train ride there which is the first time I ever ride in a Japan train. The stories of the punctuality of the train are true, with the train arriving at the exact timing stated, and departing at the exact timing given. This further shows me the discipline and respectful nature of the Japanese. One interesting fact of Huis ten Bosch is of a hotel by the name of Henna Hotel. The hotel in an effort to reduce operating cost is powered by renewable energy and staffed with robots. Hydrogen based autonomous energy supply system is used in the hotel. This is another example of Japan fully utilizing modern day technology.

Finally on the seventh day, we returned to Singapore, having gained a better insights into various aspect of Japan. From its culture and people to education system, food, transportation, and technological advancement. This is a really enjoyable and fruitful learning experience, and I am really grateful for being given the opportunity to part of this learning journey.