

## RITS – HCI Students Exchange / RSSF 2009

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*29<sup>th</sup> Oct ~ 8<sup>th</sup> Nov*

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Initially, I was quite unwilling to leave Singapore for a foreign country due to the uncertainty as to what will occur in Japan. The idea of a homestay was also one which was quite uneasy for me as I found it weird to live in a stranger's house. However, when we began our first day in Japan, I had a major change of viewpoints. When we checked in into our hostel, the staffs were really friendly and helpful towards all of us, making us feel much appreciated. After that, the dinner party was also very wonderfully planned, as it helped to bring us closer to the Japanese students living down there by creating an avenue for us to socialize. What I found quite unique during the trip was the bathing methods of the Japanese in the hostel. They had to strip totally naked and enter the huge bathroom which is meant for everyone to clean themselves. Obviously, being such conservative and close-minded Singaporeans, it was a very funny and perhaps, embarrassing way to bathe. Still, it proved to be one of the major psychological blocks that we overcame and we found ourselves enjoying the relaxing and soothing effect of the hot bath inside.

The second day saw the commencement of the 7th Rits Super Science Fair (RSSF) and I was exposed to the colourful and unique culture of the Japanese, portrayed through the various activities and performances the students put up. I realized that the Japanese places a strong emphasize on politeness, best epitomized through the tea appreciation activity I went through, in which the person

who drinks the tea must exercise various acts to show their appreciation for the tea and those who make the tea. We had science presentations by various professors after that and I went for the presentation on “How nature exhibits such beautiful patterns and behavior by itself” and it made me realize the importance of mathematics in science research, in which both of them are dependent on one another. This presentation has also highlighted the importance of science in the conservation of the environment as it enables humans to find better methods to carry out an action such that it lessens harm on earth.

We had project presentations by various schools the next 2 day and it most certainly was an eye-opener, making me realize not just the various problems which are happening around the world, but also the breathtaking scientific knowledge and information of all the different students around the globe. Singapore is just one of the many mining spots of scientific knowledge and that I could learn much more from all the presentations and projects carried out by the young science enthusiasts in this fair. Science is a common language, and yes, it is what connects more than 150 students from 16 regions around the world. It has been a most wonderful experience looking at the various presentations made throughout the course of the fair.

Another highlight of the fair is the science zone, in which different students are separated into different zones to experience different types of science involved. I joined the energy zone and was required to create a solar boat which could move the fastest with 3 other group mates. Although the 3 other group mates are all Japanese, it was really exciting as we shared ideas, cut the Styrofoam and laughed at the shapes that we have cut out. There was no language barrier at all between all of us. Although our boat was unable to move due to the lack of sunlight, we still thoroughly enjoyed the boat creation process. It is the process that matters, not the results. The last day of the fair was the poster presentation by all the schools, displaying all their hard work they have put in for their project. The posters were as impressive as the students’ presentations and it certainly helped to enhance our scientific knowledge as they tried their very best to make sure that we thoroughly understood them. 1 of the project I liked the most was one which attempted to recreate a tornado using just dry ice, hot water and a vacuum cleaner. Though simple, it has helped to portray science in an interesting manner.

All wonderful memories must come to an end and with the conclusion of the poster presentation, the closing ceremony draws near. The cultural performance though, started first and it managed to unveil the different culture of the different country which participated to all the audience. It was also a very unforgettable memory for me as it was the first time that I actually stood on a stage to dance and even sing. It was also particularly interesting as the other cultural performance were all eye-openers and captivating for all of us, ranging from dances to songs and even to Wushu performances. The closing ceremony was particularly saddening, as it signifies the end of a simply unbelievable 5 days in Ritsumeikan high school. Gloom and grimness was all I felt as the emcees gave their speeches and with that, ending the whole event. The concluding video made was really touching and pretty much sums up the feelings felt by everyone throughout the fair—exciting, inspiring and incredible. Though imperfect, the video has comprehensively recorded our journey in the school, and looking back at all the small happenings in the fair has just aroused a sense of belonging with the school.

The next day was an industrial tour to GS-Yuasa which was a battery-making company. It unraveled the mystery as to how battery actually functions for me and exposed me to a large variety of batteries used in the different sectors. What’s even more incredible was the ride in the battery-powered car made by this particular company. It was virtually free of sound and could travel much smoother than conventional cars. This industrial tour not just make me realize the functions of battery, but also the individual efforts put in by different companies to create an environment ideal for the conservation of the earth, one which is of utmost importance in this times.

We commenced our homestay in the evening and it was really quite awkward when I first interacted with my host. However, the host gradually warmed up to me and furthermore, his family was one which was very forthcoming and hearty to me, making me feels like home. What’s even more interesting was the fact that the host’s brother actually hosted a Hwa Chong student before in his

house. This fact made me more comfortable with the host family and eventually made me socialize more with them. 1 point though that was quite uneasy for me was the fact that the host family actually spent quite a lot of money on us. From their bringing of us to the different landmarks of the country, to their taking care of our lodging, food and travel expense, they have really spent quite a huge amount of expenditure. Even though comparatively with their standards of live, the money spent is not really that huge burden on most of them, still it makes me feel quite guilty whenever my host has to fork out his own money to pay for me. I feel utterly indebted to their hospitality and generosity. From the homestay, I have completely experienced the superior mannerism that the Japanese preaches so much and is primed for. I am also especially thankful to the host mother who has went all the way to prepare almost all my meals for me and how she has always cared for me throughout my entire stay. My gift is trivial in comparison to the warmth they have shed upon me.

It was really a somber moment as we departed on the last day, as we left the country we have spent 10 valuable days of our time in, as we bid adieu to the host and their family who have dedicated themselves to our enjoyment and welfare. The sense of departure is really immense, just like we are able to leave our country of birth to another country. The trip to Japan is really a special one, one that will leave an indelible mark on not just me, but everyone else. I want to go back to Japan sometime, to see the autumn leaves flutter to the ground, to huddle with one another in the cold, to feel the speed as the train zooms past the station, to experience the extreme politeness of the citizens, to simply smile and pretend I understand whenever someone speaks Japanese to me, to live with my host family again, to ride in the incredibly high roller coaster again, to experiment with the various food products that Japan has and also to make more new friends in Ritsumeikan High school. Thank You so much Ritsumeikan High School and Japan.

