

## 2024 Campus Asia Social Innovation Forum @ Waseda University

5<sup>th</sup> July, 2024

On the first day, we were divided into several groups to explore the neighborhood. Each group consisted of students from all the partner universities. As we introduced ourselves and shared information about our home institutions, I already knew that this Forum would be truly special. Our group visited Kagurazaka, which is an area rich in Japanese, Western and modern cultures. Even though I am Japanese, this excursion provided me with a lot of new insights, as I had never explored that area before. As we walked along the streets of Kagurazaka, we were delighted to see paper lanterns hung up in preparation for the upcoming Kagurazaka Festival. After visiting a shrine, we stopped by a historic cafe, where we all enjoyed the signature cream puffs. This excursion allowed us to experience the sophisticated atmosphere and blend of Japanese and Western cultures that the area has to offer.



The first day was concluded with a lecture about the Okubo area delivered by a speaker from a community-based volunteer group. I must admit that I had recognized the Okubo primarily as a Korean town before this lecture. However, the lecture made me realize that the area is rich in diverse cultures from various ethnic and religious groups. Korean people indeed live in that area, but the current image of Okubo has been shaped largely by mass media. In reality, people from many different backgrounds have started small businesses and lived there for a long time. The speaker also highlighted that hate speech was one of the challenges faced by foreign residents in that area. He remarked that engaging with people and understanding their cultures is essential for building a community where individuals from different backgrounds can coexist. As I absorbed these important insights, I became very excited to visit the Okubo region the following day.

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The second day started with a brief group discussion to decide where to visit during our excursion to the Okubo region. Our group chose Takokuseki Dori and Okubo Dori to experience

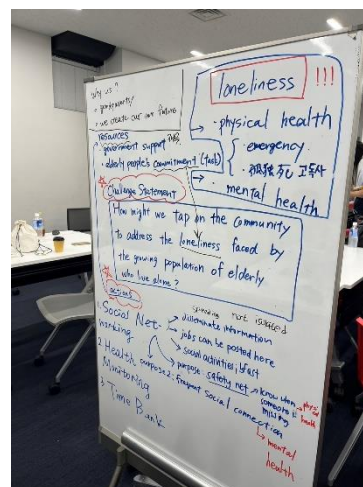
both the local area and the spots primarily popular among visitors.

First, as we explored Takokuseki Dori, I realized that this place serves as a hub for international residents. Although the area was quiet and calm, it was lined with small restaurants and shops offering cuisines from various countries, such as Nepal, Thailand and Vietnam. In the middle of Takokuseki Dori, we discovered a temple primarily serving the Taiwanese community. The temple seemed to be well integrated into the neighborhood. We had a precious opportunity to walk inside the temple and observe how people pray. As we stood by the altar, a local woman kindly showed us how to make a prayer. Originally from Taiwan, she had lived in Japan for many years. We learned that this temple has become the heart of the Taiwanese community in Japan. I realized that having such religious facilities that represent diverse cultures is key to building an inclusive community for people from different backgrounds. After visiting the temple, we made our way to the Okubo Dori. In contrast to the quiet atmosphere of Takokuseki Dori, Okubo Dori was bustling with young visitors. As we walked along the street, we shared insights about our cultures. After returning to campus, we attended another lecture on the Okubo area, where we learned more about the efforts made to create an inclusive community.



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The main activity of the last day was to design a social innovation project as a group. As we were given reading materials on the aging population, an issue common to China, Korea, Singapore and Japan, our group decided to discuss how communities can address the loneliness faced by the growing population of elderly people living alone. It was fascinating to engage in discussions with students from different backgrounds as I gained valuable new perspectives. For instance, when we talked about nursing homes, we realized that the definition and operations of elderly care vary significantly between countries. To clarify these differences, we paused our discussion on social innovation and each student explained how nursing homes function in their home country. Although it took time and patience for everyone to understand each system, this effort helped avoid misunderstandings and led to a more productive discussion. This experience made me realize that what we often take for granted in one country may not hold true in another. Therefore, asking questions without hesitation and elaborating on our points is crucial for understanding other



cultures. These practices are keys to effective communication with people from diverse backgrounds.

The 3 days of the Social Innovation Forum was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. I am grateful for the opportunity to connect with students of different countries. This exchange of cultures and discussions on social innovation made me realize that although each voice may seem small, together we can bring about change from Asia to the world.