

Introduction



I joined the CAMPUS Asia program and went to Singapore to study social innovation. It was my first time going abroad. So, I was quite nervous, but it turned out to be an extremely valuable experience that was more than worth it. I am profoundly grateful to my teachers for giving me this wonderful opportunity.

First, I'd like to explain why I decided to join this program. Having never left Japan before, I began to wonder if the things I took for granted were very narrow in scope as I learned about social issues and the situations in other countries through my university classes. Also, I was curious about going abroad while I was still in college. Then, just at the right time, a friend from my undergraduate seminar told me about this program and invited me to join. I decided to participate because I judged it to be the perfect opportunity for me—someone who wanted to break free from my own “norms”, encounter various other “norms” to broaden my values, and wanted to go abroad.

This journal focuses on how Singapore's social innovation and multicultural environment reshape one's perceptions of “normal”.

Academics

Dignity kitchen

On the first day, I visited dignity kitchen to see firsthand how people with disabilities work and how the facility supports them. There I learned that the kitchen was a social enterprise with a social purpose, distinct from volunteer work, and people are crucial to its success. Also, I learned sign language to order drinks from deaf staff members and placed an order. This reminds me of a sign language class I took before, where I learned that sign language grammar differs between Japan and other countries.

Later, on the bus during the trip, I had a brief discussion with one of the program members about how a similar system could succeed in Japan, and if it wouldn't, and if not, why not. And within that discussion, it was speculated that because Japanese people don't have such a strong culture of eating out, they might consequently tend to demand higher quality meals. It was also mentioned that because



the volunteer aspect inevitably becomes so strong, it might be difficult for a similar system to take root in Japan.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

On the second day, I attended a lecture at NTU on the economy and the Japan occupation.



In the economics lecture, I learned about inflation and market analysis methods, using the high cost of purchasing cars and homes in present-day Singapore as a starting point. Singapore lacks resources like agricultural and marine products, so its people are its resource. This means investing heavily in human development (skills upgrading), and Singapore's budget is directed towards this goal. However, the government operates a digital voucher system called CDC vouchers, distributed to all households to ease the burden on citizens. This revealed an approach focused on sustaining the nation within its limited land and population.



In the Japan occupation lecture, I learned about Sook Ching that refers to the mass arrests and executions of Chinese individuals deemed to be resisting Japanese occupation during World War II in Malaya. The vivid accounts of the Japanese military's actions shared during the lecture were extremely brutal and shocking. What left the deepest impression on me was "In Japanese school is paradise but outside is opposition". I felt it suggested just how firmly entrenched the practice of making people follow Japan's instructions

had become. I strongly felt that we must not forget that Singapore, now a major tourist destination well-known even among Japanese people and home to partner universities of Japanese institutions, has such a history. At the same time, I wish to express my deepest condolences to the victims.



After the lectures, we took a campus tour. The campus was so vast that I felt I might get lost without a guide, which made me think it must be well-equipped with extensive facilities. Several Chinese-style buildings were visible on the grounds, making me keenly aware that the Chinese community constitutes nearly 80% of Singapore's population. I also frequently saw posters about career support, which gave me the impression that the university offers substantial career assistance.

Singapore City Gallery

On the third day, we visited the Singapore City Gallery, and I learned how Singapore has developed and how it preserves its urban landscape. Singapore, despite having only one-third the land area of Tokyo, has achieved remarkable economic development. I learned that this success stems from the effective utilization of underground space for facilities such as subways and water infrastructure. It was found that high awareness of proper waste disposal contributes to maintaining the city's landscape. The Gallery features activities where visitors can learn about correct waste disposal in an enjoyable way, and the trash bins installed within the gallery clearly indicate the types of waste they accept.



Cultures

Around town

Over the course of three days, I encountered many new things that became the new "norm".

The first sight that caught my eye upon arriving in Singapore was the dense cluster of financial company buildings. Located within sight of the Merlion and Marina Bay, this area vividly conveys Singapore's rapid development while also seeming to epitomize the nation's defining characteristic: that its people are its sole capital.

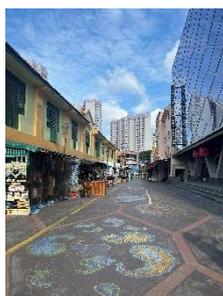


Another common sight around town was posters prohibiting littering and trash bins. As expected of a country where littering carries fines, I felt a very high level of awareness about waste. Japan is also strict about sorting, but you don't see trash bins this frequently in public spaces. One reason cited is that placing bins leads to littering around them. However, in Singapore, I didn't see any such littering around the bins I observed. The difference here likely stems from whether littering carries penalties. In Singapore, since fines are imposed for what is deemed littering, I believe it has fostered a habit of properly disposing of trash in bins. In Japan, the opposite effect seems to be occurring. This suggests that policy design, not merely cultural morality, shapes public behavior.



Differences from Japan were also apparent on the train. Signs prohibited eating and drinking, as well as bringing durians onboard. While eating and drinking on trains in Japan is generally frowned upon as an unspoken rule, the explicit prohibition in Singapore reflects the strict enforcement against littering. The ban on bringing durians onboard struck me as particularly unique- a sign only found in a country where durians are commonly sold.

Additionally, there were many spots like Little India, Arab Street, and Chinatown that truly embodied the nation's multiculturalism, making every place I visited incredibly stimulating. Stepping into these areas felt like arriving in a foreign land, offering visual enjoyment, but what particularly stood out was how the smells differed from place to place.





Foods



Hawker stalls are everywhere in the city, and I observed that the culture of eating out is deeply ingrained. This demonstrated how Singapore's hawker culture functions not only as a food culture but also as a social infrastructure that supports daily life across different income levels. Among the many hawkers, I visited Maxwell and ate the famous chicken rice. I also tried various other dishes like bak kut teh, hokkien mee, and mee banding, and all of them were excellent. I felt that many of the flavors were well-suited to Japanese tastes.



diverse influences of various nations, offering a glimpse into its history of embracing different cultures.

Conclusion

This time, participating in the program exposed me to so many new experiences- from cultural aspects to the sights of the city- and I feel it expanded my own preconceptions. Moving forward, I want to continue visiting various countries, receiving diverse stimuli, and

broadening my own values. This experience reshaped my understanding of how societies can design systems that enable diverse people to thrive.