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| **Exchanged University** | Waseda University | **Exchanged Country / City** | Japan/Tokyo |

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| **Title** | To be unexpectedly gifted the two greatest gifts. |
| I did not have any expectations for the Campus Asia program even until the moment I got off the airplane at the Haneda Airport because the information given beforehand was quite ambiguous and I was still little unfamiliar with the program itself. I had seen to notice on the board of my department’s website and had submitted an application which was followed by a brief interview with the professor. It was a short and simple process. However, after having gone through the week of the program, I have come to appreciate the non-existence of expectations. At times, expectations mean stereotypes you have formed for a particular person, a demographic, or a country that limits how you perceive the world. Throughout the program, my ‘expectations’ – or stereotypes – for other countries and people from different countries have been both met and failed miserably. Nonetheless, it was a humbling experience that forced me to confront both personal and global conflicts that I would often dismiss for my convenience in daily life.  The first global conflict I directly faced was that of the Korean – Japanese relationship. The trouble was most blatant in the museum of Yasukuni Shrine where Japanese militarism and nationalism was celebrated in the way that undermined the atrocity of the Japanese military during World War II and the resulting victims’ pains. I was not surprised by the museum and its nationalistic commemoration of the war as it was the same rhetoric often reported in Korean media concerning Abe administration and the right-wing population in Japan. However, I was more pleasantly surprised by the reaction of fellow Japanese peers. I had assumed such position to be the stance of the general Japanese population as the Korean media dominantly depicts Japan in such a way. However, the Japanese participants of Campus Asia told me that this is rather uncommon in Japan and that it differs from the general public’s view. Although I was happy to hear that such right-wing rhetoric is not commonly held by the whole Japanese population, I was also disappointed to find out the reason why it is so difficult to discuss historical issues with Japanese counterparts – they are uninterested and undereducated on the subject. During the visit to the WAM museum, I found out that the mention of the comfort women issue has been constantly decreasing in Japanese textbooks due to the government pressure. Even World War II taught in Japanese history classes does not mention non – Japanese victims and is very event-centric. This hinders the students from gaining a holistic understanding of the war including its dark sides and the moral responsibility that follows for such actions as a state. I felt the need for more diverse and introspective history education in all three countries from this experience.  The internal conflict I had to confront was more complex and did not come with a definite answer. Particularly during the Yasukuni shrine museum, I had to question how tolerant I am as an individual. To what extent is a narrative considered a constructive ‘perspective’? While multiple conflicting perspectives can coexist, justifying all views as ‘perspective’ also have the danger of exploitation by radicals or hate-speech-doers. I also had a very genuine discussion on how we Koreans feel regarding historical issues with Korea University students. We were able to admit that while logically we understand that we should be understanding and empathetic to the Japanese, it is still difficult in our heart to actually empathize and truly commemorate the victims of the atomic bombs. While we do understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation, are we truly ready to forgive? These are very sensitive and uncomfortable subject to not only ask one another but also to ask oneself. Thus I was grateful to have an opportunity to openly and frankly discuss even just between Koreans.  Even at the end of the whole week, I am still yet to narrow the discrepancy between the logic and my intuition. However, in Korea University’s Political Science and Economics department, there is a slogan “with a cold reason and a warm heart”. Maybe the two are never meant to be aligned with each other but we as individuals always carry the conflicting nature within ourselves. Although at times the discrepancy seems to be an obstacle to faster reconciliation or societal changes, by simply being aware of it and constantly having an internal dialogue, we can minimize its harms and harvest its benefits. Similarly, it is so easy for us to be swayed for our own benefit - minimizing our wrongdoings and highlighting our achievements both as individuals and as societies. Still, we should remember one thing: if one commemorates one’s victims, one should also learn to remember the others’ victims one has incited; if one praises one’s shining armor, one should also recognize the blood on the sword.  The term “there is no future for the people who have forgotten one’s history” has a nationalistic undertone. However, it can be applied on the global level too. With globalization, we are no longer simply a citizen of a nation but also a citizen of the global community. We as humankind must not forget our history and learn from them. For the same reason, ‘moving on’ from past conflicts is not easy; but if all nations can share one common goal of true reconciliation, a genuine apology can be made and generous forgiveness can be given. Further, once we can remove all the expectations we have for ourselves and each other, we can free ourselves to discover more ingenious and novel approaches to the problems we face collectively. I have learned that the expectations I had made are ultimately arbitrary as trying to fit the world in a box is no use; ‘Japanese’ or ‘Korean’ or ‘Chinese’ is nothing more than a simple nationality and is not an indicator of an individual’s character. We students too have long fought to escape the set ideals for what an exemplary ‘student’ is.  I cannot claim to have transformed into a different person after the week of the program. I must confess I am still unsure of what to make out of my experience with the program. But I am fine with that. I don’t think Campus Asia is a program devised to make one feel in a specific way. Rather, somewhat ironically, it is much more of a personal experience that you keep at the corner of your head and it will confront you with difficult questions when it is reminded of occasionally. After returning to Korea University, I chose to enroll in a course named ‘Special Topics in East Asia Studies’ which explores Japan-Korea Relations and East Asia from an analytical and academic perspective. After experiencing and pondering on the nations’ differences and discrepancies in the understandings of history, the course provided a logical and evidential explanation as to how the relations have come to be what they are today. By exploring the roots of the conflict, I was able to more effectively distance myself from the nationalistic history education I received as a Korean and also why and how such nationalistic rhetoric and commemoration was used in other parts of East Asia. Also, I learned that such a nationalistic tone of history education is not the sole reason behind such discrepancy in understanding history between nations and came to be aware of much more complex and various elements that led to the status quo. Such perspective is enlightening and further discourages me to vilify a certain nation or a certain government. I am grateful for all the amazing peers and professors I had a chance to interact with. This was also my first time living at a dormitory with a roommate and I am impressed to find out that I am quite comfortable with sharing a room with somewhat of a stranger. It was also very fun to travel Tokyo and get a very small glimpse into what universities are like in Japan.  After all, for me Campus Asia program was one of very few educational experiences that is actually fun. The program I had no expectations for, gave to two greatest gifts. First, I became much more self-aware of my stereotypes and biases that prohibit me from freely and productively engaging with others both regarding historically sensitive issues and on personal interactions. To be so introspective and become honest with not only me but also with others was ironically a liberating experience. Such enlightenment forced me to confront myself to break away from my own biases whether by taking a course on the topic and studying more on it or by being more critical of myself and the media. Second, although it was a short time, I was able to experience what life in Tokyo is as a Waseda student. Life in Tokyo was foreign yet familiar and to experience the city as a local student was both new and exciting. I met diverse people with distinct characteristics: curious and collaborative peers who never hesitated to both ask for help and give help; the most caring roommate who was always so considerate; fellow Korean students who were so friendly and humorous – some of whom I still stay in contact with. I would recommend the program to active peers who are both genuinely interested and are ready to face both diverse peers and my own shortcomings and fully enjoy such conflicting dichotomy even in a short period of time. Those who seek to learn not from simple lectures but personal experiences and interactions would be perfect for the program. If you do participate in the program remember this: there doesn’t have to be a definite answer, as long as you identify what the question should be and remember the question for yourself. | |