

2018 Re-inventing Japan Project (Short term)
International Students Summit, RJP Program

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The Re-inventing Japan Project (short term) was full of activities. Since the first time I was notified about my trip to Japan, my excitement and emotions were raising rapidly because this country in question is, for me, one of the most interesting and developed in the world. Because of this, my purpose on participate actively in the RJP was to learn as much as I could about forestry, agriculture, culture, traditions and lifestyle in Asia, and specifically in Japan. I wanted to take all the opportunities to know everything about this phenomenal country; starting with the people, the big Tokyo city, the customs or manners, the environment and nature, this because my knowledge area is related to forests and the relation with the society.

The activities we did during the RJP were full of knowledge. Starting with the beginning: The Comprehensive International Student Program (CIEP).

Comprehensive International Student Program

The CIEP was held the first week of my entire stay in Japan. The main objective of this program was aiming to show us, international students, about the current situation of Japan's agriculture. The activities started with a field trip to Chiba prefecture in which we visited Chiroi organic farm. We did some cultural activities on the crops they grew; they presented to us a little bit of the current situation about some of their crops and the overall organic products in the country; also, we visited some local organic markets to see how these products are distributed in the nearby areas.

Another important aspect was the pear production. We got to know a pear plantation just beside the organic farm. There, they were developing some techniques to acquire high quality pears, this to satisfy the demand on the local and regional markets, because the pear coming from this part of Japan is one of the most valued. Regarding pear, we had the opportunity to visit a packing plant. The whole process to pack the pear was shown, starting with the selection of the fruits, going through the wrapping and labeling, and finalizing with packaging and transport.

More activities in this amazing program, once we returned from Chiba prefecture, were the visit to Atsugi campus of the Tokyo University of Agriculture. In this campus we received some presentations about the projects they were developing in there. It was a rapid visit, but the ideas people shared with us were huge and excellent. After Atsugi campus, we headed to Isehara farm: an interesting and technology farm. They had a lot of modern greenhouses and a strict hygiene protocol. This was also a brief walk through the farm because we had to move to our last field trip visit of the CIEP: pear and grape plantations of Kanagawa Prefecture office.

In the last visit of the day we got to the office of Kanagawa prefecture, there we had a quick presentation about the situation of this prefecture and the production ways they have taken. After that, we went to see fruit plantations: another way of planting pears, sort of similar to the one they had in Chiroi farm but with some small differences and also the way to produce grape was explained and we got to taste a couple of them.

With this, the field trips of the CIEP were officially concluded, now, it was time to start working with the researching job we were given at the beginning of the program, because during the field trips, at night we had lectures about Japan's agriculture, food and environment. In these lectures, we formed work groups to do a research job about one of the three topics.

The final 3 days of the CIEP were in Setagaya Campus of NODAI. In the morning we had some kind of classes about the situation and some other research projects in Japan. At the end of the day, we had discussions with our workgroups to try (and eventually reach) to find one big problematic they have in Japan, referring to the assigned topic. On the last day, we did some heavy and dense work to finally found the problem and some alternatives of solution proposed by ourselves. Our final activity was presenting our thoughts and ideas in front of the members and organizers of the program.

Activities worth to mention: visit to the National Museum of Japanese History; barbecue meal given by Chiroi farm members; visit to Boso no Mura park and city.



Figure 1. Chiroi farm and their way of production.

RJP Internship at ERECON

On day 1, we visited this place near Akihabara neighborhood, the Organic Forum Japan, in which they were hosting the Organic Life Expo; hundreds (not to say thousands) of organic products were shown in this event, realized once a year.

As a big group, we did a little walk through the first zone of the Expo as some sort of introduction to the environment. After that, we gathered for a couple of minutes and then split in smaller groups, so we were able to start looking for the product of our interest: first day task. Between 2 and 3 hours later of traveling the expo (pretty big by the way) we gathered again to give the final conclusions for that day. We all explained our thoughts about the place and the event, and finally named what product we picked. The task for the second day was given: prepare a quickly presentation about everything we learnt till that moment and also including why we picked the product in question.

On day 2, our RJP took us to Machida-Shi area, to the main office of ERECON. Here MR. Koji presented the works he and his collaborators have been developing in the southeastern region of Asia (Cambodia), teaching and supporting local production and local farmers to help them to improve the ways of production in their regions, maintaining the traditional techniques.

He talked about Satoyama, a specific and incredible way Japanese people manage the natural ecosystems in optimal relation with society.

Then the time for our presentations had arrived, but after noticing our joy and happiness walking and discovering new places, Mr. Koji decided to take us to this popular park in the area. This park was one of the best experiences I had in Japan. I really enjoyed visiting this park that's more like a natural forest area with the additions to make it passable for humans. We walked by the forest land, agricultural crops, some little hoods beside the park and even a little farm with a couple of cows. It was the experience I wanted to have and that I always want to have when visiting new places and this park completely filled it.

There were around 3 hours of walking through this interesting and entertaining park. At the end, we did our final stop in a cozy store in which they served tea, coffee, ice cream, vegetables and souvenirs. We sat on a big wooden table and then, started to talk about our experience on the second and last day, and also, we did a little presentation about the task of the first day: the organic product.

In my case, I mentioned all the things I wrote lines above; one of the best trips and experiences in Japan until that day. My presentation was about a product that I personally really like: Green Tea. Since the first time I got to drink and taste green tea, it caught me; maybe because of its different and bitter flavor, but it resulted in a very interesting drink to me.



Figure 2. Organic green tea producers in the Organic Lifestyle Expo.

18th International Students Summit

The final week of the RJP was finally here: the ISS. Just beginning the week, on Monday, we had a field trip to a recycling plant in Saitama-ken. In that place, we, now as a big group of around 80 people, were able to see the process they have in this plant to obtain products from the debris, mostly coming from construction. Inside the plant, there was this little park we walked through. It has a lot of different plants, brought by the owners in order to create a high diversity garden. Also, we got to see a little sanctuary or temple and a restaurant and souvenir store that was cooled via cold air coming out from the underground.

After the field trip, the activities on the classrooms started. We were divided, as in the CIEP, in small groups, everyone with subjects that had something in common. In my case, it was students in the role of agriculture. These groups were defined before the actual ISS week, and even before the trip to Japan. Once the group analysis started, we finally knew our chairpersons; they were the ones in charge, their mission was to drive our discussion to certain points like objectives, similarities, differences and improvements. In this two days before the real presentations, we had the opportunity to have some rehearsal with our small group and also in the auditorium where the event was.

On the day before the ISS, we as a complete group with all the attendants, had a couple of hours to now work as a group of groups, we discussed the same we did in the small ones and, at the end of this gathering, we came with the theme of the next ISS: Youth transforming thoughts on Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management to connect Local and Global Community.

Thursday and Friday finally had arrived. The two days we were working for, the real deal. Presenters from all around the world introduced us into their topics of interest and research. In my case, as part of the session number 1, I, with my partner Miguel, presented on day 1. After every group presentation, we did the session conclusion: the work our chairpersons accomplished the last 2 days. That was with every session in the first day and also on the second. At the end of the final day, we had the general conclusion, again, as a big group. The ending of the ISS was given by the CIP president. We had a brief photo session and then, the ISS and practically the adventure in Japan was officially over.

Activities worth to mention: opening talk by Michigan State University professor; farewell party with the radish dance.



Figure 3. ISS presentation.

Final thoughts

Re-Inventing Japan Project is the best trip I have ever had so far. The whole experience I had in this country was overwhelming. The people, the city, the knowledge, the nature, the food... almost everything I experienced in Nippon was superb. I definitely have now within my person a new bigger perspective of the world and the way life is lived. Every activity of the whole program taught me something new: the CIEP with the local farming production and the researching task; the internship at ERECON with the organic life in Japan and the natural environment in bond with society and agriculture; and of course, the ISS with the presentation in front of an amazing audience, the work before and after it and the people I got to meet during those days.

My personal feelings about my performance in the ISS and in the 2 weeks in general, are pretty amazing. I felt amazed on people reaction to my presentation and the interest they showed once the event finished. Even some advisors and presenters came to me to congratulate and ask more about our topic. This is an experience I am sure I will never forget.

Being in the farms and rural areas of Japan, in contrast with the giant metropolis of Tokyo, made me realize the reality in the agriculture sector. This is a major problem not only here in my country México; all over the world the gap between actors in agriculture and natural resources is big.

Talking about my major and using the advantage I acquired with the RJP knowledge, we, as future forestry engineers, have the big opportunity to change the future of the Mexican natural forests and the people living in there, because they are the first actors interacting with the forest goods. We as students and urban areas settlers, should definitely give possibilities to the owners, and now I am quite sure that the organic market, use of marketing, increment of people awareness and more, can be superb alternatives; maybe not now but in the future, with our help and effort and disposition of producers and consumers.

Finally, I want to congratulate NODAI and RJP for the effort and disposition to provide these activities; thank for giving me this opportunity of knowing more about Japan, its people and its way to manage some aspects related to the environment and society. I would definitely recommend this short-term internship because despite its duration, its undeniable dense and full of knowledge. If I have to give some advice or recommendation to the organizers, I would just say that making this project a little longer will be completely worth it, and also that the CIEP should become a “must do” activity, since only a few of us took it. I know I don’t speak only by myself but for all my mates that this was such an amazing experience that most people would be thanked to have.