

## **Reflective Essay: A Trip to Japan**

By: “Anzoa” Madelene Kajusa

From May 15- May 28, 2023, I went on a Japan Field School trip with the Geography Faculty of Arts at TRU. This field school course “offers participants the opportunity to learn first-hand about the human and environmental geography of Japan and gain field experience analyzing the planning of Japanese neighbourhoods,” (TRU Japan Field School: Geography Faculty of Arts | BC Study Abroad, n.d.). This was my first time travelling outside of Canada since me and my family arrived in Canada as refugees from Sudan in 2001. I never left the country or returned to Sudan or South Sudan. With the uncertainty within the countries, it just never felt right. I do hope to go back one day. Hopefully when the war is over and there is peace.

Before going to Japan my professor went over places in Japan, with students however studying about a country is different than being in a country. My prior thoughts about Japan were that I thought people would not be nice to me because I am not Japanese. I am a young black woman, and I have also not seen many representations of black people in Japan, so I was very concerned at first. I am already a minority in Canada so I felt like I would be a minority in Japan as well. Even so, I wanted to travel to Japan and see it.

I did some research on Japan to have a better idea of what I was getting into. I watch YouTube videos on food reviews, fashion, makeup, and tourist attractions. One cool thing that I found was Japan has a big fashion culture such as the Harajuku fashion style. So, what is Harajuku? “Harajuku doesn’t describe one particular style or way of looking, but the conglomeration of many different styles in one place,” (Jez, 2021). What I have personally seen of Harajuku is bright-coloured clothing and hairstyles, lots of accessories, and neon-bright makeup. It is an extremely cute fashion style, something I would like to try in the future.

Japan is incredibly beautiful it has many green spaces, blue spaces, flowers, tall buildings, great culture, and delicious food. It was interesting to see the cultural differences between Japan and Canada. For example, in Japan bowing is a sign of respect. Bowing was something I was getting used to. People in Canada do not bow to each other so there is a cultural difference. I think if you were to bow to people in Canada it would be considered odd. Most people hug or shake hands when greeting each other. Another cultural difference that I noticed in Japan was how the streets were clean. When you walk anywhere on the streets of Japan there is little to no trash and many trash cans. I remember being in Tokyo and seeing many trash cans and this helps stop people from littering and why streets are cleaner in Japan especially compared to Kamloops where you often do not find trash cans immediately around you. I think having more trash cans in Kamloops could help with making the city clean. It was great to experience being in another part of the world. I think with my knowledge of sociology I was able to look at the world around me and question and reflect on how different societies are structured and the norms and values they have. I think my views on the world have changed to be more open to new places, ideas, and cultures, that are different from my own. It is important to have openness to be able to connect and appreciate the diverse world that we live in.

On the itinerary for the field school, Hiroshima was one of our stops. A historical event that happened in Hiroshima was how it was struck by an atomic bomb." On August 6, 1945, during World War II (1939-45), an American B-29 bomber dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima,"(Zapata, 2024). "The explosion immediately killed an estimated 80,000 people; tens of thousands more would later die of radiation exposure,"(Zapata, 2024). I knew that before stepping foot in Hiroshima. However, being in Hiroshima I could feel the fragility of the place. The effects of the bomb were still present within the city because there were deep cracks on the streets and there was not much new infrastructure.

Did you know the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is the only structure that remains standing after the atomic bomb? Learning more about the stories that took place in Hiroshima was very emotional. The Japanese people have faced historical intergenerational trauma. As someone who has faced intergenerational trauma and whose people have faced 40 years of civil war, I felt connected to the Japanese people.

Pain knows pain. People who have faced traumatic events understand each other and at that moment why it is important to have intercultural understanding. We are all human beings who need each other's help and support. This experience made me want to hear more Japanese stories and Japanese Canadian stories. Having this understanding I think can help create a more globally connected world by having compassion for others. I think even if you are not from Japan that does not mean you cannot offer support and empathy for those who have endured such hardship.

During this field trip to Japan, I have become a more open person and have gained more knowledge about Japanese culture. In my prior beliefs, I was concerned about how I would be treated as a black person but people in Japan treated me with respect and were kind to me and the colour of my skin was not an issue. Everywhere I went people were willing to help and wanted to know more about me and my journey to Japan. I want to go back to Hiroshima and meet with the locals and have conversations with the Japanese people living there to learn their ways of healing from intergenerational trauma.

## References

Jez. (2021, August 5). *What is Harajuku style?* The Japanese Shop.

<https://thejapaneseshop.co.uk/blogs/japan/what-is-harajuku-style#:~:text=Harajuku%20doesn't%20describe%20one,community%20and%20freedom%20of%20expression.>

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – Causes, impact & Lives Lost | HISTORY. *HISTORY*.

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/bombing-of-hiroshima-and-nagasaki>

*TRU Japan Field School: Geography Faculty of Arts / BC Study abroad.* (n.d.).

<https://www.bcstudyabroad.ca/program/tru-japan-field-school-geography-faculty-arts>