

First Hijiya On-line Student Exchange with Ming Chuan University, Taiwan

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Key words: on-line student exchange, cultural exchange, Taiwan, Taiwanese culture, English language

1. Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic Hijiya University (HU) has been unable to conduct overseas study programs for students in 2020 or 2021. In February-March of 2021, the plan had been to take the first group of students to Ming Chuan University (MCU) in Taipei, Taiwan, for an intensive English language program at the Taoyuan Campus. Since this was not possible, it was decided to approach MCU regarding a kind of pilot online-exchange between our two student bodies. The idea was to start small. The purpose for Hijiya was to create interest and awareness among our students about MCU, Taiwanese culture, and the possibility of studying English there in the future. MCU recruited two senior students from their Applied English Department and the two authors recruited eight Hijiya students to participate in our first on-line exchange with MCU on March 10th of 2021 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 AM (Japan time).

The exchange was conducted using Zoom. Some students participated from home and others from the Building 5 computer classroom with the assistance of Ms. Matouchi (CALL staff). The basic format for the exchange was as follows: brief self-introductions with a chance for questions; a short 18-minute video tour of MCU created in advance by the two MCU students; a PowerPoint introduction to HU by Hijiya students with question-and-answer time after each presentation; a “10 Facts about Taiwan” PowerPoint presentation; and a “10 Facts about Hiroshima” PowerPoint presentation, along with a 3-minute live video stream of the HU campus, followed by ample time for questions. This paper will briefly review each of these steps, including merits.

2. Self-introductions

The HU students briefly introduced themselves stating their name and explaining their hobbies, what they want to do or be in the future and something unique about themselves. The MCU students gave less structured and slightly longer self-introductions because there were only two of them and they had a higher level of English. There was time for questions both during and after the self-introductions. It was a positive and casual warmup which allowed HU students to practice English in an unscripted way.

3. Introduction to MCU

The two MCU students showed an edited 18 and half minute video tour of their campus starting at the athletic playing field (in the center of campus), which allowed us to see a physical education class in progress. They then showed us the gymnasium with a table tennis room, a badminton class in progress,

weight room and basketball court. From there they showed us the central campus courtyard and garden, the Administration Building, and the Technology Building. We were able to see two restaurants, and the two Family Marts on either side of campus. At both of these stores, it was explained that you could get a full meal for two Taiwan dollars (about eight yen). We were also able to see the Tourism and Languages Building, which houses the Applied English Department and its large instructional wall panels on US and British history and culture. At the library we could see signs in English and Chinese requiring students to take their temperature before entering, wear a mask and observe social distancing. Additional sites on the video tour included the Comprehensive Teaching Building, computer labs with a casual lounge-like atmosphere, the Design College, and dormitories for local and international students.

During the question-and-answer time we could learn that most MCU classes were being conducted face-to-face with COVID restrictions such as masking. On-line classes were being provided, however, for international students who were unable to get back to MCU due to COVID travel restrictions. This very interesting video tour gave HU students a stimulating glance at what campus life is like at an overseas school.

4. Introduction to HU

The HU students gave a 36-slide PowerPoint presentation of the HU campus, HU departments, and campus life. The presentation started with a campus map and brief introduction to each of the 4-year university and junior college departments. The introduction to campus life started with an overview of the sports, and culture and arts clubs, such as baseball, 3 on 3 basketball, dance, futsal and Eskii tennis for the former. The culture clubs included the folk song club, the brass band, the Japanese calligraphy circle, the entertainment club, the Taiko (Japanese drum) club, and the Sado (the Japanese tea ceremony) club. This was followed by several pictures of the annual Hijiyama Festival. There were photos of clubs and special guest performances and food stalls to show MCU students what a festival in Japan features.

After the MCU students “10 Facts about Taiwan” presentation (See section 5), but a part of the introduction to Hijiyama University, one of the authors and an HU student did a 3-minute live video stream of the HU campus from the 4th floor window of Building 5, pointing out some of the campus buildings and the Ota River. In the future, the authors would consider having HU students make a longer and more complete edited video of the entire HU campus, in order to give MCU students a more thorough view of a Japanese university and to make the logistics of a live online exchange easier.

5. 10 Facts about Taiwan

The MCU students gave a 19-minute PowerPoint presentation regarding ten interesting facts about Taiwan and Taiwanese culture. First, they said visitors should always bring an umbrella because Taiwan is both intensely sunny and rainy. Second, they explained Taiwan has both sitting and squat style toilets. They said squat style toilets are still very common and be found everywhere. Contrary to Japan though the two styles of toilets are in separate rooms. Third, like Japan, people drive on the left side of the road. Also, pedestrians walk on the right side of the road. Fourth, since customers must pay for plastic bags, cup sleeves have become very popular for carrying drinks. They cost about 300 yen and come in many cute and colorful designs. Fifth, Easy Cards (a transit card similar to ICOCA in Japan) can be used in

Taipei and Taoyuan for all buses and trains. These cards can be recharged at any convenience store. In Taipei, we were surprised to learn it costs \$12 (only 46.05 yen) to ride a bus and only \$18 (only 69.05 yen) in Taoyuan City.

Sixth, garbage trucks play music in Taiwan. This is to signal to people that they can bring their garbage directly to the trucks. Seventh, one can travel around the entire island of Taiwan by high-speed rail in eight hours and go from Taipei to the southern tip of the island in just two hours. Eighth, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao are the only places that still use old style, unsimplified Chinese characters. Ninth, Taiwan is a bicycle-friendly place. The You Bike company, for example, has bicycle rental stations all over the country and there is an extensive infrastructure for cyclists. Tenth, Taipei 101 tower is 1.5 times taller than Tokyo Tower. It has 8-floor modules that flair outwards. The reason is that eight is an auspicious number as it is in traditional Japanese culture. Each New Year's (January 1st), there is an impressive fireworks display launched from Taipei 101. This presentation was extremely informative for HU students because it was not only non-academic, but also looked at daily life in Taiwan. In other words, anyone could relate to these fun aspects of Taiwanese life and culture.

6. 10 Facts about Hijiya

Since MCU said they would give a presentation on 10 Facts about Taiwan, with the authors help HU students decided on 10 things they wanted the MCU students to know about Hiroshima. Students each decided on two or so things and wrote out the text of their presentation in English which the authors then edited for them. Before the students' presentations, the authors gave a brief introduction to Hiroshima including its location in Japan and the Chugoku Area, the meaning of the word Hiroshima (i.e., wide islands) as well as some historical context.

First, students explained the Atomic Bomb is a symbol of the desire for peace and a must place for all people to visit. Second, students showed pictures of Fudoin Temple. They explained it is a Buddhist temple that dates from the 14th century that is designated as a national treasure and is only an eight-minute walk from HU. Third, Hiroshima Castle was introduced. Students said it is near the center of the city and only 10 minutes from HU and is a great place to understand the history of Hiroshima during the feudal age. Fourth, students showed pictures of the Hondori Street (Main Street), and said it has many large and small stores and is great place for shopping and finding local products. Fifth, Zoom Zoom Stadium, the open-roofed stadium and home of the Hiroshima Carp professional baseball team was introduced.

Miyajima Island was listed as the sixth place to visit. Students showed pictures of the torii (Shinto shrine gateway) in the sea, the shrine and explained the history and importance of Miyajima. Seventh, HU students introduced two Hiroshima foods: Hiroshima style *okonomiyaki* and *momoji manju*. Eighth, pictures of Hiroshima streetcars were shown, and it was explained that it is only one of three cities in western Japan that still have street cars¹. Ninth, Kintaikyo Bridge and Iwakuni Castle, located near Hiroshima, were recommended as great places to visit due their beauty and historical importance. Tenth, it was explained that Hiroshima has several seasonal festivals that visitors should know about. These

¹ Unfortunately, according to Japan Visitor home page (Japan Trams, 2021), this is incorrect. In addition to Hiroshima, there are still streetcars in Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Kagoshima, Matsuyama and Okayama, all in western Japan.

are the Tokasan Festival in June, the Hiroshima Flower Festival in August, the Sake Matsuri (in nearby Saijo) in October, and the Ebisu Festival in November.

7. Conclusion

The authors feel that this first on-line exchange with MCU was a success. Although it was scheduled for two hours, the entire on-line exchange took two hours and 20 minutes. We went a little overtime since the MCU students and faculty were very interested and not rushed for time.

Flexibility is one clear benefit of doing on-line exchanges. Many of the HU students participated from home, one MCU student participated from a café and one of the authors participated from home while the other joined from his office where he could use his own computer.

There is a lot of untapped potential for the use of video, both pre-recorded, edited video and live-streamed video. HU, students for example, could pre-record a video of Hiroshima campus that could be used alone or in conjunction with the PowerPoint slides used this time. Videos can free up participants from the pressure of performing live and the time required to show the video can be known in advance. Live streaming could be used not just to show the campus, but for short interviews and so on.

The 10-fact format proposed by MCU is a great way for students to choose interesting things about their regions and culture to share with other students. The slides created this time could be recycled for future exchanges as long as the exchange is not with the same MCU students, and HU students could add new things to the list, creating new resources for future exchanges.

Finally, there are some issues to consider. What is the maximum number of students this format is suitable for? With larger numbers of participants, would the use of Zoom Breakout rooms be successful? Each Breakout Room would have to have confident well-trained HU leaders to be successful, though such an idea could be implemented prior to the exchange as a way of pairing up students from each university. For example, students could be assigned a “get to know you” interview of 6-8 questions that would be ideally done by pairing students up on Line one to two weeks in advance of the exchange program. This could also facilitate friendship building between students of the two universities. And lastly, is the issue of how much preparation and lead time would be required for both faculty and students.

References

Japan Trams (2021). Japan Visitor. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from the World Wide Web: <https://www.japanvisitor.com/japan-transport/japan-trams>

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