A New Tree for Graduate House

Following the fall of the old banyan tree just below P4 two years ago, a remnant of the varnished tree trunk has been reinstalled on the site to commemorate its existence. We were told that the poor tree was much older than HKU itself and yet the building of GH probably killed it. Much as I agree and support the idea to put up the remnant as an object of commemoration, I believe planting a new tree would be more meaningful as our contribution to the improvement of the environment of GH. Thus in March (on 24th) I donated a small banyan tree, probably of the same species as the old one: Ficus microcarpa (or in Chinese 細葉榕), planted on the slope just outside P2. I hope that in time, this small tree will grow to the size of the old one, while witnessing the development and growth of GH itself within the history of HKU!

From the Master Dr Desmond Hui

I have resigned!

By the time this newsletter is published, I would have left Graduate House for over a month.

Looking back through these years, days at Graduate House can be summarized by the "four tastes", i.e., sour, sweet, bitter and spicy since the first day I reported duty on 1 June 2001. Despite all the tough times and difficulties I had encountered, yet my work at Graduate House did help me enrich my life experiences, improve my interpersonal skills, enhance my career development and most memorable of all is that I get to know a group of nice and intellectual residents. With my departure and the change of mastership by the beginning of next year, an entirely new management will come into place. I am sure it will lead Graduate House fruitfully through its 10th anniversary and into a new millennium. Hereby, I wish every one of you every success in your future endeavours!

This picture was taken in my recent trip to Guam and it showed a beach at the Northern most tip of Guam which is called Ritidian Point and it is directly under a cliff which housed an American Air Force base.

From Mr. Rocky Tang

( Editor: Rocky is now working as an Executive Officer, at the Student Housing Office of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.)

Refrigerators will arrive soon!

In the process of ordering the refrigerator, we were advised by the Finance Office that a small fridge fitting underneath the desk may have potential occupational health issues. We will now build an extension to house the new fridge on the window ledge. Please pay attention to our arrangement and co-operate with our staff when the company deliver the fridges:

(1) Please clear your window ledge so the workmen can install the extension board.
(2) Please be responsible for the cleanliness of the fridge.
(3) Please sign and return the form attached to the fridge.

In-house Management Committee
Dear Crazy Tree,

Why have you settled in this uncomfortable place? Each day you smuggle against gravity, struggle to find water in that brick wall, and struggle to hold on when the wind blows down such a lonely street. No other trees have found this their home. Why you?

I don’t want to be personal about it, but perhaps you have some sort of identity issue. Were you rejected by your woody friends and can find solace only in the company glass and concrete? Was it a love gone wrong and now you sit alone and mope? Cheer up - it’s not the end of the world!

Yes, I should be more understanding. Of course, here in Hong Kong land values are so extremely high. Indeed you can make a strong business case for your odd predicament. And besides, there are many ugly retaining walls - not to mentions some buildings - in this city that would be much improved if adorned by a tree or two. So, good job – hang in there my friend!

However, I have to ask: What’s in store for the future? Where will you be in five years’ time? You do have options few other trees enjoy. Whereas others basically grow up, you have the freedom to grow up or down - or for that matter forward or back. Being so apt a defying gravity, you might as well make the most of your wonderful skills.

Anyways, keep in touch and all the best in your future endeavors.

Regards,

George Martin

June 6, 2007, Hong Kong

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Want to relax? How about a walk to the peak?

Nipuna - nipunabp@hkusua.hku.hk

I come from a small town in Anhui and we have lots of nice trees there!

Mei Lei - leimei@hkusua.hku.hk
A Trip to Japan

I had the wonderful privilege of visiting Japan for 2 weeks, having accumulated enough money and vacation leave to do so. My trip included stops in Tokyo, Himeji, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Osaka, and Kyoto, in that order.

Pretty much anyone can recognize the Eiffel Tower, “Big Ben”, the Empire State Building, and the Forbidden City. Japan, however, has no such recognizable monument (if you don’t count a red and white exact replica of the Eiffel Tower in Tokyo). Having been destroyed so many times by warfare, natural disasters, and fire, Tokyo also has few buildings of significant historical value. I found the city to be a sterile modern city of concrete and some glass, very different from European cities that have cobblestone streets and centuries-old buildings. Yet despite being so modern, Tokyo does not have a skyline like Hong Kong and New York City do, but is instead a city of low-lying buildings (probably due to the threat of earthquakes) dotted with a few clusters of skyscrapers. Two pleasant surprises in Tokyo were the surprisingly high proportion of residents who ride their bikes for at least a portion of their commute, as well as the green space amid all that concrete.

I honestly wasn’t sure what to see and do in Tokyo, and it turns out that there are few museums, palaces, and temples of note there. The thing to do in Tokyo is to wander around some of the busier districts. Ginza and Harajuku, for example, are world-famous for their concentrations of luxury stores, but can hardly be distinguished from high-end shopping districts in any other major city (where I can hardly afford a single pair of socks), so these districts aren’t really worth visiting. The Asakusa area, on the other hand, is worth visiting because it’s the best place to find traditional handicrafts and snacks in Tokyo. Shibuya is pretty special because it’s where bizarre youth trends are on full display, both in the display areas of the shops and worn by the young people who hang out there. It’s best to visit the seedy, neon-lit Shinjuku in the evening, when the red light district is at its busiest (though it’s very tame by Bangkok and Amsterdam standards). As for those who love electronic gadgets, there’s Akihabara, which I found to be quite disappointing, since the South Koreans have far surpassed the Japanese when it comes to design, and the ipod has vaulted Apple far ahead of the likes of Sony when it comes to “cool”.

In doing research for my trip, I was baffled to find that the “must-see” place in Tokyo is not a museum, temple, monument, or palace, but a FISH MARKET! The bustling Tsukiji Fish Market was indeed quite cool, even though part of the fun was constantly dodging the diesel-powered “turret trucks” that are used to ferry seafood throughout the market. Navigating my way through Shinjuku Station, the busiest train station in the world, during the evening rush hour was also unforgettable. But the highlight of my trip was watching a sumo wrestling match. It was fortunate that my trip to Japan coincided with one of the month-long sumo tournaments, held only three times a year. Because I happened to be there as the tournament was drawing to a close, I was unable to buy the cheapest stand-by, standing room-only ticket ($130 HKD), and was instead forced to opt for a $230 HKD seat. Anyway, it was worthwhile. What was less worthwhile, however, was the $200 HKD meal of protein-rich stew that sumo wrestlers eat, available at many restaurants near the arena. As for the wrestling itself, it was as interesting to see the pre-match rituals as it was to watch the wrestling themselves. In fact, while the rituals may last for several minutes, the fighting usually last several seconds, so the rituals did get boring after a while.

To travel from city to city, I took the famous high-speed Shinkansen train, better known outside Japan as the “bullet train”. Tickets are usually quite expensive, but I bought the “Japan Rail Pass”, which is only available to foreigners and which can only be bought outside Japan. I made good use of my 7 day pass, having gone on more than $3,200 HKD worth of train rides for the price of $1,800 HKD. As for the bullet trains themselves, the cars are clean, the seats are comfortable, and the ride is smooth and quiet. This actually proved to be a problem because I kept falling asleep on the train, meaning that I didn’t get to see some of the sights on the way, such as Mt. Fuji.

My next stops were Himeji, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. I spent only 2 hours in Himeji in order to see Himeji Castle, arguably the most beautiful castle in Japan. Although many castles were built in premodern Japan, the majority of them were destroyed and subsequently reconstructed (and are often quite gaudy, especially Osaka Castle, which is only worth visiting for its exhibits on Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the guy who tried to conquer Ming China, but who only succeeded in laying waste to Korea). The 400 year old Himeji Castle is a rare exception, and since there’s a bullet train stop only 1km away, it doesn’t even require a detour.
A Trip to Japan (Cont’d)

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are probably best known for being the only two cities to have ever suffered attacks by nuclear weapons. The main attraction in Hiroshima, aside from its reconstructed castle, is of course the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, as well as the Peace Park in which it is situated. Nearby Miyajima, with its “floating torii”, Itsukushima Shrine, and the wild deer that roam the island, is also worth at least a half-day visit. I also decided to go off the beaten track to go on a free tour of the Mazda factory, the first time I’ve ever witnessed car production firsthand.

Nagasaki also has a museum and a memorial peace park dedicated to the tragedy of the atomic bomb, but the city is of far greater enormous historical value than Hiroshima, having been Japan’s only conduit to the outside world for centuries. The centuries of Portuguese, Dutch, and British presence in the area, as well as a long-established Chinese community of substantial size, reminded me of the city of Melaka in Malaysia, which was similarly multicultural. You can step back into 18th century Holland at Dejima, once a Dutch enclave on an artificial island where the former Dutch warehouses and residences have been reconstructed. Nagasaki features several long-established Chinese communities of substantial size, reminding me of the city of Melaka in Malaysia, which was similarly multicultural during roughly the same period, and even with the same nationalities present (minus the Malay and Indians). You can step back into 18th century Holland at Dejima, once a Dutch enclave on an artificial island where the former Dutch warehouses and residences have been reconstructed. The European-style mansions at Glover Garden and the Dutch Slopes also give Nagasaki a strong European flavour, and the churches and cathedrals in and around the city demonstrate how the city has long been the hotbed of Christianity in Japan. And don’t forget Chinatown, once the site of the only substantial Chinese community in Japan.

I spent very little time in Osaka, and to tell you the truth, I only really remember eating, eating, and eating (though this is probably because I’ve been trying to purge the memory of the disappointing Osaka Castle from my mind). It is said that Osaka is THE place to eat in Japan, and the best thing is that prices are slightly lower than in Tokyo. I can’t recommend specific restaurants to you, and I don’t even really know what kind of dishes to suggest, but I’d recommend wandering around the Umeda and Namba to find places to eat; both areas happen to be the home of two of the city’s main train stations.

I spent 5 days in Kyoto, the Japanese imperial capital for more than a thousand years. Just as tourists who visit Europe sometimes experience “ABC syndrome” (“ANOTHER bloody church?!”), tourists who visit Kyoto may experience “ABT syndrome”, its Asian equivalent (the ‘t’ standing for “temple”). I certainly did. Of the more than 1,600 temples, 400 Shinto shrines, and 200 classical gardens in Kyoto, I only managed to see a dozen temples, 0 shrines, and 3 classical gardens. After a while, the temples began to look the same to me, and even put me off visiting Nara, another former imperial capital that’s full of temples. I felt the same way about the National Palace Museum in Taipei, where ancient Chinese pottery, bronze vessels, and scrolls start to get boring after the first 100 or so pots, vessels, and scrolls.

Overall, my experiences in Japan were quite positive. Japan is a clean place with polite people, tasty food, and impeccable service. I must admit that living in and visiting so many glitzy, bustling, and high-tech cities in Asia probably took a lot of the novelty of seeing what has long been touted as a very glitzy, bustling, high-tech place. The fact that pretty much any snack, toy, or article of clothing you can find in Japan can also be found in places like Hong Kong, Taipei, Vancouver, and Beijing, doesn’t help much.

To my surprise, though, I found that prices in Japan really aren’t as high as I thought they’d be, nowhere near as expensive as prices in Western Europe, especially the UK. Restaurant meals can cost as little as much as a “two dishes” meal at the Chong Yuet Ming canteen, hotel accommodation as little as $200-250 HKD per night (though not in Tokyo), and subway rides as little as $8 HKD. You can save money by eating surprisingly tasty food in convenience stores, staying in dormitory-style accommodations, and stealing a bicycle with which to get around town (though if you do THAT, you might as well SWIM to Japan!). Anyway, I enjoyed Japan immensely, and perhaps you would too!

Ken Ho - hokenyu@yahoo.ca
**Recent Events**

**Artist in Residence - 25th April - 30th June, 2007**

"Timeslots I (+ II)" - An Exhibition on Chronophotography
By the German artist and designer Mr. Ludwig Zeller
http://zeller.openkhm.de:80/154

**Movie Night - 25th May, 2007**

Nipuna Parahitiyawa (1/F) shared with us The DNA story from the HKU Main Library. It is a movie on how Watson and Crick discovered the double helix structure of our DNA.

**Volleyball Day of CSSA-HKU Festival 2007 – 17th June, 2007**

This is not an inter-hall activity, so we did not play as a team, our TEN members (Han Rui, Chen Chen, Li Ling, Hu Zhiyi, Liu Xiaonian, Guo Jianpeng, Xu Ziwen, Xing Chong Ke Xue, Wang Wenfeng) served on the FOUR teams of the day (Sunshine, Freezing Winter, Superstar, Challenger):

- Han Rui  Captain of the Sunshine Team
- Liu Xiaonian  Captain of the Freezing Winter Team
- Guo Jianpeng  Captain of the Superstar Team

FIVE players were awarded for their excellent performance.

- Guo Jianpeng  Best Captain
- Liu Xiaonian  Best Attacker
- Han Rui  Best Back Court Player
- Xu Ziwen (Alumni) Awardee of the Sportsmanship Prize
- Wang Wenfeng One of the awardees of the prize for good organizers

(Reported by Clarence Wang Wenfeng)

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**24+12 application**

There is a shortage of vacancies for new residents and the assessment for the 24+12 policy will be tightened. Please apply at least 3 months before the expiration of your residency and kindly supplement your application with detailed supporting documents!!

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**In - out Board**

A warm welcome to ...

Huang Yun, Lu Song, Ma Ling Jun, Tang Li Bo, Zheng Yu Hang.

A fond farewell to ...

Chen Quan, Ding Yan, Huang Xiao Xian, Hui Kwun Nam, Li Ci Ting, Li Li, Liu Chun Hua, Mak Hoi Fong, Mtababwa Lyabwene, Ng Ka Ki, Su Huan Xing, Robert Alex Clar, Sun Jin, Tong Li Xin, Wang Si, Wang Zheng, Zhao Dan Dan.

To find out who is living around you, please join our activities or check out the notice board in the lounges! Have Fun Friend Searching!!

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PRODUCED BY:
Graduate House, The University of Hong Kong, 3 University Drive, Hong Kong.
Tel: 2249-1800 Fax: 2546-1861
email: gradhse@hkucc.hku.hk  URL: http://www.hku.hk/gradhse/

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