

## **Kakehashi Project: A Debrief**

When a cohort of political science and global affairs students embarked on a trip to Japan during reading week, most of our knowledge about the country was rooted in academia. Ten days later, we returned to the University of Toronto with a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and a sense of gratitude towards the warm and welcoming nature of the Japanese people.

Our visit to Japan was part of the Kakehashi Project, a program that promotes a deeper mutual understanding between Japan and Canada to build a basis for future friendship and cooperation. Over the course of a week, we visited Tokyo, Kyoto, and participated in a homestay in Wazuko. We strengthened our understanding of Japanese political and economic systems by attending lectures at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a courtesy call with Kuniko Inoguchi, a Member of the House of Councillors and the former Minister for Gender Equality and Social Affairs. During lectures at Keio University and Chuo University, we learned about Japanese-Canadian relations, Japanese innovation and diplomacy, and policy challenges faced by Japan.

One of the most memorable activities was a school exchange at the University of Tokyo, where we learned about the Japanese education system, careers, and social life. We delved into roundtable discussions on aging populations, international trade, security, and immigration. The opportunity to engage with our student counterparts on relevant issues faced by both Japan and Canada was an unique way to share best practices. Such dialogue highlighted the importance of building human relationships for increased cooperation, regardless of different languages, religions, cultures, and perspectives.

The cultural immersion was by far the best part of the Kakehashi experience. Fourth year political science student George Wilson reflects on his experience, “While the trip exposed me to a greater historical and political understanding of Japan, it was the exchange of culture that had the largest impact on me. Getting to see how every day Japanese citizens live and interact has helped me broaden my horizons and be a true citizen of the world.”



By observing Japanese cultural traits, we could better understand how and why domestic and international policies were created and sustained. While participating in zazen meditation and a tea ceremony, visiting temples and shrines, and exploring different neighbourhoods and foods, we encountered a rich and peaceful culture. One of the highlights of our trip was the homestay in Wazuko, Kyoto. We were kindly welcomed into the homes of Japanese families, where we ate traditional cuisine, witnessed their daily routines, and had the opportunity to share personal stories.

The Kakehashi Project was an insightful and impactful program that broadened perspectives, deepened understandings, and strengthened bonds across international siloes. According to Master of Global Affairs student Hannah Rosen, “Being in Japan really showed me how similar humans can be, even when separated by language, culture, and physical distance. The beauty in Japan were the people; their kindness astounded me from start to finish.”

The University of Toronto Kakehashi group is thankful for every connection made during the duration of our visit, and are especially grateful to our guides, Sato san and Ueno san, for their kindness, patience, and sharing of knowledge. We would also like to extend our deep appreciation to the Japan International Cooperation Centre (JICE) and Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the invaluable opportunity to learn about a truly beautiful country. This initiative was spearheaded by the Centre for the Study of Global Japan.

—Siobhan Bradley  
Master of Global Affairs Candidate