



Asia New Zealand
Foundation

Te Whītau Tūhono

'Looking closely'

Leadership Network
Japan Hui

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'Looking closely'

In June, I was lucky enough to travel to Japan as part of the Leadership Network's first Offshore Hui for 2019. For the 16 Leadership Network members, the purpose of the trip was trifold – to expand our Asia knowledge, develop our leadership skills and expand our networks and connections.

A HUGE thank you to the Asia New Zealand Foundation for the opportunity to participate in this Hui - it was my first time in Asia and I couldn't have asked for a better place to visit or a better group to travel with!

As an art history student, I found myself trying to make sense of Japan in a visual way so I've looked at the trip as if I've been looking at a painting. What follows is a report of my personal highlights :).





1. Composition

Composition: programming Tokyo

I saw composition (make-up/arrangement/placement) in two particular elements: in our programme and in Tokyo as a city.

Programme: we had a pretty busy schedule! A key aspect of the programme was co-creation, where certain members of the group participated in and led sessions. This provided a great way for us to learn from one another.

Tokyo: although we only made it to a few districts within the capital, I couldn't help but be fascinated (and overwhelmed) with its size and atmosphere. The city was busy, bustling and bursting at the seams - a true metropolis. As we were staying in Shinjuku, it quickly became a fave. I did love the presence of parks in the area though (especially Shinjuku Central Park), which provided for a pleasant walk on the way back to the hotel from the train station.





2. Tone & Texture



Tone: Yokomura

On the Saturday of the trip, we made our way to Yokomura Eco-lodge, situated in Uenohara (about an hour or so out of central Tokyo). On the way, we had lunch at Hayari Terrace, a small restaurant famous for making its own sausages. At Yokomura, our Hui officially began with an icebreaker session led by Alice and Nina. Our overnight stay at the lodge helped us to get to know one another and really set the tone for the rest of the trip. Saturday afternoon presented us with an opportunity to relax and take in the beautiful surroundings.

Texture: food

That night, we were treated to an eight-course dégustation meal prepared by chef Ozawa-san.

Using locally-sourced seasonal produce, he cooked up a literal feast for the team. The meal was accompanied by insightful commentary on Japanese food culture from the amazing Sachie Nomura. The different flavours, textures and tastes of the food were brought to life by Sachie's thoughts - I really appreciated the emphasis placed on hospitality in Japanese culture, a value which is important within my own Pasifika culture.

3. 'Strip the label' (Nina)

During the icebreaker session, we were tasked with thinking about who we were without the 'labels' usually attached to us and how that related to our ideas of leadership. I particularly enjoyed hearing everyone's stories and wanted to include snippets/titles/"new labels"/what I learned from each person here:

- "Wake up call" (Sachie)
- "Impulse to impact" (Alex)
- "Removing the veil of ignorance" (Rob)
- "Understanding your multi-faceted self" (Allan)
- "We don't have all the answers" (Corey)
- "Creating a new story for New Zealand" (Lena)
- "We get so caught up with innovation that we forget about what we can do now" (Breccan)
- "We have to be a part of the system to change it" (Josh)
- "Make lemonade if you're given lemons" (Luke)
- Name/privilege/home - "lift up those who have been left behind" (Alice)
- "Creating spaces where people can learn" (Margie)
- Navigating a system that wasn't made for me/sharing this experience with the people I love (Serena)
- "Calling people out who think they are above others" (Shannon)
- Lifting the achievement of our Maori students/bridging the generational language gap (Will)



4. Line & Shape

Line: trains

I was also fascinated by 'lines' on the trip (it's a strange one I know, I blame it on my "artistic sensitivities" a.k.a. weirdness) - the most obvious expression of this element for me were the train lines.

Tokyo's meticulous and efficient train network served to connect us with the places we visited - travelling on the train was an experience in itself. (The stories are true folks: they really were on time!)

Shape: Mt Takao

Under the guidance of Rob (and his legit pdf itinerary), Sunday afternoon saw the group hiking up Mount Takao in Hachioji. I put this excursion under 'shape' because 1) mountains form such a pretty shape and 2) it showed me that I'm pretty out of shape. There was more to Mount Takao than hiking though, and those of us who stayed near the foot of the mountain were able to explore shops, restaurants, museums and other attractions..

Eventually, Nina, Serena and I decided to take the cable car up and walk the shortest route back down. I'm so glad we did! It was amazing and allowed us to reflect on the trip thus far.

5. Space & depth: the deep dive sesh

Space and depth were provided during Sunday evening's 'Deep Dive' session with Corey and Rob (*must be said in a late night radio show voice*), where each talked about their respective areas of Japan expertise - Corey on the geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific region and how generational changes affect ideological dispositions (yeah, it really was that intense), and Rob on online social interaction.

Huge shout-out to them both: to Corey for making me want to study international relations again (I honestly thought I'd moved on) and to Rob for the new lingo (I now drop relational mobility into every other conversation, however random and inapplicable it might seem).

Really appreciate it, you guys.



*We dived so deep that I didn't even take any photos.
Mild consolation: this is post-deep dive, on the way
to dinner. Corey's in the centre of the shot. Sweet.*



6. Symbolism

Symbolism: Peaceboat, Cookie Time & Meiji Jingu



Monday was probably the busiest day of the Hui, filled with meetings and briefings. It started off with a seminar at Peaceboat, an NGO dedicated to raising awareness about peace, human rights and sustainable development. We then visited Cookie Time and chatted to Jason about the success of the business in Tokyo (the store was located in Harajuku, which means it was #litandlegit). A group of us then visited Meiji Jingu and saw the huge torii gate. It was wonderful!

A boat, a cookie and a shrine - I wondered where the connection might lie. Then it struck me how symbolic each 'object' was - Cookie Time as a Kiwi business, a symbol of New Zealand; the Meiji shrine as a symbol of modern Japan; and Peaceboat as a symbol of peace and cooperation. It reminded me of the Asia New Zealand Foundation's work that seeks to build on the symbolism and spirit of cooperation - in connecting Kiwis with Asia, and connecting us Leadership Network members with one another through this trip.



7. Characters

It seems a trivial thing to place our time at the Embassy under 'characters' but Monday evening was characterised by the people I encountered - from Deputy Head of Mission Dom Walton-France (who had spent time in Tonga so he was uncle Dom by the end of the night #islandflex) and our Tokyo-based Leadership Network members (an AMAZING bunch) to the Kiwis living and working in Tokyo - it was great to connect with everyone and see so many of our people doing well in Japan! (#justkiwithings)

I don't think I've ever conversed so intensely with people in my life before though - I appreciated the opportunity to network and learn more about networking by observing fellow Hui participants in action (I'm looking at you, Josh. Too good my bro).

Thanks to the New Zealand Embassy for hosting us, it was an honour!



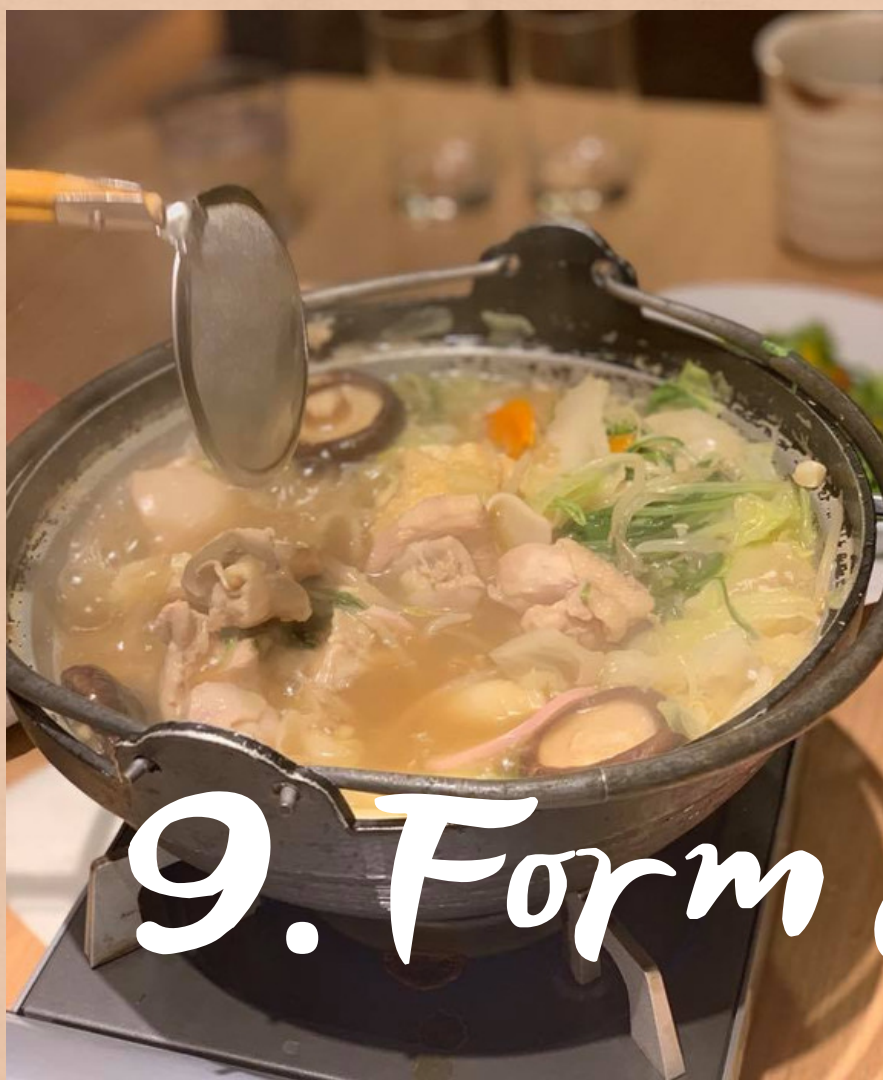
Characters: the Embassy

8. Themes: telling the right story

Tuesday was full of ideas and narratives - I really enjoyed hearing from our kahui Māori on the trip, Will, Shannon and Josh, about Ainu-Māori relations. Indigenous peoples around the globe are kindred when it comes to the struggles they face - for recognition, legitimacy and survival. It was encouraging to hear that Māori were keen to share lessons learned from their own experiences in an effort to help the Ainu out. However, Will made it clear that New Zealand still has a long way to go on its journey - pointing out that it's not just about preserving culture but helping it to thrive too.

Another highlight was the talk we had from Geoffrey Wexler, Chief International at Studio Ponoc. Geoff chatted to us about how cultural exporting (of films for e.g.) should strive to be authentic and not just a 'photocopy'. His talk definitely changed my views about language in movies - I was someone who thought watching international movies with English subtitles provided for a more authentic experience. But studios put in a lot of effort to create dubbed versions for their international markets - in order to make it easier for audiences to connect with the content. Thanks to Allan for organising this talk, it was awesome!





9. Form & movement

Form/movement: judo & sumo

We encountered judo masters and sumo wrestlers on Tuesday too! (well, we didn't actually see sumo wrestlers, but we did dine at a restaurant that served a typical sumo meal - delicious stuff).

We also had a session at the Kōdōkan, the HQ of the international judo community - this was a historic first for a group of our size as they don't usually take tourists in for lessons. An amazing opportunity for the group and testament to the strong relationship between the Foundation and the Institute.

From what I saw that afternoon though, I'm pretty sure more than half of our Hui group took secret judo lessons (I thought my previous life as a "kpop dancer" would translate onto the judo mat but 'alas it was not the case. Judo: 1, Fine: 0). I loved the talk we had prior about the history of judo though and appreciated the innovative and adaptive spirit of the Japanese - especially in developing a safer way to engage with one another after jūjutsu became unpopular during the Meiji era.







Colour: ukiyo-e

We had a free morning on our last day in Tokyo together as a group. I took the opportunity to visit the Ōta Memorial Museum of Art in Shibuya, a small museum which specialises in the display of ukiyo-e or woodblock prints from the Edo period (17th-19th centuries).

It was beyond amazing. I have no adequate words. I just really appreciated the opportunity to view the artworks I was studying in person - what a treat! Thanks to Luke, Alex, Nina and Serena for tagging along as well, it was so nice to have people to go with!

Light: haiku

Our wrap up session took place in Shinjuku Central Park on a bright, hot Wednesday afternoon. Each person in the group reflected on what they'd enjoyed the most during the Hui (Nina and I shared that our favourite meal was at a konbini - those places are the best ever, seriously) - there was laughter and some tears too! Serena, one of the session leads, encouraged us to write a haiku about what we had experienced over the past few days:

*"Saturated slopes,
Connecting our weary souls,
Tokyo, en light."*



A group of people, including men and women of various ages and ethnicities, are sitting in a circle on a paved area outdoors. They are all looking towards the center of the circle, and some have their hands raised, suggesting they are participating in a group activity like singing or a game. The background shows green foliage and a stone wall.

Tokyo, where we sang in unison

A final highlight of the Hui was our singing! Each time we visited an organisation, we sang a song to show appreciation to our hosts, as is customary in te ao Māori. Our stay at Yokomura felt like a mini music camp as we practised singing waiata classics Te Aroha and E Toru Nga Mea. The power of singing together cannot be overstated and for me, reflecting on the Hui a little while later, it still amazes me how such a diverse group of people who had never spent time together before managed to sing so beautifully in unison.

You could put it down to the shared understanding that as members of the Leadership Network, we were representing New Zealand whilst abroad in Asia, and a huge part of being a Kiwi is embracing Māori tikanga. Or to the realisation that this kind of experience doesn't come around often - we really were out there just 'living our best lives'. Or maybe, as with our judo session, there were some secret recording artists in our midst (ask Luke FYI).

I tend to read too deeply into situations though (#lowkeyTMI) so I'd like to think there was a more subtle reason. Maybe it was that spirit of cooperation and connection, a spirit which, in all its generosity and possibility, grew into something more during the trip: friendship. This was probably the greatest highlight for me!

All in all the Japan Hui was an amazing experience. I learned a tonne, laughed too much and met some awesome people. Thanks again to the Asia New Zealand Foundation for taking me along!!