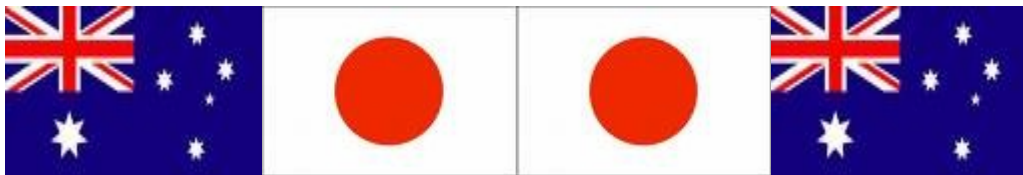


BEN TODD

Year 8 Japanese Assessment Task

Twenty-Sixth Australia-Japan Relations Essay

Length: 848 words (not including topic or bibliography)



Japanese Junior High School Activities

Essay Topic

Club activities in Japanese junior high school vary from traditional culture, martial arts to modern culture and western sports. What kind of club activities would you be interested in and why? How do you think Japanese Club activities differ from those in Australia?

Japanese schools are often portrayed as highly competitive where students and their parents believe that entrance to the “right” school and later university will pave the way for their future success. This can lead to pressure on students to perform well academically at an early age and even at the junior high level where students are aged between twelve and fifteen. As the Meitoku Gijuku School suggests “A wide variety of courses have been established to meet the needs of each individual student, so as to cultivate their character and develop their unique abilities”. This also includes after school clubs (kurabu katsudo in Japanese) that occur after school but are an accepted part of the school day and are sometimes used to reinforce the values and commitment taught in the more traditional subjects learned during the school day. For example, it has been stated that some clubs are ‘communities of practice’ where the learning emphasises repetition and practice whilst more senior students provide role models for the younger students that reflects the cultural hierarchy of Japanese society.

Like Australian students, Japanese pupils have many clubs or activities to choose from. For example, there are clubs for; drama, art, science, computer and library studies as well as the sports-focussed clubs such as baseball, golf, swimming, soccer and softball. There are both similarities and differences between Australian and Japanese students in the activities they choose to do, why they do them, and probably in their attitude. In Australian schools most co-curricular activities are seen as giving the students a chance to have some fun and their choices are probably more about what their particular interest is rather than whether they show a special talent for it. Many sports that originated in Japan have become popular throughout the world and Australia is no exception. As Australia has become multi-cultural we have adopted many sports with martial arts such as karate and judo and variations becoming some of the most popular.

This remainder of this essay will focus on the martial arts. As a student of martial arts (taekido) in Australia, this subject is one of particular interest to me. I am interested to compare my experience with what I have learned about the Japanese clubs. The classes I take in Canberra are aimed at fitness and fun as well as learning the art of self-discipline. Progression through different and more difficult levels of skill is rewarded with a new “kyu” and a sense of satisfaction. It is more about my personal growth and development: not for the club or society. The Sensei (teacher) helps us learn the moves needed and many of the students probably do not practice once they go home.

My understanding is that whilst there are similar elements in the after-school clubs in Japan, there is perhaps more emphasis on what it can do for the student in the long term and that the Japanese Ministry of Education is promoting martial art and other sports as a way to enhance society as a whole, not just the individual. The Japanese government website states that “As a common cultural bond linking people around the world together, sports bring joy and happiness, enrich lives and make lives fuller. The culture of sport that influences both mind and body can well be said to be of vital importance to the formation of a bright, enriched, vital and fulfilled society, and leads to the sound development of individuals' minds and bodies” (MEXT, Sports and Youth)

That is not to say that the Japanese students are not also doing it for fun and fitness but the emphasis is also on what the individual is doing to make him or herself a more valuable member of Japanese society. Academic achievement remains the main focus for students and these activities are to enhance their learning. Since various forms of martial arts have been part of Japanese culture for a very long time, the students perhaps have more heroes that they can strive to follow. Since it is relatively new in Australia we do not have the same number of well-known people competing at national or international levels. The films we see make me believe that there are probably a far greater number of students participating in Japanese martial arts and that perhaps the classes are more advanced with stricter teaching and rules from sensei.

Club participation is very high in Japanese schools and martial arts such as karate and judo are too. The values associated with living and learning in Japan are also shown in their clubs where things like order, ritual, human development and good study habits are considered usual within the club as well as the classroom.

There are both similarities and differences between the Japanese club activities and co-curricular activities in Australia. Each has their strengths and weaknesses according to what you think or what your society teaches you. Martial arts is a sport that crosses the

language and social barriers because wherever you come from, wherever you learn and whatever your motivation, it is an activity that can be enjoyed by all.

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