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Living Heritage: Tradition in Modern-Day Japan

During my three-week stay in Osaka, I learned many things about Osaka's culture. Although Osaka is a very advanced city with many skyscrapers and trains running through it, the culture and history still remain strong. With the people I met in Osaka, we explored the city together and learned a lot about its traditions and people.

Early on, I began to notice everyday customs that reflected Japan's cultural values. Before eating, they would say "*Itadakimasu*" to show appreciation not only for the food, but also for the effort of those who prepared the food. This act of gratitude reflects the values of respect and mindfulness toward others in Japanese culture. Many locals also visit shrines to pray and throw 5-yen coins into the offering box. This is a custom that is rooted in the belief that the 5-yen coin brings good luck because it sounds like the Japanese word for "connection" or "destiny". While many tourists may buy omamoris as souvenirs, many Japanese people buy and hang them on their bags for good luck and protection. This symbolizes how culture and belief are woven into daily life.

Alongside these customs, festivals offered another way for people in Japan to preserve and celebrate traditions. For example, students and teachers in schools would take time out of their day to celebrate the Tanabata festival. The college we visited celebrated the festival by changing into yukatas and holding a small celebration in the lobby. There was also a small bamboo tree on which everyone wrote their wishes. I learned that this was called "*tanzaku*". When I went to Higashi High School, the students there were also celebrating the Tanabata festival by writing their wishes on a piece of paper and hanging them on bamboo inside the classroom. I also learned that fireworks and Taiko drumming are major parts of Japanese culture. When I attended a festival featuring Taiko, people surrounded the stage in their yukatas watching the performers drum. There were even some who bought snacks and sat on the steps to eat them. When I went to the Tenjin Matsuri on the second day, the amount of people present couldn't compare to the amount of people that were at the festival on the first day. Everyone gathered around to watch the fireworks and the crowd was so bad that there were workers using light sticks to direct everyone. Many people chose to sit on the ground to watch the fireworks, and many others chose to wear a yukata.

In addition to festivals, we explored spaces dedicated to preserving Osaka's history, such as the Osaka Municipal Housing Museum. This was one of the most interesting places I visited. Inside this museum were life sized traditional buildings that have been built to model an old town. We got to explore around this small town and go into the buildings. We learned about what people used back in the day to cook, what their baths looked like, how they dried their clothes, etc. There was also a specific store that rented kimonos so visitors could experience

what it would feel like to live in an old town. Along the street was also a building that offered traditional toys that kids played with back in the day. You were able to try them and play with them free of cost. When night came over the town the lanterns would light up showing what night would have looked like back in the day. This museum did a very good job of preserving the culture of Osaka while also letting you experience it.

During the trip, I also got to directly experience Osaka's past by staying in a 100-year-old house. It was truly a magnificent experience. The exterior had a traditional design to it and the inside was what you would expect, with sliding doors that had wooden frames and paper coverings, and floors lined with tatami mats. There were also several decorative pieces, such as an art scroll displayed for decoration. Later in the trip, we visited a 250-year-old house in Kaizuka. While exploring the house with our friends, we found a room with two elegant looking kimonos hanging on the wall. Upon further exploration, we came across other rooms with floor-level chairs, a calligraphy piece above a door frame, closet doors with bonsai tree designs on them, futons, and other traditional features. We also discovered a backyard with a small pond in it. This house was the perfect representation of what preserved culture looks like. I believe there are many more houses like this in Osaka, which can be seen from the window of a train that moves above ground. While there are many people that have moved into more modern homes, I am sure that there are still many in Japan who live in older homes that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Although both Osaka and San Francisco preserve their culture, the two cities have different approaches to cultural preservation. Osaka is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and emphasizes its traditions through foods, holidays, clothing, etc through a collective community. San Francisco, on the other hand, focuses on multicultural communities and preserving them. When there is a celebration in Osaka, the whole city celebrates it. In contrast, celebrations in San Francisco are more community based, promoting cultural exchange but not citywide participation.