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Tanaka & Green Scholarship Report

After what seemed like an eternity of planning course schedules and navigating formalities with my advisors and family, I finally stepped on a plane in March 2018 to embark on my journey to Japan. Studying as an exchange student at Waseda University would be my first experience living abroad long-term, and as expected, I was split evenly between nervousness and over-joyed excitement.

I had visited Japan with my family once before in 2015, and walking through the crowded streets of Harajuku and spending time at the temples and shrines of Kyoto, I was instantly enchanted with Japan and knew that I would return one day. This time however, as a student in Toyko, it wasn't going to be just a "fun vacation", and it was clear that my two experiences were going to be very different. I wouldn't be a tourist, and I would not be relying on English speaking hotel staff for convenient directions. Instead, I would be living in the relatively quiet area of Nishi-Waseda, and would be communicating with locals, shopkeepers, and my professors in Japanese. I took the requisite tours of bustling Shibuya and Tsukiji Market, but as I write this report, I realize that my favorite moments during my time abroad were the routine daily events I could only have experienced as a college student. Reflecting on the past six months, I am already nostalgic for the ice cream runs I made every evening to the neighborhood grocery store, when I would stop to pet the friendly local cats. I was amazed at how the largest city in the world still had pockets of peaceful suburban life, and the banal, everyday memories I fondly hold have given me much more insight into life in Japan than I would have expected.

During my semester at Waseda, I was enrolled in the Japanese Language Program, and primarily took courses that focused on increasing my Japanese language skills. The majority of my program consisted of grammar, *kanji*, and vocabulary-building classes taught in Japanese, but I also took a wonderful Japanese art history course that greatly aided my understanding of Japanese culture. Through this art history class, I discovered my love for Japanese gardens, and every weekend I would spend hours roaming the various gardens dotting Tokyo. This interest in gardens took me all the way to the Kagawa and Ishikawa prefectures to visit the famed Ritsurin

and Kenroku-en gardens respectively. The tranquil gardens' seamless incorporation into the otherwise concrete cityscapes spoke to me, and I was fascinated by the coexistence of Japan's technological advancement and its peoples' reverence for nature. I was particularly interested in a lecture on the Ise Jingū, a shrine located in Mie prefecture. Every 20 years, Ise Jingū undergoes a ritual rebuilding process that is said to renew the energy of the shrine, and this tradition upholds the Shinto beliefs of the rebirth and transience of nature. While this shrine is rebuilt with new materials every two decades, it is built in the same fashion since the 7th century. Reading about this shrine's rejuvenation process, as well as my own experiences ambulating through Tokyo's gardens, furthered my understanding of Japan's cultural relationship with nature and its veneration for upholding tradition alongside its progressive industrialized society. It is this respect for the environment in addition to Japan's interest in science and technology that has had the most impact on my personal growth, and is something I will always remember whichever field of study I choose to pursue in my future.

I would like to thank the Japan-America Society of Washington DC for generously supporting one of the most enriching experiences of my college career. Studying at Waseda and exploring Japan both developed my language skills and helped deepen my cultural understanding of the country and its people. I am certain that no matter what my future career plans hold, I will visit again and strive to strengthen both my personal relationship with Japan, as well as America's.