

H.K. Cup English Program

Youths present original ideas with passion

By Rie Tagawa
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Keiyo University senior Natsuka Konishi impressed the audience and a panel of judges with her idea of establishing a joint venture in Hong Kong that would help Japanese entrepreneurs to operate their businesses worldwide, during the ninth Hong Kong Cup All Japan University Student Ambassadors English Program held last month.

The annual presentation contest is held to promote better understanding of Hong Kong among young people in Japan. The top winners become "student ambassadors" each year and are invited on a two-week trip to Hong Kong. This year, the participants were required to present their original ideas on one of four designated themes in the fields of business, working holidays, movies and cuisine.

Encouraging start-ups

"Accepting. That's one of many things I love about Hong Kong."

Konishi, this year's top winner, began her presentation on Jan. 22 with this line. Saying that she had stayed in the city as an exchange student for about a year until June 2016, Konishi explained that she wanted to take advantage of the region's cultural diversity and open-mindedness toward new things.

She then described the current situation in Japan, where smaller numbers of people start their own businesses compared to other developed countries. Her solution for giving a boost to Japanese entrepreneurs was to launch a joint venture called HJ Accelerator, deriving its name from Hong Kong and Japan. Konishi sug-

gested a six-month program offered by the accelerator for start-ups in which these young companies can acquire know-how to realize their ideas on the global stage.

"Hong Kong will welcome your idea. Let's start a business together in Hong Kong," she said, concluding her presentation.

"I can't believe I won the prize because there were so many incredible presentations. So, I'll try to do my best so that all Japanese people understand how great a place Hong Kong is," Konishi said.

"Her idea was unique and had sustainability," said judge Michael Korver, a professor at Hitotsubashi University's Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy, citing Konishi's finance plan, which involved claiming a 5 percent equity stake in the start-ups.

Meiyu Shirai, a third-year student at Mukogawa Women's University, was the first runner-up. She created a cheerful atmosphere by appearing dressed as a bus driver, illustrating her plan to operate a new type of bus service in Asian cities, including Shenzhen, China, and Bangkok.

Shirai described Hong Kong's minibus, a type of budget bus running across the region 24 hours a day, and Japan's community buses that feature universal design and run mainly in residential areas. By combining aspects of these services, representing the Hong Kong "spirit of convenience" and the Japanese "spirit of omoiyari (thoughtful consideration)," the region and the nation can deepen their partnerships while invigorating other cities.

"It was an honor to have the first runner-up prize, and I am full of gratitude," Shirai said. "As an ambassador, I would like to tell [about] Japanese culture and traditions to Hong Kong students and people."



Haruka Mizukami, a senior at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, placed third. Her idea was about a video conference system connecting young Japanese and Hong Kongers to increase the number of Japanese who choose the region as a destination for working holidays.

Noting that only about 450 Japanese had joined the working holiday program in Hong Kong in the six years since 2010, Mizukami argued that it can be attributed to the fact that

many Japanese have superficial impressions of Hong Kong. Her project called "Well Met!" can close the gap between Japanese perceptions and the real Hong Kong, she said.

Keio University junior Yoshika Tagashira won the Fighting Spirit Prize, which honors a finalist who has lived overseas for less than a year and gave an outstanding performance. She delivered her idea of creating package tours to Hong Kong and an app, both featuring the city's "photogenic" cuisine. "I tried



Yomiuri Shimbun photos
Clockwise from left: Natsuka Konishi speaks to the audience; Meiyu Shirai introduces herself as the "new CEO" of a bus company; Haruka Mizukami delivers her presentation; Yoshika Tagashira gestures during her presentation.



to use a lot of photos and colors [for visual aids] to make my presentation fun to watch," Tagashira said.

The final round was held at Nomura Conference Plaza Nihonbashi in Chuo Ward, Tokyo, on Jan. 22, with 15 university students selected from among 223 participants nationwide. They competed against each other with presentations on their chosen topics, including "How would you promote working holidays in Hong Kong among Japanese young people?"



Winners, judges and representatives of sponsors pose for a photo after the contest.

1: Kota Sawaki, Tohoku University
"Critical Concepts for Accelerating Working Holiday to H.K.: Gap Year Promotion"
2: Zhao Bo, Waseda University
"Kumamon and McDull Travel Discovery"
3: Kaori Konda, Hosei University
"Animation Cafe Business in Hong Kong"
4: Yoshika Tagashira, Keio University
"Delicious and Photogenic Hong Kong"
5: Yan Yuchen, The University of Tokyo
"Inside the Scene: Gourmet Tour in Hong Kong"
6: Meiyu Shirai, Mukogawa Women's University
"Future with Comminibus"
7: Rumi Aoshima, Sugiyama Jogakuen University
"Beauty and the Gangster"

8: Yuka Kanda, Waseda University
"WOR-HONG TOUR Seeing is Believing"
9: Yuki Yasumiba, Yokohama City University
"Explore Food Wagon Street in Hong Kong from Cat Eyes"
10: Natsuka Konishi, Keio University
"HJ Accelerator — Hub for Japanese Start-ups Worldwide"
11: Sakurako Koseki, International Christian University
"Hong Kong Food Festival in Tokyo"
12: Keito Ando, Keio University
"Insta-Hong Kong"
13: Haruka Mizukami, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
"Well Met! Meeting up Project Between Hong Kong and Japan!"
14: Risa Yoshida, Keio University

Finalists (in speaking order)

"#LoveHongKong Stamp Rally"
15: Minami Izumikawa, International Christian University
"Working Holiday Program for Junior Year Students"

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Identifying problems, proposing solutions

Prof. Michael Korver of Hitotsubashi University served as a judge at the contest. He gave *The Japan News* the following comments about students' presentations.

The top prize went to Ms. Natsuka Konishi of Keio University, who proposed an "accelerator" in Hong Kong for Japanese start-ups aspiring to international business. Ms. Konishi correctly identified the dearth of Japanese start-ups with international aspirations as a serious impediment to future economic growth in Japan. Her solution was to leverage the multicultural environment and global connections of "Asia's World City" to boost the international prospects of Japanese start-ups by providing a Hong Kong-based facility to help them obtain needed infrastructure, financing, mentoring and global business connections. Ms. Konishi's presentation was knowledgeable and passionate, based, in part, on her experiences studying and living in Hong Kong.

First runner-up was Ms. Meiyu Shirai of Mukogawa Women's University, who appeared in uniform as a bus conductor/driver and charmed the judges with her passionate and spirited present-

ation for a bus service to be rolled out in growing Asian cities. The service, called Comminibus, was a hybrid of the community bus services found in many localities in Japan and the popular minibus service found in Hong Kong. Characteristics of Japan's community bus service founded in the Japanese spirit of "omoiyari" would, perhaps, take some of the hard edges off of the profit first aspect of Hong Kong's minibus service and, accordingly, would be more acceptable in emerging Asian cities. Ms. Shirai's presentation was distinguished not only by the costume she wore but also by the fact that it included financial analysis of the business's feasibility.

Second runner-up went to Ms. Haruka Mizukami of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, who proposed a service to match prospective participants in working holiday programs between Japan and Hong Kong to local friends who can help them overcome challenges of working and living in foreign environments far from home. The problem awareness that Ms. Mizukami demonstrated in this presentation also arose from her first-hand experience living and studying in Hong Kong and relying on her friends' good advice and assistance.

The Fighting Spirit Prize this year was awarded to Ms. Yoshika Tagashira of Keio University. This prize is awarded to the contestant who despite not having lived an extended period outside of Japan scores the highest among other contestants with similar backgrounds. Ms. Tagashira presented

methods to promote distinctive and delicious Hong Kong cuisine through photos uploaded on social media. She won the judges' hearts by her fluent, smooth and passionate presentation that was accentuated by her "I heart Hong Kong" T-shirt and obvious passion for both Hong Kong and its food culture. Because cuisine is the most popular topic among contestants, it is very difficult to stand out with this topic but Ms. Tagashira managed to do so.

Although, she did not win a prize, I would also like to commend Ms. Yuka Kanda. Ms. Kanda's idea was to promote working holidays in Hong Kong by organizing inexpensive and short tours to Hong Kong, during which participants could learn more about a working holiday by meeting with organizations and people involved in the program. Ms. Kanda was also eligible for the Fighting Spirit Prize for which she was narrowly edged out. Most remarkably, her language fluency was near-native notwithstanding her background.

In conclusion, the high level of language fluency and presentation skills made for a very competitive contest. As was the case last year, however, contestants show a great ability to identify problems and propose solutions but do a poorer job of convincing about the feasibility of those solutions. Solutions must be sustainable. Whether solutions to the kinds of problems dealt with in the contest are supported by an ongoing business, sponsors or government support — those must be identified and articulated in the presentations.

Bustling interaction between H.K., Japan

Opening remarks by Shirley Yung, Principal Hong Kong Economic and Trade Representative (Tokyo)

The Hong Kong Cup, which we have been organizing with The Japan News since 2007, aims to strengthen the cultural ties, friendship and goodwill between Hong Kong and Japan. This year, we received more than 220 applications from university students all over Japan, which is very heartening.

The year of 2017 marks the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In the last 20 years, Hong Kong and Japan have drawn closer than ever. Japan has all along been one of the favorite destinations for Hong Kong tourists. The number of Hong Kong visitors traveling to Japan has increased seven times, from some 260,000 in 1997 to over 1.8 million in 2016. During the

same period, Hong Kong has also welcomed an average of 1 million visitors from Japan every year. Hong Kong is one of the preferred destinations for Japanese businesses as well. Japanese companies have again become the largest group of overseas companies in Hong Kong, with the number exceeding 1,300.

Hong Kong is an international business and talent hub. We have numerous measures in place to welcome talent and professionals, and business start-ups. These could be some of the paths you might consider upon graduation. To make an informed decision, you may join the Working Holiday Scheme which will provide you with an opportunity to gain first-hand experience living and working in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong and Japanese governments have recently increased the annual quota from 250 to 1,500 to meet the growing demand.

To the 15 contestants who are selected to the finals today, I am sure you have made a lot of effort in researching and preparing for today's presentation, which I appreciate very much. I look forward to hearing your presentations very soon.

