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約 8 年間のシンガポール生活の中で、違った角度から歴史を学ぶことの意味と意義を知りました。シンガポールで安心して暮らせることへの感謝を込めてこのエッセイを書きました。

The Importance of Learning History

Before I came to Singapore due to my father's job, I had disliked learning history, and I had been always thinking "What is the point of learning history?" or "Why do I have to know about other countries' history?" However, my life in Singapore, a diverse country, completely changed my mind and perspective towards history and now I know the importance of learning history.

I have been in Singapore for almost 8 years now since I was in 4th grade. Singapore is a multi-racial country with several races living together including Malays, Indians and expatriates like Japanese, but most of the citizens are Chinese Singaporean. One day in Grade 6, I was in a history class, and the class was about World War II. As I was in Japanese primary school then, I studied with a Japanese history textbook. In the book, there was only one sentence that explained the time when the Japanese occupied Southeast Asia. The sentence just mentioned the fact that Japanese soldiers occupied some countries in Southeast Asia. Later in that class, our teacher gave us a copy of an English textbook. We wondered what this was all about. Then he said to us, "This is what students in local schools in Singapore learn in their history class when they are almost the same age as you. Just read the textbook and give thought to what happened to Singapore in the past." We read the textbook quietly. I was very surprised and shocked at the same time. All of the tragic events described in the textbook were committed by the Japanese military. I couldn't believe that the content of such a thick textbook was only mentioned in one line in our country's textbook. I thought that I should know more about the history of Singapore.

After the lesson, I went to some places in Singapore where I could feel the tragedy of the war. In those places, I learned, through exhibits and stories from local guides, about the horrific events of the time and how the Japanese were killing people for selfish reasons. For example, Japanese soldiers at that time in Singapore tried to find spies and traitors. So if they found a person wearing glasses, they thought that person was clever and trying to resist them, so they kill such people without evidence. I found out that they were absolutely doing terrible things that cannot be understood only from that one line in our Japanese history textbook. Every time I went to such places, I was wondering "Why do Singaporean people not blame us for the past?" Later, I

learned that one of the famous quotes from Lee Kuan Yew, the first prime minister of Singapore said "Forgive but never forget". Lee Kuan Yew believed that they shouldn't forget what the Japanese did to Singapore but they should forgive them in order to build a good relationship with Japan for the economic development of Singapore. That's one of the reasons why Singaporeans don't blame us or show their negativity toward us. Of course, elderly people who went through the war period may have negative feelings towards Japanese people. However, they never show their dislike to us, and they are really kind. I was moved when I realized that, and I came to love Singapore even more. Now I truly appreciate the fact that I can live in Singapore as part of the community.

Until I came to this country, until my teacher gave me the copy of the local textbook, I had had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to learn about the Japanese occupation of Singapore. If I had continued my life in Singapore without learning about this history, I may have unknowingly offended people and would not have appreciated the warmth of Singaporean people. After learning this fact, I have a desire to learn more history. Knowing history has changed my way of thinking. Now, I really enjoy my world history class in high school. I'm sure that history will lead me to a deeper understanding of the world and will grant me new perspectives for my future. [685 words]