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Translated Interview Transcript:

Translated by Jessica Wu, 2017 Program Ambassador

Joseph Tsang: It is now 6:30pm, June 7th. Good evening everyone! I am Joseph Tsang.

Alex: Such a hot day today Joseph, and it seems today we have some high school youth joining us in our studio today.

JT: Yes, which lowers the average age of all the people in this room (chuckles)...

JT: ...Now I will introduce today's guests. They are participants from the "Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth," co-hosted by CCNCTO and ALPHA Education. Now can you please introduce yourselves?

Jessica: Hello everyone! My English name is Jessica Wu and my Chinese name is Qin Ying Wu. I am a Grade 11 student from Richmond Green Secondary School. I immigrated to Canada from Jiangmen, Guangdong, China, in 2011 and this year marks my 6th year in Canada. I am happy living in Canada right now but I still maintain a part of my Chinese tradition too.

JT: I am happy to hear that you are maintaining a part of your Chinese tradition.

Jessica: Yes indeed.

JT: Ok next guest, introduce yourself please.

Amy: Hello everyone, my name is Ying Tong Ma or you can call me Amy. I am also a student from Richmond Green Secondary School and I am in Grade 10 right now. Unlike Jessica, I just came to Canada two years ago and as an international student. In terms of getting used to living here, I consider myself to be okay; partly because since my parents are not with me and I live at a homestay. I mostly hang out with Chinese friends. With local students, not so much.

JT: In terms of gaining a deeper insight into the Canadian society and getting involved in community development events, I heard that this program focuses on mental health and cultural differences. But let me ask both of you first: have you ever felt isolated and find it hard to adjust to your new life when you first came to Canada? For instance, when you arrived, you had no friends and not many people to depend on. How long does this period last? Like one week or is it still ongoing?

Jessica: Everyone goes through this situation, including me. When I first came to Canada, I was only in Grade 5 and only 10 years old. I didn't have many friends in school, as I didn't share many common topics with my classmates. I already felt grateful that they were not segregating me but I knew that since I had just arrived, it was normal that I wouldn't have super "best friends" that I could open my heart to, like I used to back in China.

JT: So, no hope, no disappointment.

Jessica: Exactly. I just wanted to familiarize myself with the new environment in Canada first. Loneliness is inevitable.

Alex: Amy, this is your second year in Canada and now you are in Grade 10. Did you come here when you were Grade 8?

Amy: No, I came here when I was Grade 9.

Alex: Okay Grade 9. You lived at a homestay when you first came here?

Amy: Yes.

Alex: Is it a Chinese family?

Amy: Yes, it is a Chinese family.

Alex: It was not very hard for you to adjust to the new life here?

Amy: Uh huh.

JT: Do you feel like there is a big difference between living with your own family and living at a homestay?

Amy: Indeed. Actually, I am quite lucky. The homestay family that I live with when I first came here was a very close friend of my mother's. She treated me like her daughter. But to be honest, we only met a few times before and we didn't know each other that well. There is still that gap that [they are not really my family], which I feel between us.

Alex: I see.

Amy: Plus, she has two kids of her own. And to me, who is a 10th grader, or 9th grader back then, I feel like an "intruder" to the family.

Alex: Are her kids younger or older than you?

Amy: One is in Grade 9, who is younger than me, and the other is in Grade 12.

Alex: There is not much of an age gap then?

Amy: Yeah, we are all around the same age.

Alex: It was easy for you guys to get along?

Amy: Yes, and they are nice to me.

JT: So this is your situation at your homestay. But how do you think others perceive you? In school for instance, how do you think others feel about your identity as an international student? I don't mean literally pointing at your forehead [and say that you are an international student], but do you think they consider you as a Canadian? Do you feel like you are a Canadian after living here for 2 years?

Amy: To be honest, there are lots of Chinese people in the Richmond hill community. When others walk by, they would speak to me in Mandarin or Cantonese. (Chuckles)

Alex: Really, there is that many at Richmond Green Secondary School?

Amy: Not at Richmond Green. I mean, outside of school.

JT: Outside of school?

Amy: Yes, but actually everyone speaks English at school, which is common. In terms of feeling like a Canadian, to be honest, I don't think I feel completely infused in the Canadian society yet because let's face it. I have only been here for two years and I am by myself. Dad and Mom aren't with me either. So I don't consider myself a Canadian yet.

Alex: Just simply a student?

Amy: Yeah, just a student.

JT: She has only been here for two years and plus, she is an international student. So it might still be hard for her to feel this way.

Amy: Uh-huh.

JT: Then how about you Jessica? You have been here for 6 years now. How do you define yourself in terms of being a Canadian?

Jessica: I am legally a Canadian now, as I attended my Canadian citizenship ceremony back in 2015. But spiritually, I don't feel that I am a 100% Canadian because nevertheless I still came from China and it has only been 6 years. Even though I've stayed here longer than Amy, I still feel the film that separates me from being a true Canadian. In school for instance, my other classmates have been living in Canada ever since they were born so there are differences, in terms of lifestyle and mindset. We've grown up in different learning environments. I have been

taught in strict ways back in China, but here they are less restrictions and more focus on self-expression. So sometimes...

JT: So sometimes you are frustrated seeing someone not doing their homework yet they think that is normal?

Jessica: Um yes. Sometimes we are very different in terms of thoughts and mindsets. There is definitely conflict in ideas. Sometimes I feel their ways of doing things are weird and they think that my ways of doing things are weird but to me, it is completely normal. So there is conflict. And I feel that they don't really care if I am a Canadian or not because no matter where I am from, I am just their classmate.

JT: You don't mind at all? You are not bothered by it at all?

Jessica: Yes, we don't classify each other's identities by your nationality, ethnicity, not anything like that. We are simply just classmates to each other. We learn and we grow together.

JT: With regards to your participation in the "Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth," you've learned a lot about your own identity, social norms, culture, etc. How do you feel about this program after you've completed it? We will continue after the commercial break.

[commercial break]

JT: It is the evening of June 7th and welcome back! Today two special guests have joined us and they are student participants from the "Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth." This program was co-hosted by CCNCTO and ALPHA Education and was completed in the month of May, which coincided with Asian Heritage Month. We have Amy and Jessica with us now who have just finished this program. What have they learned? How was the program like? Was it like a regular classroom environment? Were there any fun activities? Homework?

Alex: It's like what Obama and Trudeau had said during their meeting yesterday, in terms of encouraging more youth to become leaders in the community.

JT: How was the program like? Can you share with us?

Jessica: The “Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth” was a very casual program.

JT & Alex: Very relaxing?

Jessica: Yes it was like an extra-curricular activity. I enjoyed it very much. I was always excited to attend the Monday sessions every week. I would feel happy thinking about going to the program from my co-op placement and I’d look forward to participate in the fun activities planned for the day. The learning environment was indeed very fun. It was also relaxing, as there was no pressure. Although we had to write a reflection after every session, it helped me develop a deeper understanding of myself. It allowed me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses, and determine what I needed to improve on, as well as setting goals for next week’s session.

Alex: Jessica, what did the program usually teach?

Jessica: There were three main focuses in the program. The first one was recognizing one’s identity.

JT & Alex: Yeah, identity.

Jessica: The second one was mental health and the third one was culture.

JT: Wow, I am amazed at how mature youth are nowadays, as they are already starting to care about such issues and topics.

Alex: Yeah, I mean, sometimes it is hard for even adults to understand.

(JT and Alex chuckles)

JT: (Jokes) Haha I feel like a second-class citizen for not having the opportunity to learn about these topics when I first came to Canada.

Alex: And how about you Amy? What do you think about the program?

Amy: To be honest, I joined this program initially for its volunteer hours.

(Everyone chuckles)

Alex: You are very honest.

Amy: Haha yes. But after I joined the program, I realized – first of all, the two program facilitators of the program were very nice. Furthermore, since all the participants were people from our school from different grades, it provided an opportunity for me to get to know them and make friends. Most importantly, I learned from this program many things that I had never thought about and it made me realize that certain issues do exist in this world! Identity for example, back in China, I only knew that, “Oh, you are Chinese and others are foreigners.” We only knew how to distinguish people like that, not by specific details [about who they really were]. As well, this program covered the topic of Aboriginal people. So there are three groups but actually, there are many groups –

JT & Alex: There are First Nations, Inuit, right?

Amy: Right.

JT: And Métis.

Amy: Yeah, I had never learned about this before and after I learned about them, I found that they were very interesting to know about.

JT: I want to ask more questions but unfortunately it is time for commercials. When we come back, we will discuss about the memorable moments and highlights of the program.

Alex: We will continue after this commercial break.

[commercial break]

JT: During the month of May, CCNCTO and ALPHA education wrapped up a program called the “Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth.” What part of the program or any activities in particular that has left the most impact on you? Who wants to answer first? Jessica or Amy?

Jessica: I will go first. One of the activities I enjoyed was the reflection tasks. After the program facilitators finished introducing the session topics, they would provide us with chart paper and markers and we would write down our thoughts about the session topics we just learned about. Then we would share with the rest of the group. I thought this was great because I was able to reflect on my thoughts.

JT: Reflect on yourself, you mean?

Jessica: Yes, reflect on myself, as well as finding out what others had thought about. Sharing our ideas and thoughts provided a better understanding of the topic for all of us. For instance, one of the topics was the “comfort women” of the Asia Pacific war. We would share our ideas by writing them down first and then, we would read them off the chart papers. I would realize that, “Oh there are these particular aspects about “comfort women” that I haven’t really thought about.”

JT: The reflection task allowed you to look at the topic through different angles. When people were expressing their different ideas, you would feel that, “Oh, so there are really a hundred different opinions amongst people.”

Jessica: Yes it helped me recognize this but it was not only that. When we shared with the group, I was also developing my public speaking skills.

JT: Public speaking skills?

Jessica: Yes I used to be very shy before. I was too afraid to raise my hand in class. But after this program, I felt like these experiences have boosted my confidence.

JT: Yes I can sense that, as you’re talking. I feel like that these two girls, who are speaking on a radio show for their first time, are not showing any signs of nervousness, which is very good. And you, Amy? What was the most memorable [moment] for you?

Amy: For me, it was the first day of the program. It was the most memorable because we talked about identity that day. Back then, I didn’t feel good about being an Asian at school because I felt that Asians were constantly being judged by white people for being... for instance short, just racial discrimination in general. I was very scared indeed. But after this program, I changed from that mindset. I no longer feel like being an Asian is something to be ashamed of. I am proud of being an Asian now.

JT: Do you feel that Asians are lower class citizens or anything like that?

Amy: Yeah, when I was little.

JT: Interesting to know, as some people think that Asians are smarter than others.

(Everyone chuckles)

Amy: Because when I was small, I was influenced by discriminatory ideas against Asians. Maybe from books or movies so that’s why I felt [that way].

Jessica: Can I share my thoughts too?

JT: Sure! Go on.

Jessica: Speaking of identity, I remember when the teacher was calling out students' names to give them their report cards. My name would always appear as my Chinese name on my report card. I would feel embarrassed when the teacher called me because I was usually the only one with a Chinese name on my report card, instead of the name that people usually called me by. The teacher also struggled to pronounce it correctly, making it sound awkward. I would awkwardly take the report card from the teacher's hand, as no one responded to this name except for me. But after the program session on identity, I definitely changed. Instead of feeling ashamed, I told myself that I should feel proud for the two names I have. I should feel special for having a Chinese identity, in addition to an English name.

JT: Actually, for a lot of Europeans and South Asians, their names are often mispronounced too.

Alex: Yeah.

Jessica: Yeah, but before I never thought about that. Probably because I was the only student in my class who immigrated from China [back in elementary school].

Alex: Jessica, I've had similar experiences as you. You mentioned about public speaking. Before, I used to go to Toastmasters to train myself to be a better speaker. I was scared at first too and I had to do a lot of preparation but I progressed in the program and I learned that in order to be an effective speaker, you must make your thoughts be heard. Then, you will eventually go from not wanting to share to being open to sharing your thoughts. Now that you have improved on your public speaking skills, you are able to make yourself be heard in the public? Do you have any plans to use your skills, contribute back to the community and give back to those who supported you along the way?

Jessica: Of course! Not only have I developed my leadership and public speaking skills but I have also become more interpersonal and I am very active in helping others. At school, I recently applied to become the emcee for the Grade 12 graduation ceremony. It was something that I never thought I'd do and even though I was not selected, I felt proud for attempting such a position.

JT: This is a big change for you. What about you, Amy? Did you change a lot too?

Amy: Yes! I am kind of outgoing even before joining this program. Just shortly after I joined this program, the Student Council election started and there was a position for ESL students, called the ESL rep. I ran a campaign for it and I got elected at the end! This program had helped me by boosting my confidence level. Also, my public speaking skills and social skills improved too. I used to just stay in my comfort zone and refuse to walk out. I stayed in the same circle of friends but now I realized that it was just as important to go and meet new people to expand my social network.

JT: It is time for commercials again. When we come back, we will talk about how your attitude has changed for people of different ethnicities. We will continue when we come back and we will also discuss why others should join this program as well.

[commercial break]

JT: Today we have Amy and Jessica with us at our studio. They are two student participants who have participated in the “Live Well, Take Action: Ambassador Program for East Asian Youth.” I know that by the end of the program, you were required to demonstrate your learning by creating a community group project. What did you two make?

Jessica: We picked newcomers’ challenges as our topic and made a website. On the website, we wrote about challenges that newcomers faced after coming to Canada. In addition, since there were three people in our group, we each shared our own experiences as newcomers when we first came to Canada. We also invited a Vietnamese friend to share her story, as we wanted the contents to be more diverse. We wanted to make it more diverse to reflect that there were not only Chinese people in the East Asian community but other ethnicities as well.

JT: Making it more Canadian [since Canada promotes multiculturalism] so people will not just focus on stories of people from their own ethnicity but as well as from other countries.

Jessica: Exactly, so more people can make connections to our website.

Alex: Amy, were you also a part of this project?

Amy: Yes, I was a part of the project. Our website is not only for newcomers to share their stories but there are also different sections that provide assistance. The goal of this website was to help newcomers, especially youth. We have a volunteer resource page, since, as we all know, high school students need volunteer hours in order to graduate. We also have listed out community events on our website for students to attend. That way, they don’t have to browse through Google all the time trying to find them, since they can access them directly on our website.

JT: And not just play video games at home all day, right? (Chuckles)

Amy: Right.

Alex: But WeChat is popular. Why not create a WeChat account?

JT: Are there many students that use WeChat?

Jessica: I don't think so personally. Since the "Live Well, Take Action" program focused on East Asians as a whole, we felt it was more appropriate to create a website, since not all East Asian populations use WeChat. We not only want the Chinese communities to know about this issue. We want to reach out to more people.

Alex: Is the website available in both English and Chinese?

Jessica: It is available in English for now but we are planning to translate it into Chinese and make it an option soon. This will be easy for our group, since all of us have Chinese backgrounds and we know how to write Chinese.

JT: Very meaningful and interesting. We adults did not expect you youngsters to care about [the East Asian community] –

Alex: We didn't expect students to be so involved in such issues.

JT: I believe if we had this program back then, it would've helped newcomers to better adjust in Canada. We are so happy that CCNCTO and ALPHA Education are able to put together this program. This is their first year running it? Do you think there should be more programs like this in the future? In other words, would you like to see the program taking place next year?

Jessica: Of course, I would like it to continue! And I would encourage others to be a part of it. I think nowadays, teens are too self-absorbed and they would not care about issues happening in society right now. Especially amongst East Asians, there aren't many of them who care about how their communities are struggling in Canada and the challenges that their own people face. This program will offer a great opportunity for them to start caring for their community.

JT: Yes, I agree. Sometimes, helping others is the best way to solve a problem. How about you, Amy? What is your opinion? Do you think the program should continue next year?

Amy: This is a really great program and it should definitely continue next year! I am the only one in my circle of friends who is in this program and when I tell my friends about it –

Alex & Amy: All of them want to join.

Amy: All of them have said to me, “Remember to tell me the next time you go, Amy!” I feel like for a lot of the things I have learned in this program, the teachers will not teach you at school.

Alex: This year, the program was held at three high schools: Thornlea, Richmond Green, and Thornhill. We hope that in the future, it will reach out to more schools so more students can benefit from it.

JT: And here, we give thanks to the two program facilitators: Judy Cho who is Korean, and Jaclyn Wong who is from Hong Kong. They had put extensive efforts in preparing this program and we hope they will get more funding in the future to continue it. If you want to learn more about this program, please visit CCNCTO’s website: www.ccnctoronto.ca. Go check out the photos and videos of the projects, as well as the events that students have attended. We hope that it will help newcomers and international students to better adjust their new lives in Canada and live with greater happiness.

Alex: It is a very meaningful program.

JT: Thank you, Amy and Jessica, for joining us today.

Amy and Jessica: Thank you. Bye!