

## **Hebrew U. students bring Japan to Jerusalem high schools**

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by **Jerusalem Dispatch Staff**

Japan is being introduced to Israeli high school students in a unique program run by Japanese Studies students at the Department of East Asian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The program, which aims to introduce Japanese society and culture to new layers of Israeli society, was developed with the support of the Embassy of Japan in Israel and is being coordinated by third year student Hadas Kushelevich.

“We hope to invigorate the interest of high school students to learn more about Japan through interactive presentations given by outstanding university students from the Department of East Asian Studies,” says Dr. Nissim Otmazgin, director of the program. “We in Israel tend to look only to the West as a source of learning. But there are some good things to learn from East Asia,” says Dr. Otmazgin, on the importance of teaching about Japan in Israel. “Japan and China are, after all, the world’s biggest economies following the US, and I think that in an age of globalization we will see more and more from them and increasingly feel their presence – not only their economic impact but also their cultural and political impacts.”

The program, which has been implemented in seven high schools in Jerusalem for more than 450 students, includes information about Japan’s history, geography, traditional and popular culture, and Japanese language, and is taught using visual presentations and videos.

One of the student-teachers in the program, Daniel Prag, believes it is important to teach high school students about Japan because it allows them a peek into a culture, about which their knowledge is usually superficial and stereotypical, and introduces the students to the academic world. “I believe Israelis are very exposed to Asian culture. But most of their knowledge about Japan concerns sushi, martial arts, and auto-manufacturing companies. I couldn’t help but notice that in many schools, students used the names ‘China’ and ‘Japan’ interchangeably,” he says. “This program is very important in promoting slightly deeper cultural understanding and exchange, deepening awareness of Asia among Israelis, and ultimately contributing to the betterment of Israeli-Asian relations.”

“The response I got from the students was very positive,” says another of the student teachers,” Alexandra Rabinovich. “I hope with the younger generation’s increasing knowledge of Japan and other countries in Asia, that a better and more fruitful relationship might be formed, since today’s children are tomorrow’s leaders.”

The coordinators hope to expand this program in the future to include more high schools and junior high schools in Jerusalem, as well as youth movements, youth organizations and community centers.