

A reflection by Nicol Yong on her experience representing Malaysia in Hangzhou, China.



There are moments in our lives when we need to take a blind leap of faith, and travelling to Hangzhou to represent Malaysia in the Belt and Road Youth English Speaking Competition and the China Daily '21st Century Cup' International English Speaking Competition was certainly one such moment for me.

Having only joined one local public speaking competition in 2018 prior to receiving the invitation from the English Speaking Union (ESU) of Malaysia, I don't think I fully understood the magnitude of what I was getting myself into. In spite of that, however, I am glad that I stepped through that door of opportunity, for it changed my life.

There were 31 participants in the competition representing countries such as the UK, the USA, Malta, Cape Verde, Denmark, China, South Korea, and Hungary, to name a few. While it was certainly petrifying being up against seasoned speakers from such countries, I was honestly blessed to have been able to make friends with so many of these talented youths from diverse backgrounds; hearing their unique stories was eye-opening. It was here that I saw Ukraine being friends with Russia, the USA conversing with China, and Hungary shaking hands with Britain and France.

It was here that I saw the possibility of global collaboration and peace rather than war and conflict, and it was here that I learned about the importance of the journey rather than the destination.

To be honest, I felt a certain burden to perform on behalf of Malaysia, but I realised quickly that I was going to suffocate unless I had a drastic change in my mindset once I landed in Hangzhou. With that, I shifted my focus from perfection and conformity to excellence and authenticity instead. I ended up scrapping both my prepared speeches that felt incongruous to my personality in favour of more personal ones the day before the competition, and I made a vow that I would be true to myself always, even if it meant speaking in my Malaysian accent on a global stage. I decided on sharing a story rather than delivering a speech, and that mindset sustained me throughout the competition. I wasn't a competitor on that stage, but a Malaysian given the opportunity to share her country's culture with an international community.

I had to reach a state of mind in which I was willing to accept the possibility of failure and be okay with it because I knew that I would inevitably choke otherwise, fixated on perfection. And so, throughout the prepared speeches, impromptu speeches, and questions, I learned to treasure the process more than the destination and have more faith in myself. I learned that while fear is inevitable in many situations in our lives, we can actually lessen it by embracing the possibility of failure and being okay with that, and by staying true to ourselves always.

For that, I will always be grateful to all those who have helped make this whole experience possible, from ESU Malaysia and China Daily to my family, friends, and teachers, especially Ms. Cole for all her guidance and support throughout this entire process. Malaysia Boleh!

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