Sayonara and Konichiwa
Enrik Marten G. Choachuy

Rev. Fr. Manny Uy, teachers, parents, Eiko brothers, fellow Ateneo Hearters, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

Life is one big roller coaster ride, a constant opening and closing of doors, a cycle of seasons and a succession of ‘konichiwa’ and ‘sayonara.’ It seemed like yesterday when we excitedly welcomed our Japanese brothers at the airport. Tonight we are about to formally bid them farewell. After 4 weeks of being in Japan and hosting our brothers from Japan, the entire experience has made an indelible mark in our lives. We used to be a happy, gregarious family of 3 boys. Now we are 4. No, make that 5- with the addition of Masato, my first foster brother, and now Ken.

During my elementary years, I used to go to school with my brothers every day. As I stepped into high school, the age disparity among my siblings meant that we would be having separate routes and concerns each day. The cultural exchange program has given me the opportunity to fill the gap of having a brother of the same age, who speaks the same age-related language. I will cherish the conversations we had during our daily travels to and from the Ofuna station and here in Cebu.

I used to have a lot of reservations about venturing into the unknown. My experiences in Japan have altered that perspective and given me a more optimistic view of the world. Now I relish the thought of adding unwritten chapters in my book of life, thanks in part to the warm hospitality that the host families have extended to my fellow students and me during our stay in Japan. I also give a lot of credit to Space Mountain- it forces you to trust that things will have a favorable outcome even if you do not see where you are going.

I used to believe that the underlying bond of brotherhood came from commonality and blood relations. Now I know, from our collective experiences in Japan and here in Cebu, that it comes from the acceptance and appreciation of individual and cultural differences. Our 4-week roller coaster ride served to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and lifelong friendship, not just among the delegates, but also among the parents and teachers who were part of this unprecedented milestone in the cultural exchange program. Tonight’s farewell dinner bids you ‘Sayonara.’ But we will always be looking forward to that day in the future when we will be greeting you, ‘Konichiwa!’