

My life while studying abroad

Wen Huichao

2nd-year doctoral course research student
specializing in Multicultural Education at
Hokkaido University Faculty of Education

1. My choice

When I was at university, I was lucky enough to be selected to study at Hokkaido University of Education, Sapporo, as a publically funded exchange student. During my one year studying abroad I not only got to increase my knowledge, but also gain experience in life. As an exchange student I was able to listen with my own ears, see with my own eyes and physically experience the real Japan and get to know the Japanese people. It really made me understand the how important it is for me, and many Chinese people with misconceptions or prejudices with regard to Japan, to get to know the real Japan, and how mutual understanding between both countries is vital. For me, even though my Japanese language ability improved, I still felt my understanding of Japanese culture and my year studying abroad was a little rushed. Therefore, I decided to come to Japan again and, at the stage of studying for a Masters degree, began to look at how the youth of China could start to understand the real Japan. When I was looking for a teacher, I compared the websites of almost all the Japanese universities and found that my present professor's research policies and the field I wished to study matched well. With a sense of unrest and anticipation, I wrote to the professor. Luckily, the professor accepted my research plan and, as I had hoped, I was able to return to Japan and to the city of Sapporo I love so much, as a "Hokkaido University student."

2. Studies

With regard to my studies, the first thing I think about is my professor, whom I greatly admire. In simple terms he is both "my teacher and father figure." When I was a young child, I often heard that "teachers are technicians of the heart," but it wasn't until I first met my professor two years ago that I understood the true meaning of this. As far as I'm concerned, it is not so difficult for a teacher to become a good teacher, academically; what is difficult is being a teacher who can also provide guidance with regard to a student's life. I have been lucky enough to meet such a "technician of the heart" here at Hokkaido University. My professor always provides sound advice concerning my studies, and when I am having problems deciding on my next research plan, he provides inspiration. With regard to lifestyles, too, my professor provides advice on how we can become responsible adult members of society, using everyday

details to teach us about deep philosophies of life. I am always grateful to my professor, whatever the time or place. Meeting my professor surely increased the meaning and depth to my time while studying abroad. I don't know much about the other teachers but I believe there are many people who exemplify the true meaning of "technicians of the heart" here at the beautiful Hokkaido University.

As well as my professor, there are many teachers in various fields and from various countries, including Japan, China, UK, USA, Australia, Germany, France and the Philippines, doing research on our course. My specialist field of multicultural education is exactly what it says – global and diverse; all the teachers have experience studying overseas, and all are "overseas students" with stories about living in rural areas of some foreign country or another. Because of this, they have an understanding of how we feel as overseas students. Therefore, when the teachers and students gather together they are able to talk together like friends, and there is a feeling of warmth, just like being at home. Of course, this is not because they are taking our studies lightly. All the teachers are researching humbly, and are highly motivated towards academic accomplishment, meaning we are able to receive their rigorous instruction.

In that respect, my choice of studying on Hokkaido University Faculty of Education's Multicultural Education course can be said to be the most sensible choice with regard to my place of study in Japan.

3. Private life

My private life is also varied, and as well as a part-time job I have lots of chances to experience various things. For example, the university's International Student Center and other international exchange organizations offer us a variety of services, acting as a bridge for friendship between Japan and other countries of the world. I am always actively participating in exchange activities, and through this interaction I get to understand more about the culture of Japan and other countries, and to expand my perspective. In addition, I was able to experience my first volunteer activities when I was lucky enough to participate as an English-Japanese volunteer translator at a world cross country ski competition held in Sapporo. As well as this, Hokkaido's natural beauty is famous throughout the whole of Japan: the greenery of spring, the refreshing summers, beautiful leaves in autumn, and winter snowscapes. I spend almost all of my private time traveling around, experiencing the beauty of the four seasons unique to Hokkaido.

If you want to know more about the life of an overseas student, come to Hokkaido University yourself and find "various splendors" of your own.

When I look back on my four-and-a-half years as an overseas student, there was laughter, tears, sadness and joy; a mixture of emotions, all of which were experiences that helped me

grow. Each challenge brought a wealth of experience and a new leap forward in my life. I am grateful for the friends with whom I shared my student life, and to the overseas student life, itself, for changing my life. I am convinced that this is not the end, just a new point of departure.