

15 August, 2018

## **Walking through this summer in Japan**

Just like the little travelling frog, I had an extremely wonderful cultural exchange trip this summer. And now I'm writing down what I experienced during that time, with my backpack full of treasure next to me.

Before going to Japan, to be honest, I had little understanding of Japan, and most of my impressions about Japan came from Japanese movies, TV dramas, and social media. In addition to Japanese culture characterized by “mono no aware” and “wabi-sabi”, I also curious about Japanese modern society, politics and education, which all made me really look forward to this summer exchange program.

### **First arrival in Japan**

This short-term exchange program was provided by Tokyo Gakugei University. Ten students from Beijing Normal University and Seoul National University of Education participated in this program. Heard from a Japanese student, “Gakugei” in Japanese means education. So this program seemed like offering a great platform for Chinese, Japanese and Korean educational practitioners to discuss and exchange ideas.

In the afternoon of our first day arriving in Japan, we hanged out around our hotel for a rest. The clean and tidy streets, the shining houses, the anime-style railways, along with the breeze, made me feel quite comfortable. When I paid at the checkout counter in SEIYU supermarket, the cashier carefully placed the items I bought into the shopping basket, and by observing others, I learned to put them in the bag on my own at the special table. Everything seemed polite and orderly.

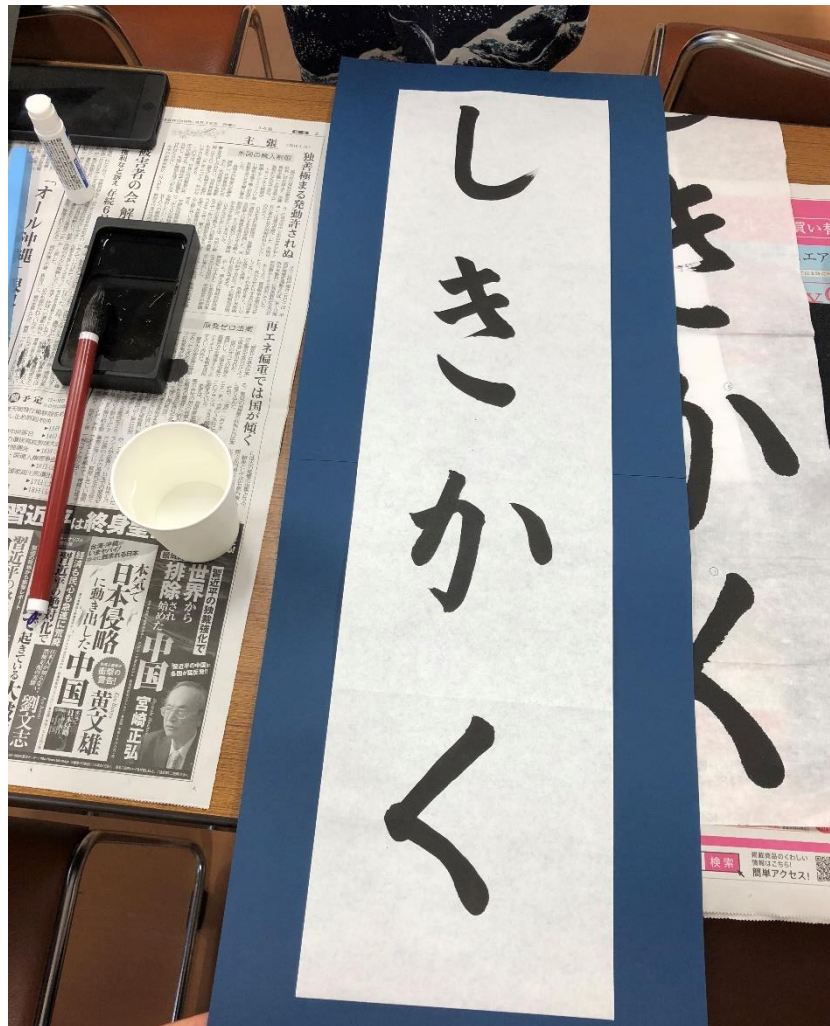
The next day, when we finally met the teachers of Tokyo Gakugei University for the first time in the campus of Tokyo Gakugei University, there was no feeling of strangeness. All teachers welcomed us friendly and warmly, especially the lovely and energetic Prof. TSUBAKI and the thoughtful and considerate Prof. SHIMODA who can speak Chinese. The campus of Tokyo Gakugei University was not big, and had a dense growth of evergreen trees. The style of buildings were elegant with classic simplicity. With the sign of “Caution Crows”, the campus was just like Beijing Normal University in Tokyo.

### **Cultural experience**

During this program, I was deeply impressed by several cultural experiences such as

Japanese calligraphy lessons, the visit to Edo-Tokyo Open-air Architectural Museum, kimono and tea ceremony lessons, and study tour to Kokubunji, which all combined ornamental, enjoyable, cultural and educational value in one.

In my opinion, Japanese calligraphy shares the same root and homology with Chinese calligraphy. However, due to the characteristics of “hiragana”, Japanese calligraphy focuses more on the flexibility and smoothness, different from the square and angle in Chinese calligraphy. I learned how to write my name in Japanese and practiced writing Japanese phonetic alphabet.



Visiting Edo-Tokyo Open-air Architectural Museum and Kokubunji were also good experiences. Although the weather was so hot, it still didn't abate our passion. Edo-Tokyo Open-air Architectural Museum displays over 20 buildings that have been reconstructed, restored and preserved from the Edo period to the early Showa period (from 1600s to 1940s). Explained by our guide, an old man who has Chinese descent, we learned the history and structure of different architecture such as the farmhouse, public bathhouse, soy sauce shop, izakaya, tailor's, stationery store (where the scene in *Spirited Away* originated from) , flower shop, umbrella shop, hotel and so on. It seemed like I travelled through time and went back to the bustling commercial streets of Japan

in the past, witnessing the living scenes of the handicraft residential areas.



During the study tour to Kokubunji, we appreciated the garden which combines Japanese style and western style together. And we also touched the cool spring and heard the miracle of a pool. It's said that a Japanese beauty got her disfigurement cured by using the water in the pool to wash face. Informed of the knowledge of geology conditions in this place by Prof. TSUBAKI, I could not help to say that the power of nature is really awe-inspiring.

Without doubt, kimono and tea ceremony were also brand new experiences for me. Similar to Chinese Hanfu, kimono is a national traditional garment. On formal occasions, the Japanese will wear kimono. During summer, Japanese men and women will be dressed in yukata which is simpler and lighter comparing with formal kimono, to participate in various festivals. Kimono has different types and particular accessories, which is quite complicated and exquisite. With the help of teachers, a white full-length Kimono was wrapped around my body, which were secured by a sash called "obi". And I also put on traditional footwear and split-toe socks.



In the ideal venue, a purpose-built tatami-floored room, we then learned Japanese tea ceremony, which is also called *sadō*. Harmony, respect, purity and tranquility are main four points of *sadō*. It means that on one hand, the harmonious state and mutual respect between hosts and guests and between people and nature should be built during *sadō*. On the other hand, the tea implements shall be cleaned thoroughly and inner peace of the people involved is required. *Sadō* is not only about the taste of tea and food, but also about art and aesthetics. Each action in *sadō* – how a kettle is used, how a teacup is examined, how to serve and drink tea – is performed in a very specific way, and may be thought of as a procedure or technique.

### **Exchange on education**

The exchanges and discussions on education between China, Japan and South Korea benefited me a lot. We attended the lectures on Japanese education given by professors of Tokyo Gakugei University, and also visited Chuo University Junior and Senior High school and Setagaya Elementary School. During these activities, I found that Japanese education emphasizes the cultivation of students' self-learning and practical ability. For instance, they have many field trips within one semester. And in social classes, schools encourage students to explore the environment, culture, and history of their surroundings by themselves and make a research report based on it. Teachers only play a role as the instructor. At the same time, from primary schools, secondary schools to universities, there are lots of club activities which provide students a large space to develop their interests and talents. And teachers' careful lesson plans, class observations, subject discussion in districts make school lessons more efficient and targeted. These aspects are all worthy of reference considering Chinese education. During the trilateral symposium among graduates and postgraduates from China, Japan

and South Korea, we discussed similarities and differences on education in these three countries. And we also found some common problems we are now facing, like teachers' heavy workload, bullying incidents in campus, second language teaching methods, etc.

During the vivid Chinese culture lesson we gave in Setagaya Elementary School, the students performed very actively. In the Q&A session, questions raised by these Japanese fourth-grade students made us quite astonished. For example, they asked why almost half of the things they used were made in China, where Chinese manufacturing factories were mainly located, and how we thought about Taiwan and Diaoyu Islands issues. We cannot imagine these deep-thinking questions came from such young kids, which was closely related to the education they received apparently.



### **Beautiful moments**

During this week in Japan, I experienced some impressive beautiful moments. In the Edogawa Fireworks Festival, the fireworks always suddenly gave you surprises. Going to the top of the Roppongi Hills, you could see the whole picture of the night scene of Tokyo. In Shibuya, you could mingle with the large crowd moving across the crossroad. In one shop, a salesclerk wrote down the stores which had things I need just for my reference. In Nagoya airport, I tasted the most delicious unagi donburi I have ever had. The scenery, food and people I met here were all gentle and elegant enough.

This short week is not enough to understand all aspects of Japan, but it still can open some windows for us to understand each other mutually. Walking through this August in Japan, because of this unique exchange program, my heart became more open and inclusive.

