

Tanaka and Green Scholarship Report
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My time studying abroad in Japan was easily one of the most enjoyable experiences I have ever had. By attending Chuo University in Tokyo, I was close enough to the city that going to the city center was convenient and easy, but I lived in a quiet, rural, residential area in Hachioji. This year was a year of firsts for me, as I had never lived in Japan for such an extended period of time, lived on my own, and I attended school, interacted with many different people, and engaged in other activities that brought about many new experiences and created wonderful memories.

I chose Chuo University for various reasons, and it lived up to if not surpassed my expectations. The main reason I wanted to attend Chuo was its surprisingly small number of exchange students. Overall, there were several hundred, mainly coming from China and Korea. However, there were very few Western exchange students, adding up to less than one hundred. The year I was there, there were a total of four Americans including myself, and because of this, Chuo does not have a program specifically for exchange students, so we can be as integrated into the normal campus life as we want. While there is an international center to help and guide the exchange students, we can choose practically any class from any faculty at Chuo (with a few exceptions), whether it be in English, Japanese, or another language. The first semester (Fall 2015), aside from Japanese language classes for exchange students, the majority of my classes were in Japanese with Japanese students. During Spring 2016, my course list was about half Japanese and half English. With this, my listening ability improved tremendously and I felt like I was truly a part of the campus. Although my Japanese was not good enough to understand everything, I attended for the experience and was able to meet and converse with Japanese students I would not have been able to otherwise. One of the fascinating things about study abroad is the fact is that there are students studying abroad from countries all across the globe, and I made friends from varying countries, expanding my friend base all over the world. It is rather difficult to join clubs during fall semester, as Japan's school year starts in the spring and therefore that is when all the clubs begin recruiting. During spring semester, I joined one of Chuo's art clubs and was able to participate in some of the events they held and enjoyed being able to talk with them in the clubroom. I was the only exchange student in the club. However, although they were surprised to have an exchange student join their club, the art club was extremely friendly and made me feel very welcome, inviting me to the few events that were happening while I was still in Japan.

Being from Maryland and growing up extremely close to Washington D.C., I think of myself as being fairly used to city life. However, the quick pace of life of those living in Tokyo was surprising, and I often found myself battling the crowds when I would take the train to and from the city center. It really made me appreciate living in Hachioji, and justified my choice of attending Chuo. Thanks to the complex train system, I was able to travel to my favorite places in Tokyo at any time, and one

can do practically do anything in Tokyo. Once I was tired of the hustle and bustle, I was able to return to my quiet neighborhood.

Before I left to begin my study abroad in Japan, I thought I would be taking constant vacations, going on weekend trips all over the country. Once I started school, I realized that this was probably not going to be possible as studying was very time-consuming and frugal ways of transportation also ate up a lot of time while more time-efficient ways were fairly expensive. I was able to travel around Japan a bit during the year, taking small trips to Nagano Prefecture and Yamaguchi Prefecture, as well as take a short trip to South Korea. I went to Nagano with a friend, and we stayed in a different city each day, starting off in Matsumoto, then heading to Suzaka, exploring around Obuse, and spending the final night and day in the small hot spring town of Yudanaka in the mountains. The places we went to in Nagano were much calmer than Tokyo, and had an incredibly comfortable way of life compared to the hustle and bustle of Tokyo.

Nagano was amazing and I loved the atmosphere, but between the two trips mentioned earlier I personally enjoyed the Yamaguchi trip more. I went to Hagi, Yamaguchi alone and stayed in the little town for a total of three days. During that time, I was able to meet so many incredibly friendly locals and travelers as well as learn about Japan's Bakumatsu Era during which Hagi was prominent. As I was traveling around alone without any concrete plans, I was able to meet and talk to locals for hours at a time, and was able to hear many stories from different times. Hagi is a small castle town with a few but not many tourists. Being an American who spoke Japanese, I had many interesting conversations and was never without someone to talk to. I became very friendly with an elderly woman who ran a local Japanese confectionary shop, and went to her shop a couple times. The first time, we talked for over an hour about both her and my lives, but the day before a local man who works as a tour guide offered to take me and a woman who was not local but worked at the hostel around for free, so I promised the woman I would come back the next day. When I saw her again, I went with a Dutch tourist who was staying at the same hostel and I worked as an interpreter between the three of us, while she gave us many free samples of the sweets she had handmade and told us about life in Hagi and the history of the shop. I also happened to have a long and deep conversation with an elderly man I happened to sit next to at a local izakaya, and I told him about America while he told me about his experiences during World War II, and another day escaped the sun while eating Hagi's famous summer mikan ice cream inside a gift shop while having an enjoyable conversation with the owner.

Another rewarding experience I had while in Japan was teaching English conversation to a group of elderly Japanese. I was introduced to the job and recommended by Chuo's international center, and met with the Mogusa English Speaking Society every other week. As many of them were already fairly proficient in English, my job was to simply bring articles in English and discuss current events with them. They were all extremely smart and fairly open-minded, allowing us to talk about controversial topics and hear different opinions from different generations. A few of us ended up becoming quite close, and they would invite me to participate in experiences I would not have been able to enjoy otherwise. One of the people I taught was a tea ceremony teacher, and invited me to her tea sensei's New

Year ceremony to celebrate. Her sensei, an incredibly sharp and quick-witted ninety-three year old man, engaged all the guests in delightful conversation and beautiful tea ceremony, which he held in a tiny tearoom in his backyard. They were all incredibly kind, and told me to keep in touch and let them know whenever I am back in Tokyo.

I have absolutely no regrets from my year at Chuo University. While some may wonder why I did not travel as frequently as one would expect, or did not participate in some activities that some would see as a key Japanese experience, I lived a happy, comfortable life while I was in Japan and was able to do things that I wanted to do, many of which lead to experiences that were special to me. I am extremely grateful for the Tanaka and Green scholarship, which helped making study abroad in Japan a reality and being able to live very comfortably.