

When looking into my options for graduate school, the MEXT Scholarship provided the opportunity to expand my horizons and learn another culture and language in addition to furthering my education. I wanted to complete my studies in Japan, because of Japanese universities' strength and innovation in engineering fields. The financial and travel support of MEXT was more than enough to convince me to apply for the program. Before receiving the MEXT Scholarship, I had never been to Japan although it has always been a dream of mine to visit at least as a tourist. Studying in Japan became an experience even beyond what I had imagined.

Studying abroad, after all, isn't just studying. It is living abroad: making personal connections with my classmates and neighbors, eating the food, and learning the language. The MEXT Scholarship allowed me to study the Japanese language in full-immersion classes at my university while also being able to practice the language immediately out in the real world. For a complete beginner in Japanese, this would prove to be the fastest way to gain proficiency in the language. Picking up Japanese as a language skill was one of my main goals when applying for the MEXT scholarship. Professionally, being able to

communicate with Japanese researchers would allow for more productive collaboration.

Personally, I would be able to have a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and, of course, better enjoy my everyday life in Japan.

Everyday life in Japan is immensely different from everyday life back at home.

Coming from a smaller city, living in the big metropolis of Tokyo was definitely a big change for me. From commuting mostly by bicycle and public transportation to grocery shopping at the local market, nearly all of my daily routines have had to change. Still, it has been easy to adapt because of the hospitality from my new schoolmates. I cannot say enough about the kindness of my new friends and colleagues. They always are willing to help me when I encounter problems with the language, especially with Chinese characters. They also guide me through the mysteries of Japanese paperwork.

Above all else, they have helped me fill my time here with interesting experiences. I've been able to enjoy urban adventures at big sporting events, visiting animal cafes, and enjoying amusement parks. We also enjoyed a bit of the slower life by visiting natural hot springs, enjoying the beachside in the summer, and even going on a fishing trip.

My schoolmates also became my fellow mountain climbers when we took a trip up to the top of Mount Fuji. My tourism dreams have been satisfied, but there is still so much more to explore.

Finally and most importantly, the MEXT scholarship has provided for my education. I started the program as a “research student,” which allowed me to enter a laboratory at the University of Tokyo in the Department of Materials Engineering. A research student is not necessarily in a graduate program, but during that time, I was able to adapt to life in Japan while also setting up my research topic and preparing to take the entrance exam for graduate school. With all of these priorities, I am very grateful that I also did not have to worry about finances during that time. After a semester as a research student, I was able to enter the doctoral program, and now I am happy to say that I am currently progressing to receiving a doctoral degree under the MEXT Scholarship Program.

None of this would have been possible without the financial and procedural support I received from the MEXT Scholarship. Honestly, I may have not even taken the leap to Japan without the scholarship. There is really no other way that I would have been

able to have these kinds of experiences and see all these new perspectives if it were not for this scholarship program. Being able to further my education in Japan has truly been an experience of a lifetime.