

Impressions from One Year Living and Studying in Japan

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1. Introduction

At first, I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the Institute of Electronics, Information and Communication Engineers Communications Society (IEICE-CS) GLOBAL NEWSLETTER for providing me an opportunity of sharing my one-year experience in Japan in this article.

My name is Vuong V. Mai, a foreign student from Vietnam. I received B.E. in electronics and Telecommunications, from Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology (PTIT), Vietnam, in 2012. After graduation, thanks to the Japanese government scholarship (MonbuKagaku-sho), I got a great chance to study in Japan. I am currently working toward a M.E degree in computer science and engineering from the University of Aizu (UoA), Japan.

2. First steps on the new land

So far, I am keeping in my mind that I am a lucky student. It can be explained by the excellent studying and living environment that I have been enjoying.

What initially caught my attention when arriving at UoA was the international environment. As UoA recruited faculty from throughout the world (approximately 40% of the faculty being non-Japanese), a student from overseas like me was getting a welcome from various classes given both in Japanese and English. In addition, one of the UoA's most distinctive features lies in the fact that it is the first university in Japan to specialize solely in computer education and research [1]. It is exactly what I expected before deciding to study abroad.

During the campus life, one year is an enough time for my experiences in full of outside activities with friends. As long as the landscape in Aizu city, where I am living, deeply depends on the season, we have different ways to enjoy every season. In the last spring, with other members in my laboratory, we gathered in Tsuruga Castle to view colorful cherry blossoms in the surrounding area, and simultaneously celebrate the coming of spring with drinking. When the summer came, we enjoyed the cooler time by sightseeing in the Inawashiro Lake and taking photos of its magnificent view. In autumn time, a phenomenon in that green leaves transform into many colors ranging from red to yellow provides the scenery for my unforgettable memories. Lastly, my most impressive moment may be in the winter. It is true when saying that the beauty of Aizu really shows up in its winter snow. It was my first time that I try snowboarding, taking a break in the

outdoor hot spring and watching the snow falling outside my window.



Fig. 1 Hanami at Tsuruga Castle, Aizu-wakamatsu city



Fig. 2 Skiing and snowboarding at Grand Sunpia Inawashiro Resort, Fukushima pref.

3. Research activities

The excellent studying and living environment have strongly motivated my passion for study and research. I have planned for early completion of the Master's Program (1.5 years instead of 2 years) and catch up the opportunity to extend my scholarship to the PhD program. In order to make the dream come true, I have tried my best since some first days.

I have started my research topic for almost one year. My research mainly focuses on Free-space Optical (FSO) and Visible Light Communications (VLC). In detail, I do the cross-layer design and analysis task for FSO and VLC. The results of these works give me the opportunity of attending several domestic and international conferences, including the IEICE general conference 2013, the 18th European Conference on Networks and Optical Communications (NOC 2013) [2], and the fifth International Conference on Ubiquitous and Future Networks (ICUFN 2013) [3]. Attending conferences might be the most wonderful time in my research work. I could discuss with other researchers and receive advices from them to strengthen knowledge and improve the communication skill. Fig. 3 is a photo taken at NOC 2013 in Graz, Austria, when I was with fellow students from other countries.



Fig. 3 NOC 2013 at TU Graz, Graz city, Austria

4. Keeping balance in life and research

On the way to achieve those results, I have faced with many challenges. The key point what I tend to point out is that how to balance in life and research. It is a common question of all researchers. In the rest of this article, I would like to share some personal experiences, which I have applied to deal effectively with that issue.

Break a big goal into smaller goals: I often divide my work into smaller parts. This method has given me the opportunity to take the pressure off by trying to finish the final task gradually. As a result, I can focus on finishing one small task at a time and it is not really a big deal. After that I feel totally relax and ready to finish the next task until completing the whole work.

Reward yourself after completing each task: Between two tasks, there is a break time. I try to reward myself at that time. For example, after done weekly task, I spend my weekend time to play some sports, e.g., volleyball and running. I am a member of an international volleyball club. In the club, although there are differences in nationality, gender and age among its members, everyone shares a common interest in

volleyball. After a semester, the traditional activity of my laboratory is winter/summer camp program. In the last winter, we went to Grand Sunpia Inawashiro Resort Hotel. In that event, besides some activities like skiing (Fig. 2), onsen and having dinner together, we had a seminar when each individual presents about his/her research process. It is the good chance to relax and prepare for further steps.

Invest your time in other things besides research: Social activities are my preferences. I am an active member of a team supported by the Center for Strategy of International Programs (CSIP) of UoA. With CSIP team, I often visit local elementary schools to attend international exchange programs. Photo in Fig. 4 was taken at the Matsunaga elementary school in Aizu-wakamatsu city when I was introducing to the lovely kids about Vietnam and its environmental problems. In addition, another remarkable activity was an international exchange program with students from other universities in Japan in the last winter. We enjoyed a 3-day trip to discover the phenomenal beauty of Ura-Bandai in Fukushima prefecture.



Fig. 4 My class at Matsunaga elementary school. Aizu-wakamatsu city

5. Conclusions

One year living and studying in Japan is not a long time; I however have gained valuable experience and knowledge, as well as improved my confidence. I know my plan is a long-term relationship commitment with Japan, and I believe in my decision thanks to wonderful things I have been experiencing in this country. Moreover, I hope that my experience shared in this article would be helpful for those who not only are planning to go to Japan, but also are now studying in Japan.

6. Reference

- [1] <http://www.u-aizu.ac.jp/e-intro.html>
- [2] Vuong V. Mai, Truong C. Thang, and Anh T. Pham. Performance Analysis of TCP Over Free-Space Optical Links with ARQ-SR. In the Proc. of the NOC 2013.
- [3] Vuong V. Mai, Truong C. Thang, and Anh T. Pham. Throughput Analysis of TCP over Visible Light Communication Indoor Networks. In the Proc. of the ICUFN 2013.