A Fancy Feast in Tokyo

Before departure
“Japan is a Nordic nation in Asia”, as someone mentioned, the country is always a destination attracts people all over the world, including me. It is ordinary for Chinese to be curious about Japan’s development since we are neighbouring countries who share very similar cultural and value background but we are so different in many ways. There is no doubt that exchange study could be a perfect option to experience Japan’s daily life rather than just travelling in limited days. Of course, the University of Tokyo is another reason with its high academic reputation. Especially due to my background in environmental and urban studies, Japan should a very excellent case to inspire me.

Upon arrival
I arrived at Japan just one week before the semester’s starting. The university distributed a Japanese tutor from the same research lab to each exchange student. He really helped me a lot such as applying for bank account when the bank officers cannot speak English. Meanwhile, the international office in UTokyo is very kind to give very detailed information as much as possible in the form of portfolio in case that international student might encounter.

Financials
I didn’t receive scholarship from KTH but one called “JASSO” from UTokyo. The JASSO scholarship awards for 80,000 JPY/month. To get this support, the applicants should meet the minimum GPA of 4.0/5.0, which is same as the GPA requirements for exchange to UTokyo.

Accommodation
I got a studio room in the internation lodge located in Komaba Campus, however my courses and research lab are all in Hongo Campus. The distance between them is quite long so I need spend one hour per journey to go to school and one other to come back. But it is still very lucky to get this accommodation when the university only provides accommodation for some of the international students (there is no chance for the official university students). And the renting procedures in Tokyo are pretty difficult and complicated.

University and studies
The University of Tokyo has three campuses in Tokyo, Hongo, Kashiwa, Komaba. Most study and activities for graduate students occur in Hongo campus, which is also the most historical one. In autumn, the gingko trees decorate the school as a golden and splendid world. The first photo below is a bird view from my department building, and the age of the biggest one in the picture is several hundreds. Apart from this, UTokyo is also an ideal place to discover architecture within its combined architecture styles. My favorite one is 福武ホーム by Tadao Ando because his works deliver insights between human and buildings through taking advantages of light and space. Everytime I self-studied in 福武ホーム, I felt so satisfied and peaceful- it is not merely a place you could study and sit but also a space to think and introspect.
Gingko Trees, December 4th, 2017

Main Library (統合図書館), March 5th, 2018
Courses

UTokyo offers courses both in Japanese as well as English. I chose courses mostly based on my master program, especially the planning track. Classes are almost lecture based in UTokyo, but the very different point compared with KTH, they pay more attention to individual work and seldom require for group work.

I cannot overlook the Japanese language course-I am so treasuring this opportunity to learn this beautiful language. Additionally, it turned to be the best way for me to meet other European international students. I obtained very precious friendship during this course, travelling with some of those interesting individuals, exchanging thoughts about Japan, keeping in touch with each other even after back to home university.

Another course I want to mention is an intensive course “Projects in Developing Countries”. At first, I do like the course form of “intensive” offered in UTokyo, which will be given in very short term but dense classes. The lecturer of “Projects in Developing Countries” is alumni from department of civil engineering, who currently works for the World Bank. Students were welcomed to show their interests in specific field during construction and planning projects committed by the World Bank in Southeastern Asia nations, in order to help the lecturer to pay more attention based on students’ interests. And we used what we learnt during the course to mimic the procedures of proposing and
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ind some chances to work in NGOs like the World Bank.

City and country

Japan is an amazing country with their limitless pursuit in aesthetics. People may be attracted by Japanese cartoons, techniques, and all fancy stuff in Tokyo. However, the most important point hiding behind all modern creations in this country is the core idea of “Wabi-Sabi”, which is also the one I mostly desire to explore. “Wabi-Sabi” was came up by tea expert Sennorikyu and developed by famous Japanese poet Matsuobasho, to expressing the focus on the heart which is tolerant to test of time rather than gorgeous and pompous appearances. The rock garden in Ryuanji Temple is regarded as one of the best example of Wabi-Sabi. I spent one and half hours there with my friend, a Danish girl, and so many feelings flooded into my mind. I even wrote a passage about what I felt there when finishing this trip.

I talked about “Wabi-Sabi” in the final speech of Japanese language course, after that, one of the teacher invited me to Tea Ceremony Club of her daughter’s high school. It is never too exaggerate to state this experience as once in a lifetime. The teacher prepared delicate kimono for me and those cute girls performed tea ceremony also patiently taught me. Even the huge language barrier laying between us but we all feel something from the deep mind.

Kimono and Tea Ceremony Experience with Fujimi High Scool’s Tea Ceremony Club,

January 30th, 2018
Rock Garden (Dried Landscape), Ryuanji Temple, 石庭（枯山水）龍安寺, December 22nd, 2017
Leisure and social activities

I always keep gym workouts, no exception in Japan. It was one of the best experience I have had there is training in "Gold’s Gym", one of the globally best gym.

Besides this, I travelled for four times with my friends in total. We confronted roaring waves in Japan Sea under stormy weather, worshiped Tatteishi Temple on the hillside in the new year after a heavy snow, cycled across Kyoto with breeze, bathed in outdoors hot spring on the snow, ran in art island Naoshima to discover art works of Tadao Ando, Yayoi Kusama, Sou Fujimoto, sat under beautiful sunset at the summit of Aoba Mountain in Sendai, the city where my favourite Chinese author Lu Xun used to live......

I hold so many memories I will never forget...

Sanjo, Kyoto, February 8th, 2018
Kinkaku Ji (金閣寺), Kyoto, December 23rd, 2017

Tazawa Lake, Akita, January, 2nd, 2018
Tatteishi Temple (立石寺), Yamagata, December 31st, 2017
Zaoonsen, Yamagata, December, 30th, 2017

My Friends (He Jian, Huang Yun, Luo Lichen), December, 30th, 2017
Pumpkin by Yayoi Kusama, Naoshima, December 25th, 2017

My Friend (Malene Prytz), Pavilion by Sou Fujimoto, Naoshima, December 26th, 2017
Other recommendations and observations
I wrote a more detailed passage about some beautiful memories in Japan, the link here: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/JEJFX597NeLMb-PDmsWW3A

(I am sorry it is in Chinese due to my limited English proficiency)