

Tanaka Green Scholarship Reflection

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This past year at Shinshu University was an enriching season of growth and adventures. Upon arriving in Japan I was determined to speak only Japanese, although difficult at first and having to use English to communicate at times I still persisted and eventually improved. Classes at Shinshu University definitely aided in my Japanese ability with all classes being taught in Japanese. After taking a placement test I was a bit disappointed to have been placed in a class level that I thought was below my level; however I learned a great deal in that class, using grammar that I had learned previously but in different situations and all the while learning new vocabulary and then putting what I learned into practice instantly in daily life. My second semester I was able to progress to the next level and continued to improve my Japanese. The classes at Shinshu University really challenged me in writing and speaking Japanese, each week we would have to write short essays on various topics and at the end of your study abroad program at Shinshu students are required to do a final speech in Japanese in front of professors, students, and others from the community. It was difficult and stressful at times but in the end it was all beneficial and my Japanese has vastly improved. The professors were amazing and taught in an easy to understand way, they also really got to know us and gave us plenty of role plays and time to practice dialogue which made classes fun. Each class was a new experience and we all got to know each other well as we each shared about our own countries and cultures.

I was able to make lasting friendships with other students from all over the world and everyone I met greatly impacted my life in so many ways. My Japanese improved the most not in the classroom but during winter break when I travelled through Kyushu with two other exchange students, one from Taiwan and the other from Poland. Both had a higher Japanese level than me

and helped me improve my speaking during that time. We would always speak to each other in Japanese and sometimes while exploring a city we would have conversations about Japanese grammar and bolster each other's understanding. On that trip we were able to experience unique Japanese culture and see interesting places. The east side of Kyushu has a lot of sightseeing areas that have ties with Japanese mythology such as the Amano Iwato Shrine in Miyazaki Prefecture, where Amaterasu hid in a cave from her brother and Kirishima Jingu where it is believed Ninigi no Mikoto came down from heaven to rule the Earth. But on the west side of Kyushu where the Dutch came and traded with Japan, most of the sightseeing areas have more of a European influence with Catholic churches and European styled buildings and gardens. These experiences have fueled my desire to explore more of Japan and learn more of its history and culture.

Something I enjoyed doing was talking to other students about their countries, history, and current events in Asia. One major political event that occurred while I was in Japan was the meeting between Kim Jong Un of North Korea and President Moon of South Korea, during that time I was able to ask my Korean friends what they thought about the meeting and gain a new perspective as well as a better understanding of the situation. Because of these discussions I have learned more about not only Japan but many other countries as well and have a new found interest in international relations. Through this study abroad experience I have realized that I want to work with international students in some capacity. As I consider post-graduation plans I am looking into the JET program for the coordinator for international relations position which involves translating and organizing cultural exchange events. I am also considering a vocational school with a "reach Asia" internship program that will allow me to work in different Asian countries. I am looking forward to the next season of life and am beyond grateful for this past year in Japan where I have gained experience, knowledge, and lifelong friends.