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SENSE OF BELONGING



It took my family and to some extent, my friends by surprise when I decided to pursue my MA degree in Japan. For my friends who knew my passion and fondness of Japanese cultures, it was not an odd choice. But for my family, the idea seemed so alien. *Why Japan? Why not UK or Australia? It's very rare for Bruneian students to go there. It's not an ideal place for study due to the language barrier.* These were their thoughts. Although they were happy and proud of my achievement for securing a MEXT scholarship, doubts and worries still lingered on their mind. These only strengthened my resolve to go there. I wanted to open their eyes on Japan.

I flew from Brunei to Beppu, Oita Prefecture. The place was at Kyushu Island, far south from Tokyo. When I first came to Beppu, honestly, I was taken aback. The city, or rather referred to by the Japanese as 'countryside', was a far cry from what I had envisioned of Japan. The town was very quiet and surrounded mainly by mountains. But slowly, once I settled there, Beppu captured my heart with its idyllic scenery and charming local residents. I always took my time to walk around the town to discover its landscapes and people. Long before I realized, I began to call it my 'hometown'. The great experiences that I had while living there were indescribable. Through the international environment of my campus – Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University – I've met wonderful friends from all over the world. I've found true friendships regardless of their ethnicity and religion.

I also gained new appreciation on Japan and changed my perception from the stereotype Japanese images portrayed in the media. The pride of their own language, humbleness, work ethics, love on natures, passion on food and fashion as well as tech-savvy lifestyles left lasting impressions on me. I've lost count how many times their kindness and humility touched my heart. My everyday life was rarely dull because there was always something new to discover. I seized chances during semester breaks to travel around Japan by myself, to see historical and famous places with my own eyes. Through ancient monuments, I connected with the Japanese past and felt the essence of their heritage. Through the fast-paced city life, I saw the dynamics of Japanese culture mixed with modernity and traditional values. Along the journeys, I discovered the variations of Japanese cultures and landscapes that still amaze me until today.

Looking back now, I realized Japan has given me so many great times and experiences. The friendship that I had established and my adventures at many places left big marks on my life. One-page essay here was not enough to convey all the fun and joy I have had there. All I can say is, go there and discover the wonders of Japan with your own eyes. You will not regret it.

For me, the journey does not end here. I will go to Japan again, as many times as I can. I already made my vow to my dearest friends there. And above all, I miss my hometown – Beppu.

Thank you for all the parties involved for making my dream comes true.