

# Facing Myself Has Made Me Stronger

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### *Japan Was the Land of My Dreams*

For Mongolian students, studying abroad is a dream. It is a goal we definitely want to achieve. But the national budget for overseas study is very limited, and can only provide for 5 to 7 undergraduates and 14 or 15 technical school students. Almost all the students aiming to study abroad prepare from the time they are in high school, but for me the desire came very early. I had already decided to go to Japan from the time I was a child. This was mostly because of two experiences.

The first was the experience of my great-grandmother, which my grandmother often spoke about. My great-grandmother was a nurse when she was young, and she nursed Japanese soldiers who were injured on the Mongolian border in the Nomonhan Incident (the Battle of Khalkhyn Gol) in World War II. This gave her the deep impression that Japanese people are honest, sincere, hardworking, and punctual. I heard this many times during my childhood, and my grandmother often told me: "Grow up to be honest, hardworking, and punctual like the Japanese." As a result of her words I naturally came to respect the Japanese and to have a longing for Japan.

The second reason was that I visited Japan together with my mother, who was a university faculty member, when she studied abroad at Kyushu University. I had lived through the post-transition period just after Mongolia's shift from a socialist regime to a capitalist system, a time when there was a shortage of goods and my only clothes were hand-me-downs from my older brother, so for me Japan in 1998 was like an entirely different world. It was my first time to see automatic doors and escalators. My eyes were opened to the industrialized nation of Japan that was also different from the world of my favorite Japanese television drama *Oshin*, which reaches back to the Meiji period.

I have hated to lose ever since I was a small



Precious photo with my great-grandmother, who prompted my interest in Japan and yearning for Japanese people.



child, and when I entered primary school I was determined not to lose to Japanese children, so I frantically studied *kanji* characters eight hours a day. After leaving Japan the first time I had vowed that I would someday return, and for me the callus on my middle finger from so much writing was like proof of the strength of my determination.

### *The Purpose of Studying Abroad Is to Learn*

In 2007, when I realized my dream of studying overseas in Japan, I was a student at the Institute of Finance and Economics in Ulaanbaatar. On arriving in Japan I first entered a one-year program at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where I studied Japanese language and cultural studies together with students from 60 countries worldwide. For me, placing myself in an environment that is like a microcosm of the world, meeting many people, and making friends are the treasures of life. After completing this program, students advance depending on the results of selection

examinations given during the course of the year. My first choice was actually the University of Tokyo, for the simple reason that the University of Tokyo is said to be the pinnacle of Japanese education and everyone wants to receive education from the finest. In the end, however, I decided to enter Hitotsubashi University. This was first recommended to me by my academic advisor. Learning that I wanted to start a business in the future, my advisor recommended Hitotsubashi University because it is a university where students

can study not just management but also marketing, accounting, finance and all other areas of commerce, and above all where students can study freely. Having received this recommendation from my advisor, I also asked a Japanese acquaintance I have known



Commemorative graduation photograph at the Shine Mongol Secondary School.

Together with friends and teachers from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies where I studied for the first year after arriving in Japan six years ago. On this day, I presented a Mongolian folk dance.



since childhood about Hitotsubashi University and received more advice. When I finally informed my father of the choice I had reached after so much deliberation, he just said, "If it is a university in Tokyo, it should be all right." [laughs] It's not surprising he would reassure me in that way—Hitotsubashi University is not well known in Mongolia.

Although I had finally made my decision I was, to be honest, still anxious. But those uncertain feelings disappeared with my first finance lecture. That is because I was overwhelmed by the high level of the lecture. Also I was shocked to see students who looked as if they were sleeping during the lecture. At first I thought it was a terrible waste, but in fact the students were neither loafing nor sleeping. They had already studied the content of the day's lecture, and were resting and listening to confirm if their understanding was correct. I was surprised but also strongly spurred on by the high level of awareness of such students.

I came to feel very lucky that I had entered Hitotsu-

bashi University. That is because my aspiration became clear: I thought that if I received high-quality education from outstanding teachers and worked hard to catch up and surpass highly focused students, I might become an excellent manager. I am proud to say I spared no efforts in working toward this goal, and as a result I received awards from the university president three times. In the past I was always comparing myself with others and working hard so I would not lose to them. But in this learning process, I came to realize that the true rival I should be comparing myself to is myself, and that it is when I surpass myself that I really grow. There are some Japanese students and international students in Japan who just want to play while they are at university or in Japan. It is understandable that they might think this way since the Japanese students will have little time for fun once they become employed, and the international students have only a limited time in Japan. However, there are also international students, not only myself, who do not think that way. Because we are studying abroad, many of us want to study hard, learn a lot, become outstanding professionals, and contribute to the development of our countries. Regardless, people have their respective goals and purposes in becoming university students or studying abroad, and that is only natural. I believe what is important is to think about your goals and what you want to gain, and then work hard to achieve them.

## Japanese People Have Unseen Barriers

From my first year in Japan I began to do occasional part-time work as a mover or in factories at night. I came into contact with and learned about various aspects of Japanese society that I could not know from just studying at school. In that sense, I was able to lead a very rich life studying abroad. Yet I also felt I was lacking something in my daily life. While the international students could easily break the ice with each other and become friends, it was not easy to make friends with Japanese students. I then felt that the Japanese must have some unseen barriers. Of course,

we exchanged greetings and had daily conversation with Japanese students, and they invited us to go out for fun. Yet even when we were enjoying ourselves together and the distance between us had shrunk, the next day that sense of distance would return. This may be a sort of shyness in the Japanese people, but it leaves non-Japanese with a sense of puzzlement and discomfort. Of course, I have many Japanese friends today, and I have also made some close

friendships. Looking back, I realize that what I perceived as a sort of barrier is in fact an expression of the shyness of the Japanese people and also their consider-



Seminar taught by Professor Takashi Misumi, which I still belong to (together with Professor Misumi and fellow students).



Commemorative photo taken with my best friend (left) and two junior students (second from left, and right) when I received the award for excellence in academic performance.

I invited my family for my bachelor's degree graduation: together with my parents and my older brother and his wife.



ation for others. Yet I do think that for a foreigner to become close friends with a Japanese takes time and effort by the foreigner to fit in. From my own experience I think that narrowing the distance slowly, a little at a time, is important in building close relations with Japanese people.

## ***I Want to Take the Spirit of Consideration for Others Back to Mongolia***

It is now my sixth year in Japan, and my time studying here has made me change in various ways. The greatest change is that I now take time to think carefully. I was originally straightforward and impulsive, and tended to act without thinking first about the consequences. While studying and living in Japan, I have adopted the habit of thinking carefully before acting.

In the July of my first year here, I suddenly realized one day that I was not doing anything I would consider important. Three months had passed before I knew it, and what had I done during that time? I felt very strongly that this was unacceptable. So I set a time every Saturday to think about where I was on the path to my goals, what I was able to do for those around me, and what parts of myself were inadequate. That practice has proved very fruitful. I think setting aside time to look at myself and to think has made me grow more than anything else.

Another benefit I have gained from studying in Japan is that I now make an effort to think about and give precedence to those around me. Even today I am still learning from Japanese the importance of acting with consideration and giving thought to others. I think this characteristic is a wonderful virtue of the Japanese people not found in Mongolians, who are relatively individualistic. I really want to absorb this thoroughly and take it back to Mongolia.

My earlier goal of starting a for-profit business has changed through my studies in Japan. I now seek to ensure the success of social businesses in Mongolia, as advocated by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist who founded a bank to

assist the poor. In part this is because I identify with the idea of contributing to the ultimate goal of the resolution of social problems while generating suitable profits, and feel its potential.

As a step toward realizing my goal, I will be employed by an investment bank in Japan from next spring. There I plan to gain the abilities and experience to become a full-fledged investment banker, leave a performance record which will more than justify the bank's efforts in training me, and return to my homeland Mongolia. Then I hope to use the experience gained at the investment bank to launch my own social business while helping other companies grow.

It may take 10 years, 20 years, or even longer to accomplish this. Regardless, I intend to keep pushing forward toward this goal. In Mongolia, students from the first generation to study in Japan are beginning to demonstrate their abilities as the core of society. With their efforts, our social infrastructure will gradually be developed. After I return to Mongolia, I plan to collaborate with these pioneers and contribute to the development of our country.

## ***Let's Become Internationalists Who Think for the World, beyond Borders***

I think studying abroad is an opportunity to face oneself. I really feel that examining yourself objectively in the context of a foreign culture and thinking deeply provides the greatest opportunity to make yourself grow.

As a volunteer, I now take part in activities to help Japanese children understand different cultures. In the last 10 minutes of each class I show the children the globe I always keep on my desk, which I brought from Mongolia. This globe is a gift that my grandmother, who was a doctor when she was young, gave me when it was decided that I would go to Japan. It carries my grandmother's message to become a person who can transcend national boundaries and think for the world. I cherish this globe. I show it to the children and we exchange promises to all become people who can think for the entire world.

Together with my grandmother who gave me my treasured globe and my grandfather who supported me in living for the sake of my family instead of becoming a doctor.



I achieved my cherished goal of climbing to the summit of Mt. Fuji in July 2013 together with Mongolian friends.