

Once in a lifetime journey, I have made a perfect decision

Division of dysphagia rehabilitation Sirima Kulvanich



I was born in Phuket, the largest rainforested, mountainous island of Thailand, as known as the “Pearl of the Andaman Sea”, the historic port city where many ethnic groups of people from Asian, Arabian and European countries had passed through for centuries and created the unique cultures that may not find in other cities in Thailand.

I spent my childhood in a small seaside city not far from my hometown for several years before I moved to Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, to continue studying. In 2016, I received my DDS degree from Thammasat University and continued to work there as one of the faculty staff in the division of gerodontology.

One day, I was discussing about studying abroad with my supervisor when she asked me how do I think about doing a Ph.D. in Japan. By that time, I had very few ideas about studying in Japan, and it was not on my list in the first place, so I hesitated to follow her suggestion. But after I had a chance to join the Sakura Science Program and visit Niigata University, my point of view has changed. I found that there are interesting curriculums that I think I could hardly see in dental schools in other countries, especially dysphagia rehabilitation, so I decided to come, and this is the way

my journey to Japan has begun.

I started to learn some basic Japanese while waiting to apply to Niigata University. After one year and a half, I got accepted into the division of dysphagia rehabilitation, and the acceptance letter came just in perfect timing when I also receive the full scholarship granted by the Thai government.

I remembered that it was on the morning of 24th September 2018 that the Shinkansen I took from Tokyo had arrived at Niigata station, and I saw Prof. Inoue Makoto and a new lovely friend were waiting at the platform, just right in front of the Shinkansen door. It was the first impression that wiped away all my worries from the first day of settling in.

I agree on the same things as many foreigners would say, Japan is rich in traditional cultures that blended perfectly into modern life. It was fascinating to see young



Night scenery of my hometown in Phuket

Japanese people wearing traditional clothes walking along the streets at night, people celebrating festivals with traditional dance and music, not to mention the delicate Japanese foods that reflect their own identity.

I also found that Japan has a lot of charming places to get impressed by, especially natural attractions, most of them are breath-taking. Another thing that I love the most while living in Japan is the seasonal change which is not so apparent in Thailand. Not just only because of the beautiful scenery in each season that we can enjoy, but it also gives me the feeling of the new beginning each time it changes.

If I would talk about people, two things that I found very interesting in Japan are the super-politeness of people and the social order. The way that Japanese people know their place in society and work smoothly together toward the goal is admirable.

I can not fully say that my life in Japan has passed smoothly. Indeed, for one who stays 3,000 miles away from home, not familiar with different cultures, had a hard time adapting to Niigata's weather and struggled with communication, homesickness did occur. But with all the support from my professor, instructors, and friends who have helped me going through tough times, at the end of my first year, I can wholeheartedly call Niigata my second home.

I always look back to the day that I decided to come to Japan and pursue my degree here. It was one of the biggest challenges in my life. Until now, I still have a lot

of things to learn here, though it is tough sometimes, but just as Roy T. Bennett once mentioned in his book, *The Light in the Heart*, said that "You never change your life until you step out of your comfort zone; change begins at the end of your comfort zone." I am sure that I have made the perfect decision.



The stunning natural scenery in Nagano prefecture



With the gerodontology team in Thammasat University