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What was your initial motivation to come to Japan?

Talking about my initial motivation coming to Japan, the time goes back to when I was an undergraduate in my country. As our neighbor, Japan had been well-known for its highly developed economy and society. For me, besides that, its advanced technology in civil engineering became familiar and impressive when I took courses of lectures. I started to know self-compacting concrete, which was invented in The University of Tokyo, in the course of construction materials. The longest suspension spanned bridge in the world, Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, attracted me, in the course of bridge engineering. Lubuge Dam, the first dam in China constructed by Japanese company (Taisei Corp.) in 1980s, was known as an excellent case of project management in our textbook. During my master's study, I did research in the field of concrete materials. Reading literatures, I learned more about the progress and advance of research and technology in this field in Japan. I realized that if I would pursue higher education, Japan might be a good choice for me. My university had a joint program with The University of Tokyo. Several applicants could be selected for doctoral course in the University of Tokyo and offered scholarship. The program was English-based. I decided to apply for the program, and fortunately succeeded in the screening.

What were the positive and negative aspects of your academic experience? How did your academic experience affect your decision to stay in Japan? What aspects of the academic environment helped you in acquiring a job?

I was enrolled in the doctoral course of the Department of Civil Engineering, The University of Tokyo, in October, 2007. Under the supervision of Prof. Tetsuya Ishida, I carried out my doctoral research on the multi-scale modeling of concrete materials, and obtained my Ph.D. degree in 2010. I was impressed that The University of Tokyo was very international, featuring graduate courses given in English and many foreign students in the graduate school. Japanese students also took the graduate courses in English. Research resources in English were abundant. I could find almost all the papers I needed in the library and database. English summary and abstract were also provided in most of Japanese papers and technical reports. Even if my Japanese ability was very limited, I did not have any language problem in communication and research on the campus. Besides, I also started to take courses of Japanese language. This helped me a lot to learn Japanese culture, and eventually became helpful for my current job. My career plan was to become a researcher in an academic institution. I felt satisfied with the academic environment of Japan, and realized that working here could be a good choice for me. Therefore, after I obtained my Ph.D. degree, I decided to stay in my laboratory as a postdoc research fellow to continue my research. During that period, despite that English was my main working language, I felt that some Japanese ability would be helpful for my career. Therefore, I attempted to write articles and make presentations in Japanese. Meanwhile, I kept on attending career forums, and searching for recruiting information of position in academic institutions. My supervisor also gave me a lot of advice and support kindly. In 2013, after succeeding in the screening, I obtained a position as an assistant professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Saitama University.

What sort of work are you doing at your current job? How would you describe your interaction and relationship with your coworkers? Have you experienced any issues or problems thus far in your work environment?

As a faculty member in Saitama University, my work mainly involves education and research. At present, I give three courses of lectures to undergraduate students. Each year, I give instructions to 2 or 3 students for their theses of bachelor's degree. Those lectures and instructions are done in Japanese. The department affairs, for example faculty meetings, are also conducted in Japanese. The graduate education in our department, on the other hand, features an international program consisting of academic courses in English. Through the program, every year more than 20 foreign students, most of whom are offered scholarship, are enrolled in the master's and doctoral courses, accounting for a half of the total graduate students. Our staffs give the graduate courses of lectures as well as the instruction for thesis in English. As to me, except for that, I am engaged in dealing with international student affairs, involving recruiting, screening and supporting their daily life on the campus. Every day I communicate with other staffs and students in English or Japanese, under given situations. I am satisfied with this environment, and often feel inspired and motivated. Our students are diligent and smart. They strive to study and grow up every day. Despite cultural difference, foreign students become familiar with Japanese culture, and achieve fruitful results during their studies in Japan. Japanese students, despite being shy and modest, expand their visions of international through the communication with foreign students. All of the staff members are kind and willing to help. At the beginning, I was not confident with my Japanese ability, particularly when giving courses and dealing with department affairs. My colleagues encouraged me and gave me a lot of support.

Based on your experience, what sort of support is necessary from universities or other organizations to help foreign students who want to stay and work in Japan? What should foreign students do if they are interested in staying and working in Japan?

At present, with the promotion of globalized education, more positions in academic institution are opened for foreigners. Meanwhile, many Japanese companies start to recruit foreign students. Support of acquiring employment for foreign students, from government, society, companies and universities, is also much strengthened. For example, The University of Tokyo periodically organizes career forums for companies and foreign students, strengthening their communication and providing potential opportunities of employment. Saitama Prefecture established the Saitama Center for Go Global Students to support acquiring employment, and Saitama University is actively involved in the cooperation. On the other hand, for foreign students graduating from English program, the biggest challenge is their Japanese language ability, especially in written form. Although working environments that are bilingual or English-based are increasing, some Japanese ability is very helpful when working with their colleagues. A possible support from universities or societies, in my own opinion, is to provide some basic course or training of Japanese ability towards employment rather than that only for daily life. As to foreign students who are willing to work in Japan, they shall actively take the course or training, to make them prepared for acquiring employment. For employers in particular companies, with the coordination of universities, they shall provide regular internships to foreign students, to strengthen the understanding of each other and get preparation for the formal recruitment.