

It was certainly a formidable task for me, when I was requested to do a write-up on my experience in Japan in a mere few hundred words. My trip to Japan was like a dream-come-true for me, and it definitely deserves a more comprehensive summary of what I saw and did over there. Nonetheless, due to constraints and for the fact that I do not wish to bore potential readers of this article, I shall narrow down to just one aspect from all of my experiences in the foreign land, and that is, cultural shock.



▲ Drifting glaciers at Abashiri, Hokkaidō

The old adage goes: *Do as the Romans do*. I believed in that, and I tried to follow the Japanese customs while I was over there, but it took me more than a month before I finally feel accustomed to the cultural differences in Japan. To begin with, there was the golden rule whereby one has to categorize the trash he wants to dispose of, and then look for the appropriate trash can or rubbish bin (e.g. combustibles, incombustibles, etc.) before he can finally get rid of the trash. In sub-urban areas, this process of “looking for the right bin” can take up to over twenty minutes; those international students who just can’t be bothered simply threw the trash they had into any bin they chance upon, while others like me who chose to “do what the Japanese do” either store all the trash in a



▲ Kiccoro and Morizo from Aichi Exposition 2005

plastic bag till we find the “right bin” or we limit our trash production to the very minimum. The other cultural shock which had indeed blown my mind initially was the allowance of smoking in air-conditioned restaurants. By the way, Japan is also known as the “land of cheap cigarettes and beer” and that explains why there is a need to permit smoking even in dining areas. One of my Japanese acquaintances had even asserted that cigarettes go well with beer, but for non-smokers like me, I had to bear with the cigarette smoke the whole time. Anyway, I got used to it in a matter of weeks. Last but not least, I was appalled at the amount of noise produced at the train stations – the blowing of train whistles, the shouting of station attendants, the repetitious public address system, and so on. It was very disturbing initially when I couldn’t get used to it, as it has always been my habit to read while traveling, and the symphony of noises never failed to disrupt my concentration. But if we look at the bright side, the train station is a special place where one can experience the liveliness and bustling activities of Japan, and once that person gets used to that, he can be considered to have successfully assimilated himself into the Japanese way of life.

Before I end off here, I would like to extend my grateful thanks to the Department of Japanese Studies for giving me the opportunity to be sent to Japan. The trip had changed me, both internally and exteriorly – and somehow I feel that I have matured via living independently and meeting people from all over the world. Even up to today, I would always recommend my fellow peers to pay Japan a visit if they haven’t done so before, because I believe that whatever they experience over there will certainly leave a lasting impression for the rest of their lives.



By **Wu Junxiang**

