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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



2016 JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR SPECIALISTS IN CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC FIELDS (SHORT-TERM) BY LIN LI

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Though it feels like I just arrived in Tajiri-cho last week, our program has already come to an end. I have benefited a lot from the Japanese Language Program for Specialists in Cultural and Academic Fields (two-month course). Here, I would like to focus on three of its most impressive aspects.

First, the Kansai center has a unique way of organizing courses. Before participating in this program, I took Japanese language courses at two different North American universities where students were divided into different levels and take courses corresponding to that level. For example, if one is placed into the advanced level, they are supposed to take advanced courses on speaking, writing, and reading. The problem with this method is that even while one's spoken Japanese may be of the advanced level, their writing or reading ability may be at a lower level. Grouping students into one level tends to neglect the fact that various aspects of language acquisition are often balanced. By contrast, our courses at the Kansai center were designated according to a comprehensive assessment of students' linguistic capabilities. For example, I am much better at writing and reading than speaking and listening, so consequently I was placed into the advanced reading and writing courses but intermediate conversation courses. In my opinion, this is indeed an excellent way of organizing courses as it takes account students' strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, people with the same linguistic background tend to make certain mistakes when learning Japanese. For example, as a native Chinese, when I see Kanji I often subconsciously use Chinese pronunciations to read them. It was not until my instructor Todai sensei pointed this out that I began to realize the problem with my pronunciation. When language instructors have a good command of individual linguistic group's features, language learners can benefit greatly.



Third, as a program dedicated to cultivating specialists and researchers, we had a course called "Specialist Reading" where we got to choose readings of our own interest and read them during individual meetings with instructors. This kind of individually tailored language course is quite rare at North American universities. During this class, I read several articles relevant to my dissertation and have benefited greatly from it.

I enjoyed my time at the Kansai Center and deeply appreciate the effort the instructors have put into our courses and individual meetings. I want to thank our instructors for their hard work in the past two months and for making CA2 an unforgettable experience.

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