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Research Internship to prepare a "Master Thesis" at Okayama University - South-West Japan (5 months from March 2020)

- Interview conducted in Okayama by Pr. CHENEVIER ** on May 27th - 2020 -

** Research Director at CNRS and currently on secondment since April 2014 at Okayama University where he is responsible for the international development of Research activities.

NB: the stay took place during the Covid-19 pandemic period

My interest in Japan

I come from a family that is very open to the international, for reasons related to my father's profession (dermatologist, researcher at the University of Lyon -I), which has allowed me to travel a lot. Like many young people of my generation, I was immersed as soon as my childhood in pop culture and in particular that of Japan: (manga, video games, animated films ...). Japan's reputation for cultural originality has always puzzled me and my interest in this country is therefore recurrent. Even more recurrent since I became aware of the profound similarity of Western cultural patterns, especially during a tourist visit to Australia.

Motivations and preliminary contacts with Okayama University

Because of my interest in Japan and my strong wish to gain more professional experience there, I decided to perform my PFE (Master Thesis) internship for 5 to 6 months, in a research team in Japan. The successful experience in Okayama University of other ESISAR students (eg E. Pouget: "I really enjoyed it") convinced me to initiate contacts. Through B. Chenevier, I was able to quickly exchange with Pr. Z. Yücel from the Graduate School of Natural Science and Technology -- Department of Computer Science. In a few days I was able to have a SKYPE interview and finally my application was provisionally accepted. In total the preliminary phase did not last more than 2 weeks.



Internship application process

I selected an Internship ("Gaze investigations in correlations with motivations") from a list of topics provided by Pr. Chenevier. To obtain the agreement of ESISAR for my project, I filled a few administrative documents without major obstacle.

About the Visa for a study period in Japan: at the end of the validation of my Internship application, I received the CoE (Certificate of Eligibility) which I presented to the Consulate of Japan in Lyon. In less than 7 days I obtained a 6 month "work" visa.

For the trip to Japan I used a LuftHansa / ANA flight ticket from Lyon to Okayama via Munich and Haneda. My return flight is currently scheduled for August 2, if the border opening situation will then have normalized.

NB: if the situation does not return to normal before August, I'll be delighted to keep on staying in Japan for another few weeks...

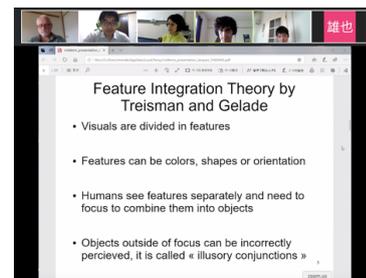


Financial support

For financial support, I benefited from family support which proved to be sufficient because the room rent is low if we compare it to the prices of Valence or Lyon. Likewise, the cost of life in general in Okayama is low.

Internship - Practical features

My research internship was entitled "Gaze investigations in correlations with motivations". I had to analyze the results of an experiment where individuals interact with objects while their looks are being recorded. The ultimate goal is to recreate the attention process. And model it using software - Development on Python was the main objective of the project



Zoom session of my Mid-Term presentation - May-18th 2020

** Pr. Yücel is very attentive. During meetings, she is very professional and takes care of understanding my arguments

** Presentation of the main results of my work: Apart from the almost daily work meetings, I had the opportunity to present my work 1 time at the mid-

term of my stay, in Zoom session. 1 final presentation will be organized towards the end of July.

**** Master Thesis (PFE) preparation:**

I expected more coding. There is a lot, but the psychology part which deals with the attention mechanism is not negligible, which adds additional depth to the subject

My daily life in the time of "Corona".

Housing at the Kuwa-no-ki (桑の木: mulberry tree) residence: initially my room was rather small. Very clean and rather modern style. The size of the kitchen corner was however a little limited.

The distance between the lab and the residence can be covered in less than 10 minutes by bike: exceptional in Japan !!

The implementation of "Corona" working conditions at Okayama University required me to move from my initial room. The new and present one is wider and more comfortable. A small balcony is also available. For all, the fee is quite reasonable (about 180euros/month, gaz consumption not included). Western style bed, Japanese style bathroom. The kitchen corner is convenient and allowed me to prepare some small and tasty meals.

The university canteen: I actually enjoyed it. For about the same price as the U restaurant in France, you can easily get a balanced meal: miso soup, meat (chicken or pork most often), sometimes fish, fresh and / or cooked vegetables. The meal can even include a dessert.

Due to the epidemic, gatherings being prohibited, I did not often have the opportunity to interact with students during "parties" or other outings. I was able to attend the University graduation event around the end of March. It was quite funny because the formal feature of the ceremony contrasted with the circumstances (ten people in the lab room where we used to work)

My work with Pr. Yücel: at the start of my stay I went to the lab. When the state of emergency was extended to the whole territory from the beginning / mid-April, I switched to telework, a period which should end in a week. Prime Minister S. Abe announced the end of the state of emergency across Japan a few days ago.

Most foreigners left before the borders closed.

As a matter of conclusion :

This internship brought me a lot especially in terms of teamwork. In particular, I interacted with my colleagues who were not working on the same subject as me. This diversity generated many new ideas.

a - At work - "Telework" in Japan :

**** Pr. Yücel is very international - We exchanged with a frequency of 2 times a week and now almost every day (sessions have variable duration but usually 15-20mn). These meetings give a certain rhythm to the working day.**

**** Overall, Japanese style confinement is much easier to afford than in France: you can go out when you want without being constantly requested a certificate or restrictions on the duration of the trip and other**

b - Highlights :

Although I have not been able to visit much of Okayama surroundings, I enjoyed a lot the local landscapes: very green, lots of open spaces, the general atmosphere of the city is pleasantly exotic. I also visited Kora-Kuen known as the 3rd most magnificent garden in Japan ! And I could take part in a "Sakura-Hanami" with colleagues on campus.

However I could not enjoy my stay as much as I would have liked

Recommendations:

**** The internship also allowed me to develop my initiative skills. Prof. Yücel often gave me simple and general overviews to explore and left me complete freedom to carry out this research.**



** Professional: at the opposite of usual ideas which circulate frequently in the West, the professional atmosphere is quite relaxed, at least between the students of the lab. However the relationship with the hierarchy is very formal, more than what we are used to with usual management methods in France.

** Apply as early as possible (for example Sept or October for a departure in February / March): there is a lot of administration and it takes a substantial time.

** Have a bike: theft and damage concerns are absent, and it is very easy to go everywhere. Streets are designed for bikes, not for cars like in France.

** Introduce yourself and discuss with the "Resident Advisors": there is 1 per floor, Japanese, who speaks English. They are of great help in overcoming any kind of problems that may arise.

Future perspectives : I plan to return to Japan in a near future. At least for a tourist stay. And maybe make a VIE (Volontariat International en Entreprise) in an IT (Informatics) company.