

As a PEN-International Student Ambassador

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I visited the United States in the March prior to my visit to China and learned about the deaf education system in America and American deaf people's perspective on their deafness. Because of the impact of this experience on me, I came to be more interested in student exchanges with deaf students all over the world. This sounds exaggerated, but I finally understood the meaning of being deaf for the first time during this visit in the U.S, since I was mainstreamed for all of my life up to high school. Until I came to China, I was ashamed of myself being a deaf person, and wanted to live my life as 'a hearing person'. However, I learned about the positive attitude of American deaf people. As a student ambassador sent to China by PEN, I wanted to see not only the American experience, but also what deaf people's lives in China are like. My main goal for this student exchange was to understand Chinese deaf people's points of views regarding their deafness and their lifestyles.

As this was my first visit to China, I was really curious what China was like. One thing I was surprised by is that China as a country is huge. The roads were wide, traffic was heavy, and there are plenty of roads for cars, bicycle, and pedestrians. However, there were some people who were riding bicycles or walking on the road with the cars, and I saw some people who ignored traffic lights. Also, various aspects of Chinese culture fascinated me as well.

I was able to see Chinese deaf education system with my own eyes through the visits to Tianjin Technical College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology and the deaf school in Beijing. The oral method was mainly used at the deaf institutes in China similar to Japan, and sign language was used to avoid communication break down. When I saw that China used the oral education method, I assumed that Chinese might feel ashamed of themselves as deaf people. However, there were several schools that integrated deaf and hearing students together. At this kind of school, students used sign language for communication, and I was hardly able to distinguish whether a student was hearing or not. Chinese deaf education is very similar to Japan, however, I was

really impressed with the system that allows deaf students to learn along with other fellow hearing students, since this helps deaf and hearing students to learn about the difference between each other and has a positive impact on both of groups for their future.

I was confused sometimes since Chinese students tried to communicate with me in Chinese, even though I don't know Chinese very well. When I tried to communicate in English, I still wasn't able to communicate with them very well because some of them weren't able to understand English. So, I tried to communicate through a book (Chinese – Japanese travel conversation book) that I purchased in Japan. Then, the students there taught me Chinese Sign Language with the sentences from the book. There were some signs that are similar to Japanese ones; however, some of them were really different. It was a quite good experience for me. In the end, I really realized that China has had a very deep historic impact on Japanese culture.

Finally, as I described above, I asked how Chinese deaf people view their deafness. They answered me that, "At first, I wasn't able to accept myself as a deaf person positively due to the communication break down with the people, however, right now, I am able to accept myself as a deaf person better. There are some advantages of being deaf such as I can spend my daily life without loud noise pollution. Also, I was able to meet you who is Japanese and deaf since I am deaf, so I am really happy about that." As I was told this, I was really impressed by their positive attitudes toward deafness.

As PEN-International project continues, there will be more need for understanding the various cultures of each country that participates in the project. For example, Chinese deaf people weren't able to communicate with the fellow Japanese and American students since they weren't able to understand English. It's easier for Japanese students to communicate with Chinese, since we use languages that are similar; however, American students get completely lost at times since they don't know either Japanese or Chinese. Therefore, to solve this issue, there is a need to have an experience for each group to share its own culture with others. Since English is used as a world standard language, it would be a great idea for America to teach Japanese and Chinese students English through the network. To establish a strong PEN-International, we need to

eliminate the language barrier. I hope there will be more opportunities for deaf students to participate in this kind of wonderful student exchange in the future, and hope there will be an ideal university that all the deaf students from the world can learn together in harmony.