

REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO - A.A.
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Testo

After six months spent in Chiba I am proud to say that these last 6 months were the best so far. I have decided to come Japan because I have always been fascinated by Japan and its culture, an incredible mix between the past and the future, where the history of a great nation merge with the future.

Choosing Japan was easy for several reasons. First, I've decided to stay away from home, in a totally different cultural context, where all my usual habits could completely change and test myself, as an adult. Second, but more important, my bachelor degree at Milano Politecnico was Product Design while the master one was Design & Engineering. Japan is a great example of product design: several international companies are Japanese, a lot of our every-day products are designed there, in the Land of the Rising Sun. Canon, Nikon, Toshiba, Fujitsu, Sony, Seiko, Epson, Honda, Toyota and so on are just few examples of how important is the Japanese contribution to Product Design.

For me, it was a unique occasion and an incredible opportunity to catch: spending six months in direct contact with this country and learning as much as possible, not just about Product Design, but also about Japan and its way to interpret design.

I have chosen Chiba University for several reasons. In 2014 I took part in a workshop at Polimi, organized by Chiba University, Toshiba and Polimi itself. That occasion was the first contact I had with Chiba University and its student: I was very surprised by their know-how and their idea of how to study and express design. In that circumstance, I was been able to talk to some students about Chiba University, and during those chats I convinced myself that Japan and Chiba were the perfect choice for me.

During my bachelor degree, I decided to stay at Polimi because I have always been sure that my university was one of the top in the field of design: Nonetheless, I started thinking about doing an exchange program abroad for the last semester of my Master degree, since I just had to do an optional course and an internship. This was the best decision so far, because I had the chance to improve throughout the years at Polimi, leaving the last semester to see how prepared I was for a new experience and test my abilities in a different country.

Chiba University was perfect.

I have arrived in Japan in March, classes did not start until April, so during the first month I was able to settle in this totally different context. Even if I had only two courses (optional course and internship) to cover for my Italian study plan, I decided to join six different classes, all of them with different themes and different outputs.

Chiba University is very different from Polimi. The university is organized in a different way, there are several faculties with their own courses, but also courses that are shared. I was in Design Management, focusing on Product but also Service Design. Design Management was characterized by having not so many students, around 30/35, among who many had studied abroad, therefore it was quite easy to communicate in English.

As I said, I joined in several classes, six, that ranged from Communication Design to Product Design and theoretical classes. More specifically, I followed these classes: Design Meanings, Design Research Methods, Communication Design, Product and Branding Design, Chiba Prefecture Souvenir Design and KORG Design.

Design Meanings

Design Meanings was a class divided into two parts. The first part of the semester focused on "how to make something disappear". More in details, we had to re-design an existing product, but trying to hide its function or to look at it from a different perspective. In this project, called Cashow, we've decided to re-design a normal credit card with a new shape. User can insert paper money and other card between our re-designed credit card and all the wallet's contents are safely fastened inside the new wallet.

In the second part of the semester, we had to design for an exhibition about Alzheimer disease, held in England. We had to design and produce ten products that reflect a story that was given to us from an Alzheimer association: the story focused on a Scottish postman that currently lives in England. We produced ten wooden smoking pipes characterized by a detachable mouthpiece that can be used as a pen, and the pipe's hole as a note holder.

Design Research Methods

The aim of the course was how to set up a design research using different methods and techniques.

Each student had to do a research on a classmate (without his knowing it), using different "tools" such as a photo-diary, cultural probes, research through the Internet. The final delivery was to produce a gift based on this research. In my case, I designed for my classmate a chopstick holder (made by MDF and acrylic using laser cut) and wooden chopstick. This product was the result of an analysis about all my classmates' habits and behavior that I had been collecting during the semester.

Communication Design

Aim of the course: create nine pictograms for Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. This course was individual and we had to design nine pictograms that reflected Japan and its culture.

In my pictograms I've decided to focus on two different themes: colors of Japan (black and red, derived from the Samurai culture), and Shodo, the typical Japanese calligraphy. For each pictogram I've decided to show the movement and the balance of the sport action, trying to explain the movement and harmony of it.

Product and Branding Design

Aim of the course: design product by applying the design language of a brand. In Product Design and Branding course I've had to design a new set of home product, like drip coffee maker, toaster

and kettle. Each student had to present several sketching that showed different design solutions for these products. In addition it was necessary to create a brand for them (including a logo, a motto and a name). Moreover, it was asked to make a raw mock-up to understand better shape and proportions. In my case, I designed a set of home product characterized by some guide lines that repeated in each product. In addition, I decided to create a 3D model of them.

Chiba Prefecture Souvenir Design

Aim of the course: create a graphic solution for paper bags that will be used to promote Chiba Prefecture during events. In this course I have proposed different solutions that reflected interesting points of Chiba. I have decided to work on different meanings: some solution focused on "Chiba" Japanese meaning (thousand leaves), so I've designed bags that, in my idea, can reflect it. Another solution was focused on trying to show Chiba as a dynamic city (using the famous Chiba Monorail).

KORG Design

Aim of the course: design new gadget related with music and sounds. The course focused also on making a prototyping of the idea.

In this course I have designed a game for kids between 3 and 5 years old, called Examusic. Examusic is an hexagonal polyhedron, characterized by having a speaker inside that has a simple loop jingle. Every Examusic modulus has different jingle and kids can compose their own songs by putting these modulus one after the other. Every modulus has two buttons, one for start/stop and one for pause and two LED.

For this course I also made a simple prototype using Arduino for the coding part to better explain my idea.

From the academic point of view I have to say that Polimi's education the best one so far. Polimi standards are very high, and I was able to see this difference during presentations of projects: sometimes the final output of the other students were not very well made, even if the concept was interesting. In my opinion, thanks to this exchange program, I was able to discover how good Polimi is. On the other side, I was surprised to discover how good and stimulating was Chiba University environment. Working all together all the time in the same room, with perfect facilities was awesome: I had never been so happy to work on projects, even if sometimes was tough, because it felt more like a big family than a normal class.

In addition, many projects had a real output. For example as far as Chiba Souvenir Project is concerned, the bags will be produced and sold next year. For me, this was a unique occasion to work on something that will be real. Moreover KORG Design was a course held by a designer that currently works for KORG, one the leader companies in the music area.

Even the relations between students and teachers were completely different: it was more confidential and friendly and this help a lot for the good result of a project.

For a Western student, I think, sometimes is not easy to study in Japan: classes are organized in a slightly different way. Most of the times projects are individual, without a theoretical part, only presentation. In addition, having a Japanese teacher is very interesting. Japan has a different culture, where it is not common to say directly if something is not correct. It sometimes can be frustrating trying to understand what the teacher want and what part of the project we have to change. I discovered this aspect especially in KORG class.

I think this is the only negative point of this experience, but is related more to Japanese culture than the university itself.

From the human point of view, instead, Chiba was perfect as well. I met many new friends, who had same interests as mine. I joined a basketball club inside the university, I participated to several events with my classmates, we made trips all together with our teachers, and so on.

Chiba University has infinite occasions to have fun, socialize and improve your skills and abilities as well,. It is only up to you to catch those moments, and make your exchange experience the best thing you can have. Everyone is ready to help you any time, language barrier does not exist: Japanese people will try to help you as much as they can and even more even if they have do not speak English.

I left Japan with the belief that this country gave me everything, in the best possible way.

I truly recommend Japan and in particular Chiba University to all those students who want to try something completely new, something that they will bring with them all life long and something that is amazing.

Autorizzo al trattamento dei miei dati personali ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n. 196/03 da parte del Politecnico di Milano.

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