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I became fascinated with exploring foreign languages when I learned about the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which proposes that language shapes how people perceive and think about the world. Growing up bilingual, I recognized this idea in my own life and became curious to study other languages, like French in high school and then Japanese when I entered UC San Diego. I chose Japanese because I was interested in learning a non-Latin writing system and its many linguistic and cultural nuances. Additionally, my mother's fondness for *Sailor Moon* gave me an early familiarity with Japanese popular media, which made my later study of the language feel both enjoyable and meaningful.

What I enjoyed and appreciated most about studying Japanese Studies was the opportunities that it led me to. I enjoyed speaking with professors, making long-term friends within the language classes, and diversifying my learning and engagement with Japanese culture through other courses such as film, art, and history. My favorite non-language courses were LTEA 138: Japanese Films and JAPN 190: Research Seminar - A Study of Director Kurosawa's Films, both taught by Professor Daisuke Miyao. Dissecting and discussing the films, particularly within the historical and social context in which they were created, was stimulating and enjoyable.

Additionally, the most life-changing experience studying Japanese has created for me is studying abroad in Fall 2023 at International Christian University (ICU), located in Tokyo, Japan. Each day was new and fascinating, being able to immerse myself in the language, art, and history beyond the classroom. I also forged meaningful connections by participating in Glocal Mitaka, a volunteer partnership between international students and the local Japanese community. My favorite memories include reading books with Japanese children and their families, visiting the Ghibli Museum with them, and karaoke with the other volunteers. I was most proud of myself when I was able to hold a conversation with some of the children and parents! Another fond memory is meeting Ayane in person and traveling with her, the friend I made through the UCSD & ICU Language Buddies Program.

In addition to opportunities and experiences, Japanese Studies helped me create a supportive network of people, those I turn to as I continue to navigate life post-graduation. Professionally, learning another language has strengthened my ability to communicate effectively about complex topics with diverse populations. In my personal time, I enjoy practicing reading untranslated manga to learn new kanji and linguistic nuances.

My message to current students is: don't be afraid to be curious and spontaneous, as it will lead you to life-changing experiences and connections. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to study abroad during my time at UC San Diego because of COVID. So, when the opportunity arose, joining my friends to study in Japan turned out to be the best spontaneous decision I ever made. I highly recommend studying abroad to experience the language and culture firsthand!