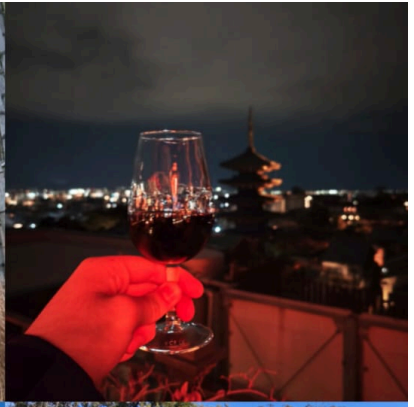


## Okamatsu, Kimura-Steven Scholarship Reflection\_ Kien Ngo

Firstly, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the Okamatsu and Kimura-Steven Families for their generous contribution, which made my dream journey to Japan possible. Additionally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the UC Scholarship Team, the Japanese Department at UC, and the wonderful educators who have guided me—Ogino Sensei, Susan Sensei, Alistair Sensei, Eri Sensei—and to everyone who has supported me throughout this journey, helping me grow in both language and cultural knowledge.

This incredible opportunity allowed me to explore seven remarkable cities in Japan: Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nara, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Fukuoka. Each of these cities broadened my understanding of Japanese culture and deepened my admiration for its people.









During my trip, I encountered several moments of reflection that I would like to share.

### **The Power of Asking**

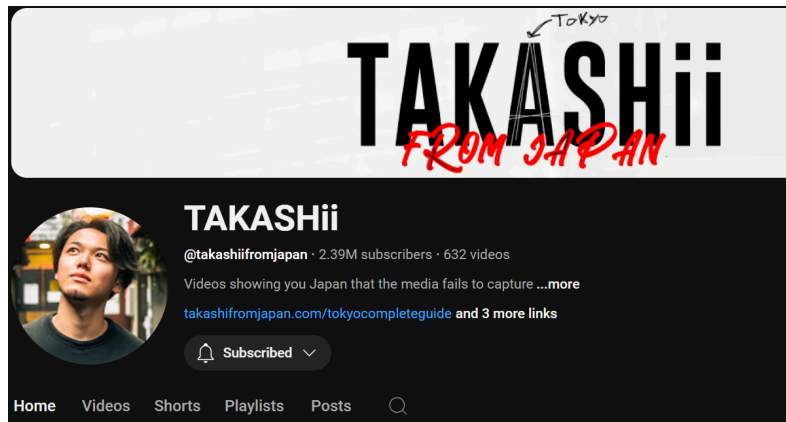
One particular memory that stands out occurred when I was getting my passport stamped at Hanoi's airport before heading to Narita. As a Vietnamese citizen, we no longer receive a stamp in our passport; however, I asked politely if I could still receive one as a token of memory. To my delight, the customs officer graciously agreed, and this simple act of asking became a cherished memento from my journey.



### **A Surprise Encounter**

Another memorable experience happened during an evening stroll in Ueno Park, Tokyo. As I was soaking in the peaceful atmosphere of this bustling city, I unexpectedly bumped into Takashii, a famous Japanese YouTuber whose videos I have frequently watched to aid my Japanese language learning. His insightful interviews with remarkable individuals had always inspired me, and meeting him in person was a surreal moment that reminded me of the beauty of chance encounters.





### **The Practice of Reciprocity and Politeness in Japan**

Unlike past trips, where my family often relied on tour agencies, this trip gave me the unique privilege of experiencing authentic Japanese hospitality, thanks to the kindness of my Japanese friends. Each time I visited their homes, I would bring a gift from Vietnam, accompanied by a handwritten letter in Japanese, which I read aloud to express my gratitude and respect. The reciprocity I received was heartwarming—whether it was being offered a place to stay, shared meals with their families, or even a friend offering to drive me around her hometown of Yokohama before taking me to the airport.





### What Makes Me Want to Return to Japan

There were many small yet significant touches throughout my trip that left a lasting impression. For instance, I was deeply moved by the practice of offering free umbrellas to people who forgot to bring one on rainy days. Additionally, the genuine apology when an order was wrong, and the tireless effort to correct it, demonstrated the level of care and respect for others in everyday interactions. In restaurants, the use of Keigo (polite language) made customers feel valued and respected. I was also greeted with warm energy and a bowl of tea whenever I stayed at hotels—small gestures that made me feel welcomed and appreciated.



In conclusion, my trip to Japan was not only an educational journey but also an experience that deepened my understanding of the culture, language, and people. I am forever grateful for this opportunity and the generosity that made it possible. I look forward to returning to Japan, cherishing all the beautiful memories, and continuing to learn from the incredible lessons it has to offer.