**Distance between Me and the World**

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One meter. Can you guess what this distance means? This is the distance I keep from people in my daily life. 40 centimeters. I only have two close friends. With them, it’s 40 centimeters. The distance has never been shorter because I am not good at interacting with people. Even though I need a large distance from others, a certain book inspired me to step out into the world. The book is called “We still do not know even 1 millimeter of the world.,” and was written by Ohta Hideki. Last spring, I went to Turin, Italy via France for a study abroad program offered by my school. I experienced a homestay, tried Italian foods, went to a world heritage site, and studied cultural differences. Among them, the most interesting thing I observed was the distance between clerks, customers, people, and myself. This overseas experience gave me a new perspective to understand other people and made me realize that the distances between me and people in the world can be much closer than I thought. I would like to share three experiences illustrating the varying distances between me and clerks in this trip.

First, in Turin, when my host mother and I went to a shop, the clerk greeted us naturally and my host mother answered, “Ciao.” I was very surprised at her response because I had never said, “Konnichiwa” in response to the word, “Irasshaimase” in my life. At this moment, I felt that the distance between clerks and customers was very close in Turin.

Second, at a cafe in Turin, the clerk spoke to me in Japanese. I felt happy because he used my native language to welcome me. In this shop, the table counter distance was 50cm between him and me, but I felt much closer to him.

Third, when I tried ordering macarons at a souvenir shop in the airport in Paris, the clerk was rude to me, chattering with another clerk on the other side of the aisle. I felt angry because I had never seen a clerk chattering with others in Japan. At that time, I felt a large distance between me and that clerk, although the physical distance of the showcase was only 50cm, the same distance as Turin’s cafe.

I compared the distance between me and clerks in my hometown to those in Turin and the airport. In my hometown, most shops seem to have the same greeting, the same attitude towards customers, and clerks keep the same distance. I would have never imagined it could be different if I had only lived in Japan, just one country in the world.

After I came back to Japan, I read the book again. I became aware of some changes in my mind. Before I went to Italy, I was interested only in things such as foods, landscapes, and other tourist experiences. I was self-centered and had no interest in people. Now since I have come back, I want to get more involved with others and would like to learn about countries directly from the local people, not from the Internet.

I was not able to change my introverted character only in a week. But this overseas experience made me realize that the distances between me and people in the world are closer than I had ever thought. The book I mentioned ends with the words, “The greatest treasures are encounters with unknown people through the experiences of playing, laughing, studying and talking together.” I understood these words only after my experiences abroad. I can get closer to the world, and want to make my perspective more profound through this experience and my next experience overseas. Thank you.