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## **On my way to Emancipation**

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It was a dark night when I had left my house with a load of luggage. My mom gave me a hug for a while, wishing me luck to the journey ahead of me. Even though I have been lived independently apart from my family since I was 15, this time hit different. I have imagined to study abroad for a long time, but there had been no chance for me. Reality always bites. While I was on the taxi to the airport, I kept thinking how lucky I am. I could have never thought I could explore myself and the world without this much freedom. Freedom is such a novel concept. Or, I would prefer to choose the word, "Emancipation" My whole exchange student in Germany can be described as the moments of "Emancipation". I will explain the very moments in this essay.

At that point, I already had some sense of what I really want to do in the future and planned how to be closer to my dreams. It sounds unrealistic that I had decided my future in my early 20s, and yes, I actually had some abstract and bold goals about my career, which was combating for the Climate Crisis. Since the outbreak of the Covid 19, I have been very concerned about our environment, the society, and the earth system. Immediately, I tried to change little things around my life into more sustainable way and joined the Climate action group of university students. I enjoyed studying and protesting for the better future and feeling solidarity with the youth. However, at some point, Climate grief kicked in. The more I realize about the climate injustice and the increasing earth's temperature, the bigger my fears toward future were. I was captivated by the helplessness that I felt there's nothing I can do to make a change as an individual.

One day, I watched a short clip which a Swedish girl was giving a speech in the UN conference, giving vent to her rage about the decision makers doing nothing of Climate crisis. This little girl impressed and consoled me at the same time. Her movement was spread around the Europe and all. I saw a power and hope in there. Although I have heard a lot of progressive movements in terms of Climate policy around the Europe, that moment was the starting point for me to be more fascinated in people and culture in there. Furthermore, it fuels me to apply the exchange student in Germany.

The first emancipation I tasted was the Asem-Duo Fellowship. Every student studying abroad would concern about their living cost and accommodation fees. Luckily, Most of the German universities do not charge tuition fee, yet still it could be a burden for students to pay the bills. The fellowship was enough to cover the accommodation for me to live in the dormitory, which gave me a freedom to live in Europe. It helped me to go further with focusing on my own study, not for making a living.

The second emancipation was talking with various people. As Germany is known as a heart of Europe or a cultural melting pot, I could be surrounded by people from different

backgrounds. The most distinctive surrounding I found attractive in my exchange student life was the quality of conversations. As far as I felt, German people can talk about Politics, Philosophy, History, and Humanities without arguing. In the class, party, restaurant, and park, People enjoyed discussing with people and hearing different perspectives. In the “Contemporary issues in contemporary societies” class I took, we discussed German energy policy and climate regime in EU. From the discussion, I could learn how German people are critical about the energy policy even it seems quite well organized and how vulnerable the European gas systems are as it turned out during the Russia-Ukraine war. I could not have understood the problems without being exposed to these different perspectives. Also, while I was presenting about NDC (Nationally-determined-Contributions), I had to think how feasible Korean NDC is. These nets of thoughts and stimulation through discussions were the things that I have been eager to experience.

The third emancipation was when I was exposed to the eco-friendly life and got used to it. When I first try the Pfand which is a big part of sorting trash in Germany, I was skeptical if people actually do it in daily basis. After a few months, I could see myself collecting bottles exciting to return it and hope it to be recycled in the line of people with their bags full of cleaned bottles. Also, the Veganism is a huge culture in Germany and now it became a part of my life. Even it was two years ago I was in Germany, Still I try to eat vegan food at least three days in a week. The environmentalism in Germany made me ditch the old customs which I made a lot of trashes and carbon footprints. That was the emancipation from the fast and convenient life.

By the time I came back to Korea, the huge storm was swirling. I was still afraid of the extreme climate change, but I found one thing was different from before Germany. I had more confidence about challenging with the issue and trying to find the best solution as long as I can. For a year after the exchange student, I focused on graduating and completed all the courses in the University. Interestingly, Now I am in Mongolia. I am working in Mongolia International University as a volunteer staff as a program of KOICA NGO environment climate Volunteer. I am organizing the climate club with university students in UB, Campaign, Seminars. I am Happy to be here and utilize what I have learned from the exchange student in Germany. What I’m doing here is accumulated from the experiences of all in my life, but the exchange in Germany makes it more affirmative and stronger. Whatever you do right now, even though you might feel it is no use, it will be anyway connected at some point with the amazing emancipations.