Reflection on My Exchange Experience in Sweden

My exchange experience at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden was one of the most meaningful and challenging experiences of my university life. Before leaving Taiwan, I had always imagined studying abroad as something exciting and beautiful. I pictured old European cities, snowy streets, international classmates, and a completely different academic environment. However, after actually arriving in Sweden, I quickly realized that exchange life was not only about studying and traveling. It was also a real test of independence, adaptability, and problem-solving ability.

The first day in Sweden left a deep impression on me. After a long flight and transfer, my roommate and I arrived in Stockholm during a heavy snowstorm. The temperature was around minus twenty degrees, which was far colder than anything I had experienced in Taiwan. Instead of resting immediately, we had to go to KTH to complete the registration process. After spending several hours at school, we still had to carry our heavy luggage to our accommodation. We even went to the wrong building at first and had to drag our suitcases through the snow again. At that moment, I felt exhausted and frustrated, but I also understood that this was the beginning of learning how to take care of myself in a foreign country.

During my stay in Sweden, daily life became an important part of my learning. From cooking meals, buying groceries, managing expenses, using public transportation, to moving from one accommodation to another, every small task required planning and decision-making. Sweden's high prices also made me more aware of budgeting. These things may seem ordinary, but when I had to handle them in an unfamiliar environment, they became valuable lessons. I gradually learned to stay calm, search for solutions, and make decisions on my own.

Academically, studying at KTH gave me a very different learning experience from what I was used to in Taiwan. Many classes emphasized discussion, group work, and project-based learning. At first, I was not used to speaking up in class, especially in English and in front of students from different countries. However, after joining more discussions, I started to realize that learning is not just about receiving information from teachers. It is also about forming my own opinions, listening to others, and understanding problems from different perspectives.

Among all the courses I took, Waste Management impressed me the most. This course helped me think about engineering from a broader point of view. In the past, I

usually focused more on how products are designed or how technologies are developed. However, this course made me think about what happens after products are used and thrown away. Waste is not simply something useless; it is connected to energy, environmental protection, urban planning, policy, and sustainability. Through lectures, industry talks, a field trip to a waste treatment facility, and the final project exhibition, I learned that engineering should not only solve technical problems but also consider its impact on society and the environment.

Outside the classroom, I also gained many unforgettable memories. I joined the KTH orchestra as a viola player, borrowed an instrument through the conductor's help, and participated in several performances. Music became a bridge that connected me with people from different backgrounds. I also traveled to several European cities, including places in Sweden, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. These journeys allowed me to experience different cultures, architecture, landscapes, and ways of life.

Looking back, my exchange life in Sweden was not always easy. There were moments of loneliness, pressure, confusion, and even thoughts of going back to Taiwan early. However, these difficulties made the experience more real and more valuable. I learned that stepping out of my comfort zone can be uncomfortable, but it can also help me discover how much I am capable of. This exchange experience gave me not only academic knowledge and international exposure, but also a stronger sense of independence and confidence. In the future, whenever I face new challenges, I believe I will remember the version of myself who once bravely lived, studied, and grew in Sweden.