Hi, I am Lau, a MEXT student who moved to Tokyo, Japan in April 2026 to pursue a PhD in Cultural Anthropology at Rikkyo University, focusing on Japanese Indigo craft.

Growing up in a village in the Belgian countryside, I never expected to one day wake up in the buzzing heart of Tokyo. Moving here has taught me countless new things, but it has also deeply reminded me of where I come from. It made me appreciate the unique languages I grew up with, and the importance of communication in building connections. Most of all, it made me grateful for the supportive environment back home that believed in my projects, making it possible for me to apply for the MEXT scholarship in the first place. Sitting in the classroom of the very professor whose work on multispecies ethnography motivated me to apply, and being able to listen to his experiences of conducting field work, I also notice how this kindness extends to my new environment.

Learning Japanese almost from zero has been a deeply humbling experience. It taught me that true courage doesn't just come from doing what you are good at, but from persisting through what is difficult to learn. To learn a new language is to accept that you will make mistakes, and that communication is about so much more than words. Recently, a teacher at my language school gifted me a postcard with the saying: 七転び八起き —*"Fall seven times, get up eight. Don't strive to be someone who never falls, but someone who always gets back up."*

The MEXT scholarship has granted me the valuable time needed to focus on the language, access new research materials and grow a pluriversal perspective. It has allowed me to notice the silent elements of Japan that go unnoticed by a visitor. Beyond the famous mountains, scenic seas, and delicious fermented foods, I have found beauty in the rhythm of Tokyo's everyday life. Moving to Tokyo allowed me to do just that: to immerse myself in the small openings of everyday life and craft making. You start to notice the same people biking every morning to work, seeing indigo plants grow and bloom as the days become shorter as we move towards winter. Within this space, there is also time to nurture deep cross-cultural friendships and share experiences that expand our horizons.



My advice: make mistakes and try, be honest with what you want to do in Japan, what this experience can bring you and the challenges you might face while choosing a supervisor and program that will support your research and time learning Japanese ~

Changing your environment and thinking in another language nurtures encountering different realities. Growing up in Belgium, I realized that a dialect is far more than just words, it is a tactile way to connect with people, the seasons and the land. Communication is how we talk to, and with, a world that is ever changing. This perspective followed me to study in Finland, researching the fragments of European indigo history, and brought me to study indigo fermentation in Japan. I realized that here, this "dialect" of natural indigo fermentation is still a living tradition between human hands and microbes. As I continue my journey learning about Japanese craft, heritage, and the artisans preserving indigo traditions, I carry both my roots and these new memories with me, ready to get back up an eight time!