



Mohamed Omer Abdin

Born in Khartoum, capital of Sudan, in 1978. Visually impaired since birth, he became legally blind at the age of 12. At the age of 19, while still enrolled at the University of Khartoum's Faculty of Law, he came to Japan to study braille, acupuncture, and moxibustion at Fukui Prefectural School for the Visually Impaired. He subsequently enrolled in the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where he earned his doctorate in Peace and Conflict Studies and is currently a specially appointed assistant professor.

Falling for Japan, Sight Unseen

Mohamed Omer Abdin is a specially appointed assistant professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies who arrived in Japan from Sudan in 1998. Legally blind, Abdin first came to Japan to study acupuncture and moxibustion at a school for the visually impaired offering courses in this field to international students.

“At that time, the civil war in Sudan was intensifying and the university I had been attending closed its doors,” Abdin recalls. “I thought of going to Japan, an advanced country that excels in manufacturing, as a way to break free of my current situation.”

After completing his studies in acupuncture and moxibustion at Fukui Prefectural School for the Visually Impaired, Abdin went on to study information processing at the Tsukuba College of Technology, a school for students with visual and hearing impairments.

“I learned how to use screen reading software and gained access to a much wider range of information. Staying in Japan, I thought, would let me broaden my studies even further.”

Hoping to study everything from politics to literature, Abdin enrolled in the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, where he has now spent more than a decade. Japan’s language and environment are very different from Sudan’s. But Abdin says that he never felt like giving up and returning to his home country.

“I was very fortunate in the families who welcomed me in for homestay and the friends I made, so I never felt lonely. I cannot see people, but I can sense the warmth in them—the leisurely, gentle feel of the Fukui dialect, for example. Most importantly, in Japan I was given a place to study and live, and new possibilities opened up for me.”

Abdin decided to take on new challenges in Japan, becoming a university instructor in order to put his knowledge to work. Currently, alongside his research into the conflict in Sudan, he teaches African politics and related subjects at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He believes that he can make good use of his perspective as a person born in a conflict zone in teaching Japanese students about conflict resolution.

“Sudan’s civil strife is not something unrelated to life in Japan. If younger people take an interest in it, this can only influence our shared future for the better. In my lectures I make efforts to have students feel a sense of immediacy as they discuss Africa, even though it is geographically distant from Japan. And I’ve been delighted when they ask questions that even I can’t answer, because that proves that they’ve come to think deeply about the material.”

In his private life, Abdin is married to a woman also from Sudan. Together they have three children. “Her miso soup is delicious, but I was taken aback when she served it with bread,” he laughs. However, his wife has now mastered a range of Japanese dishes, from grilled fish to *ohitashi* stewed vegetables.

Living as a family has also helped him feel a sense of connection to Japanese society. “The Japan that has given me so many opportunities to thrive over the years now faces social problems of its own. I would like to contribute even in a small way to solving those problems. I also want to help create a society in which people with disabilities can make the most of their strengths.”

Abdin’s face seems to glow in anticipation of the future roles he may be able to play in Japan.