

Nguyen's gold

Polytechnic University is one of the most international universities in Russia; almost eight thousand students from abroad study here. Foreign speech in the corridors and classrooms of the university has long become a usual thing. However, at the beginning of this year, an event that opened a new page in the history of international education at St. Petersburg Polytechnic University took place. For the first time ever, a foreign student became the best graduate of the university.

Nguyen Tien Hoang from Vietnam graduated from the SPbPU Institute of Energy of with a degree in "Nuclear Power Plants: Design, Operation, and Engineering". He studied with excellence all the way through: there is no single non-excellent score in the diploma supplement, and therefore, following the results of the defense of the final qualification work in January 2020, the University Academic Council put him for a SPbPU medal and awarded the title of the Best graduate of 2020.



The official award ceremony for the "gold" medalists took place on February 19 in the reading room of the Fundamental Library in the course of the student ball dedicated to the Polytechnic University birthday. One more graduate of the

Institute of Energy Alexander Moloskin received the medal along with Hoang.

Shortly afterwards, Hoang returned home to Vietnam. We contacted him through a social network to interview him for the Persona column.

- Hoang, could you please tell us about yourself, about your family. Where were you born and raised? What did you want to become in your childhood?



- I was born in the small town of Pleiku, far away from the capital of Vietnam. This is an underdeveloped city, so I had a lot of difficulties with studying. Our family is not big; I have an older brother who already has his own family and a little daughter. As a child, I wanted to become a doctor. My mother was sick, and I dreamed of curing her. And then my mom recovered, and I became a physics engineer.

- Why did you decide to study in Russia and so far away in addition to that - in St. Petersburg? Vladivostok is much closer to Vietnam.

- In high school, I learned about the opportunity to get a state scholarship to study in Russia. I was constantly reading about this country and learned about St. Petersburg, a large and beautiful city with many famous universities. I applied to Polytechnic University right away and I went through several competitions.



- Why did you choose Polytechnic University?

- For various reasons. I was impressed by the number of students and teachers, as well as the fact that among the famous polytechnics there were Nobel Prize winners. I read many positive reviews of foreign students about the University, they said that the teachers were very kind and attentive. And more than a hundred Vietnamese students are studying here.

- How long did it take you to study Russian and what helped in your studies?

- When I arrived in Russia, I did not know a single Russian letter, or a single Russian phrase. This was probably the most difficult time for me: few friends, a totally new life, Russian is by far too complicated. For a year I studied at the preparatory faculty in Novomoskovsk, Tula Region. At this time, there was nothing in my head but the lessons of the Russian language; I studied daily until three in the morning. Answering the question "what helped to learn the language", I want to thank my first Russian teacher Valentina Pavlovna Tatarinova. She explained

everything with patience and dedication, literally dancing like a swan at the blackboard to convey the meaning of words to me. We have not seen each other for six years, but we still keep in touch.



- It's rather difficult to study at Polytechnic University, and even more so to do this in a non-native language. But at the same time you were one of the best students. How did you manage?

- I was lucky that from the very beginning I seriously studied the Russian language. In my opinion, laziness is the number one enemy of success. At home, I repeated what I was told at the lectures, preparing for the next classes. My memory is not too good, so I always had a pen and a notebook on me, if something was not clear, I always put that down and asked my teachers and friends afterwards - this is my key to success. Our teachers also knew that it was difficult for us to understand the material, so they always explained slowly.

- Usually it is not easy for foreign students to get a practical training or internship in Russia. Did you do it?

- Yes, it was very difficult for us to get a practical training, especially as we specialized in nuclear power plants. Usually foreigners are not allowed to such facilities. But the staff of our institute got in touch with the CEOs of the Leningrad NPP; I don't know how they did it, but I know for sure that it was a very serious and difficult matter, and as a result we had three on-the-job trainings. Then we saw the station itself, the work of the operators in the control room. These lessons were very useful for us, we got a lot of new knowledge, saw things that we knew only

from books.



- Do you play guitar in your free time? Did you learn to play in your childhood or already at the university?

- Since childhood, I liked music; at home I learned to play the guitar and the piano myself. I think that music also helps me a lot in stress situations, and without music life would be rather boring.

- How did you live in the dormitory, from which countries did your neighbors come? Who were your particular friends?

- The dormitory for me was an entirely new experience. I would rather live absolutely independently, but it was interesting: I could meet friends every day. In addition, this dormitory is for international students which helped me make friends with many people from different countries; thanks to this I got a better understanding of the culture of some other nations. My roommate was also a Vietnamese, kind and talented guy.



- There are many theaters, museums, parks in St. Petersburg. Where did you especially like to go?

- St. Petersburg is a tourist paradise; I love everything in this city. I can't count how many times I have been to palaces, cathedrals and parks in St. Petersburg. But if you ask me about my particular preferences, then this is probably St. Isaac's Cathedral. Every time I came there and listened to a guide telling the story of the construction of the cathedral, I learned something new. If I return to St. Petersburg, St. Isaac's Cathedral will be the first place I will visit.

- How did you endure the weather in St. Petersburg? Was it hard to get used to the cold and the dark?

- No, it was not difficult for me to get used to the cold climate in Russia, I like this weather. Two months have already passed since returning to my homeland, but I still can't get used to the heat.



- Your mother came to the award ceremony. Was this her first visit to St. Petersburg or did she visit you before?

- It was my Mom's first trip abroad! She was quite worried because she flew alone, knowing no English or Russian. But she was happy to see how I lived in Russia. This was probably the most significant gift for my mom.

- Now in the world of the coronavirus pandemic, how is it experienced in Vietnam? Is quarantine declared, do people wear masks?

- The coronavirus pandemic is now a severe problem in the world. I regularly follow the news about the spread of this infection in Russia. Vietnam is considered a good country for the prevention of coronavirus. To date, a little more than three hundred cases have been registered in the country, of which 80 percent have recovered. For more than a month, not a single case of infection was detected within the country but a handful of infected citizens who returned from abroad. As for masks, we always wear them on the street, even when there are no diseases; we wear masks to protect from the sun. I think this habit has helped us a lot in preventing the spread of the disease.



- Do you maintain relations with former classmates, neighbors in the dormitory, friends at Polytechnic University? Have you made any plans for the future?

- Of course, we became very close, just as family members. Recently, many of my classmates came to my house to relax, it was great and a lot of fun. Most of us will work in one place, design power plants.

- Who or what inspires you in your life?

- My father. His name is Nguyen Tien Dung. He always taught me to do the right thing, to help the people around me. He explained that becoming a good person is more important than becoming rich.

Through this interview, I would like to once again thank all my teachers. For everything they did. I was lucky to study at Polytechnic University, and I am very grateful for your education. I wish you all health, happiness and success. I will never forget this time.

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