

1. Report

Please write a report on your study experience, addressing the matters listed below. Your report should be more than 500 words in English. Matters to include in your report: (a) Academic outcomes (how participation in this program affected your motivation, university study and international understanding, and what interests and plans you developed for further study in the future); (b) Your experiences in Kyoto University; (c) The content of the program; (d) The impact of the program on your career plans.

Engaging Buddhism

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This program has deepened my interest and appreciation of Zen Buddhist philosophy, both in terms of getting a better sense of what it feels like qualitatively, as opposed to reading about it from a textbook while situated in a different culture. This has strengthened my interest and one hopes ability in researching non-Western philosophies, which I am currently pursuing as a research assistant under Professor Garfield. Coming from a very Anglo-centric upbringing and childhood education, this has been invaluable in broadening my world view. As I look tentatively toward a future in academic philosophy, I believe that this appreciation for thinkers and ideas outside the Western canon would carry over into my professional orientation.

I found Kyoto University a great environment to learn in. The Meiji-era architecture is gorgeous-more so I believe in spring, which we unfortunately had to miss because of our school term. The students, staff and professors are very friendly and helpful. Lynn Ishikawa, an undergraduate at the philosophy department was especially outstanding as she went out of her way to ensure that we had a safe and fun trip, following us on our educational trips to various temples and shrines, and taking us out for meals. If it is this hospitable in the evening of winter, I suspect that Kyodai would be even better during school term itself.

The program kicked off in Singapore, where we had seminar discussions facilitated by Professor Jay Garfield on key Buddhist texts and sutras-such as the Genjokoan, Heart Sutra and the Vimalakirti. After that, we came over to Kyoto where we explored Buddhism in a phenomenological way-both by visiting and staying over at temples and shrines. It is my belief that one cannot truly understand Zen without having set foot in a Japanese Buddhist temple. The atmosphere of calm, subdued beauty and emptiness amidst undulations of gravel and dew-lashed boulders cannot be replicated in the same form in any other kind of setting. We also learnt from Professor Garfield, who was with us during the visits, the history and iconography of the various temples, and related them to Buddhist philosophy. Finally, some of us attended seminars and talks held by our professors from Singapore, like "Consciousness" by Jay Garfield. In it, he outlined the contrasting conceptions of consciousness in both the Western and Buddhist philosophical traditions, used them to address

traditional problems in the other—the “hard problem of consciousness” in the Western tradition, and the problem of self-reflexivity in Buddhism. The goal was to demonstrate how questions on the ‘nature’ of consciousness are hopelessly theory-laden, and that a more productive approach to understanding it would be to answer and solve more limited questions such as “what is the relationship between intention and action” with a more cognitive-scientific approach.

The program has made seriously consider Kyoto University as an option for my third year abroad, as well as a possible place to pursue a postdoctoral position or even an academic career. If this is not possible, I still do hope to, in my future career as an academic, maintain close professional ties with Kyoto University, such as organizing and participating in speakers’ series, attending conferences and the like.

*The information you provide may be included in Re-discovering Japan Project reports, or published in printed materials or on our website in pages dealing with the outcomes of programs offered by the Asian Studies Unit and/or Kyoto University. Please ensure that your report only includes content which is publishable in light of privacy considerations and the need to safeguard personal information. Also note that depending on the publication format, we may need to edit parts of your report.