Study Tour to Japan, 2012

Professor Keiko Nakano (Classical & Modern Languages & Cultures) with Dr. Susan Long (Sociology) and Dr. Malia McAndrew (History) conducted the 5th study tour to Japan, May 21 to June 10, 2012. The first study tour, “Japanese Popular Culture in Japan,” was held in 2004. Since then, the study tour to Japan has been held every other year.
This year’s study tour was entitled, “Popular Culture in Times of Crisis: Japan 2012 Study Tour.” Three faculty members and seven students participated. This year, tour participants were very fortunate to have a grant from the Center for Global Partnership. Students and faculty together engaged in the planning of the trip, inspired by the model of Japanese school trips, shūgaku ryōkō.

The first week was spent in Kyoto and Osaka, where the group visited tourist sites of various temples and shrines, such as Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion) and Kiyomizu temple, two castles, Osaka Castle and Nijo Castle, and Gion Corner (the theater for presentation of Japanese traditional performances in Kyoto), while thinking about tourism as part of popular culture and the portrayal of “traditional Japan” that is usually promoted. The group also visited sites that would be helpful in students’ individual research projects, including the Old Farmhouse Museum, the Nishijin Textile Center, the Manga Museum, and the Transportation Museum, all of which provided an introduction to a broad range of Japanese cultural topics.

The group also spent a fascinating day in Ohmi-Hachiman City, hosted by a local family, who gave them a tour in order to learn about the city’s history. Participants were also invited to the family home, where they pounded mochi (a kind of rice cake), learned an Ohmi merchant folk dance in yukata (cotton kimono), and were treated to a homemade feast for dinner.

Photos from week 1 (by Dr. Susan Long)

JCU students in yukata (cotton kimono) preparing to learn a folk dance: Rebecca Secula, Brionna Thomas, Daniel Gonzalez, Alex Peterson, Bonnie Taylor, Peter McNamara, Gemma Lascio

In Ohmi, returning from a boat ride on the canal
East Asian Studies major Peter McNamara pounding mochi; (= rice cakes is the usual translation but they are perhaps more like patties made of gooey rice dough); besides Japanese, Peter also studies French and Italian at JCU.

The second week was spent in Tokyo, where the focus was more specifically on consumption and youth culture, considering how the earthquake/tsunami in Japan of 3/11 might have impacted these. The group toured a department store and spent time exploring the Ginza, Harajuku, Tsukiji, and Akihabara. They were also able to tour the Toei Anime Studio in Nerima.

While in Tokyo, students also had time to explore the city on their own and to follow up on research interests. They noted the “mukokuseki (= no border of nationalities)” cosmopolitan nature of Tokyo, a theme highlighted in their study of popular culture while still on our JCU campus, as they chose various ethnic restaurants, visited the Fuji TV viewing area, and zipped around the city via subway. Attention was also paid to social class, as participants contrasted Ginza (more upscale) with Asakusa, and also to gender as they observed “cos-play” and street fashion. (“Cos-play” means costume play. Some – and sometimes many young people wear costumes imitating clothing worn by characters in “manga” or animation.)
Photos from week 2 (by Dr. Susan Long)

**JCU students & faculty enjoy SUSHI for breakfast!**
(Peter McNamara, Gemma Lascio, Dr. McAndrew, Daniel Gonzalez)

**At Toei Animation Studio:** [front]: Professor Nakano, Daniel Gonzalez, Rebecca Secula; [back]: Brionna Thomas, Peter McNamara, Gemma Lascio, Alex Peterson, Bonnie Taylor, (Keiko Ueno, Japanese host), Dr. McAndrew

**JCU student Gemma Lascio and Bonnie Taylor**
checking out street fashion in Harajuku

**JCU students and faculty at site of 1964 Tokyo Olympics:**
Gemma Lascio, Peter McNamara, Brionna Thomas, Rebecca Secula, Alex Peterson, Bonnie Taylor, Dr. McAndrew, Daniel Gonzalez
On June 4, the group left Tokyo for Tohoku (northeast area of Japan), where they joined Peaceboat’s other volunteers. They spent two days in a fishing community helping residents who lost homes, fields, and loved ones, to reestablish sea squirt farming in the area by sorting oyster shells, drilling holes in them, and stringing them for “homes” for the growing sea squirts. The group learned that the industry, which had primarily exported its products to Korea, had been totally destroyed by the tsunami, and that there was concern that even after the reestablishment of the sea squirt farms in three years, there was no assurance the Koreans would again purchase them in the same quantities as in the past. With other volunteers the JCU study tour participants were shown several areas of severe damage and were able to view the progress in cleaning and reconstruction that has been made so far.

The third day of volunteering was spent in downtown Ishinomaki city itself, helping prepare for the opening of a new mini-mall made from temporary construction materials as a first step in revitalizing the destroyed downtown commercial district. The group also visited the newly opened Peaceboat Community Center and several small shops in the area which had started up as new businesses in recent months. In addition to learning more about the effects of the disasters on the area, the Peaceboat experience was an immersion into Japanese culture by living with the Japanese volunteers and seeing how activities were set up in this Japanese organization.

Although the study tour participants had planned to spend an additional day doing volunteer work, the program does not utilize volunteers on Fridays. Instead they used the time to visit Chūsonji temple in Hiraizumi, a UN-designated World Heritage Site in the region. In addition to seeing more of the rural areas they passed through, and appreciating Japan’s natural beauty, by this time they had the background to think about the promotion of tourism in Tohoku after the earthquake/tsunami of 3/11, to observe the travel customs of Japanese tourists, and to think about the significance of Japan’s long history. They spent the night relaxing, learning about Japanese baths and their symbolism, and enjoying good Japanese food at an onsen (hot spring) hotel in Hiraizumi. The following morning they departed for Tokyo as the beginning of their journey back to the USA. [Travel journal written by: Dr. Susan Long.]

Photos from week 3 (by Dr. Susan Long)

Lunch of fresh scallops grilled for all the volunteers by people who had lost everything;

[L-R]: Alex Peterson and Rebecca Secula
Morning exercises for JCU student Daniel Gonzalez, who joins others at the Peaceboat Volunteer Center, Ishinomaki

Helping to prepare for the opening of a temporary mini-mall in tsunami-affected downtown Ishinomaki: Bonnie Taylor, Daniel Gonzalez, Brionna Thomas, Gemma Lascio, Alex Peterson, Rebecca Secula, Professor Nakano, Dr. McAndrew, with their Japanese host (center front)

JCU students and faculty with other Peaceboat volunteers: [front]: Dr. McAndrew (2nd from left), Dr. Long (2nd from right); [middle row]: Brionna Taylor, Gemma Lascio, Prof. Nakano, Rebecca Secula, Bonnie Taylor; [back row]: Daniel Gonzalez (4th from right)