

JSPS Fellow - Research Experience

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Host Institution: Waseda University, Organisation for Asian Studies

Host: Professor Takashi Terada

I think that my research experience in Japan began already in London in October 2010, when I attended the pre-departure seminar. Perhaps I was the first to start my fellowship from our group, as I departed just several days afterwards. What I also remember is that I was one of the few social scientists among many 'hard' scientists. It made me feel even more grateful for being awarded such a great opportunity to do research in Japan. Here I would like to briefly comment on my research experience in Tokyo, and possibly give a few tips to future awardees.

As I mentioned, my research lies within social sciences, and specifically International Relations (IR). As a JSPS fellow, I explored my PhD topic on Japan-Korea-China trilateral cooperation from the Japanese perspective. I aimed to establish why Japan engaged in this cooperative scheme, which from the standpoint of IR theory is puzzling. To facilitate this rather daunting task, I was affiliated at the Organisation for Asian Studies of Waseda University, with Professor Takashi Terada as my host. For my main method I chose interviews, which I conducted in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related organisations. I cannot read Japanese yet, which meant that interviews gave me the opportunity to obtain information in English.

Most importantly, I could meet experts who deal first-hand with the trilateral cooperation, as well as bilateral relations with China and Korea. I collected various pieces of information that lead to solving of my research puzzle. Given that my topic concerns very recent developments in international affairs, I can be fairly confident that the data I collected will give my thesis the desirable 'originality' edge.

Moving on to the practicalities of doing research in Japan, as I mentioned, I think that my experience can be particularly useful to those who go for a short period of time. Starting from the most obvious, it is good to prepare as well as possible in advance. It means taking full advantage of the resources you can access while still in the UK – Japan-related faculty and colleagues at your university, etc. This will provide a solid 'starting point' for the very first days in Japan.

Second, I believe that it is valuable to make connections to both senior and junior researchers once you arrive in Japan. Sometimes help and advice comes from the most unexpected sources. In my case, an 'impromptu' seminar was organised where I could present my research. It means that even if you haven't thought of a particular thing in advance, a kind person or two may help you out.

Finally, perhaps a surprising piece of advice - relax! There are plenty of hints, like mine, that you will read and hear before going to Japan. Just follow what you feel is right for you, and leave some room for the unexpected to make of your research stay in Japan a truly memorable experience.