

SP11108
Robert James Simpkins
PhD Researcher
School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
JSPS Summer Programme Report.
Contact: rjsimpkins@gmail.com

Host Researchers.

Koichi Iwabuchi,
Julian Worrall.
Waseda University, Tokyo.
Institute for Advanced Study.

My time at Waseda University as a JSPS Summer Program fellow was nothing short of memorable, as well as being both personally and academically formative. As a student of anthropology I had previously studied various aspects of Japanese culture and society, but the opportunity to spend a summer in Tokyo and to collaborate with scholars at Waseda University has broadened my horizons and invigorated my research.

In my PhD work I propose to conduct a careful ethnographic study of a central Tokyo rail node, considering the ways that these kinds of public spaces are used and reconfigured by commuters, city residents and urban planners. In particular, I am interested in the forms of human behaviour produced by travel and movement in the city, and the degree to which the railway complex in Tokyo may also become a place of 'dwelling' and of intense social exchange beyond its remit as a transport node. Before my arrival in Japan I had intended to use the summer fellowship in order to carry out preliminary fieldsite surveys at major train stations with a view to finalising a site and series of methods for carrying out ethnographic fieldwork. What I didn't anticipate was the longer lasting influence of such cross-cultural research exchanges and the close working and personal relationships that would evolve over the summer. I quickly learnt that I had also been given the opportunity to strengthen and expand existing bridges between Japan and UK academic communities. As a researcher intent on specialising in the anthropology of Japan, this was the first moment I began to see my place in the bigger picture.



Image 1: Koenji. One of the six train stations I surveyed during the summer.

Whilst I achieved my own personal objectives for research, I was also pleased to contribute to the development of other student projects in the lab at Waseda's Institute for Advanced Study. Indeed, my involvement at weekly seminars introduced me to a range of students and professors within Waseda University itself. Since my arrival back in the UK I have already welcomed one of these students to London and shown her around the institutions and libraries that she may be using should her applications to study here prove successful. When I return to Japan next year to begin long-term fieldwork in Tokyo I will be working with my host professor, Julian Worrall, as well as a few of the students I met during the JSPS Summer Programme, and look forward to building on these fledgling relationships.



Image 2: My host professor and two students from Waseda University at a local shrine in Shinjuku.

Despite a healthy work ethic I was also able to spend a good deal of time enjoying the cultural richness of Japan. I made various trips to famous sites and areas of natural beauty with other JSPS fellows, as well as with those Japanese friends I made throughout my stay. I experienced the excitement of Tokyo nightlife, the quieting tranquillity of its shrines, temples and museums, and the invigorating vistas of the countryside beyond the city limits. Towards the end of my fellowship I made a memorable climb to the summit of mount Fuji with some of the other JSPS researchers. As the sun rose above the clouds below us I remember thinking that it was a perfect end to a perfect trip.



Image 3: JSPS fellows enjoying a well-deserved whiskey at the summit of Mount Fuji.