

Short report about research experience (for JSPS London)

Ra Mason (PE14727)

Host researcher: Prof. Eiichi Hoshino

Host institution: University of the Ryukyus

I had a magnificent experience as a JSPS research fellow, working in close interaction with local and international scholars, on the sensitive and globally significant issue of US military bases stationed on the remote Japanese island of Okinawa. It gave me the chance to realise first-hand how the framing of localized issues in mainstream media and internet formats can be vastly different to the reality on the ground. This was hugely motivating as a political analyst, because it made me acutely aware of how contested issues that can simultaneously have a direct impact upon things as fundamental as: everyday lives, regional security structures and transnational marine ecosystems need to be portrayed accurately. It was exciting in that respect to play even a small role in elucidating how particular factors influence each of the above.

My research plan used discourse analysis to understand the complex socio-economic and political processes that determine the status and continuation of US military bases on Okinawa. The primary data content of the research was Diet minutes, national and local media sources, specialist literature and governmental sources (including interviews etc.). Through a discourse analysis of these and information from state institutions located in each corner of the political triangle – i.e. Japanese central government, US government and Okinawan Prefectural authorities – it analyzed the processes by which American and Japanese nationalisms dominate Ryukyu nationalism (or its resurrected contemporary forms), focusing on the case of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma's proposed relocation within the prefecture to a new base at Henoko. In conclusion, the interactive influences of structure, agency and norms were re-examined to expose the summative impact of nationalism, manifest in the struggle to both implement and resist implementation of the current government plans for Futenma.

In light of the above, I can honestly say that the JSPS Short-term Fellowship programme provides a superb opportunity for collaborative research into a range of valuable interdisciplinary fields. In addition, it acts as a spring-board from which to establish meaningful exchange relationships with Japanese academic institutions, staff and students. It also offers the chance to undertake on-site field research that simply cannot be achieved to the same extent or level via online or other data sources.

For those who are new to the Japanese workplace, I would suggest that it is always best to be polite and positive, but also pro-active. I would advise researchers request one or more personal meetings with their host shortly after arriving to make very clear what each side expects of the other. Any subsequent problems that do arise should also be raised first with the host researcher as soon as possible. Again, a personal meeting is usually advisable, as it can be seen as embarrassing or uncourteous to raise problematic or personal issues in front other members of staff or students.

A final word of advice to would be researchers would be to travel as much as possible while in Japan. And, if you have the chance, visit Okinawa!



Field research site- outside US base on Okinawa