

Pre-Doctoral (Short-Term) Programme Fellows' Report

Project Title: 'Zen Ultra-nationalism in Showa Japan, Asia and the West'

Host Fellow: Professor Sueki Fumihiko, International Research Centre for Japanese Studies

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I spent three valuable and fulfilling months at the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies (IRCJS, Nichibunken), Kyoto from 20th February to 19th May 2013 through the pre-doctoral (short-term) programme, under the guidance of Professor Sueki Fumihiko, one of Japan's foremost scholars of modern Japanese Buddhism. The topic of my research was Japanese Zen Buddhist ultra-nationalism from World War Two into the post-war era, concerning which I was able to gather a large amount of materials and engage in some productive exchanges with my host and other scholars.

I am not exaggerating when I say that my time at Nichibunken was one of the best periods of my life, and I would highly recommend this research centre for anyone working on Japanese culture. Nichibunken is an idyllic research environment up in the mountains above Kyoto. The Professors are all leaders in their fields, and were extremely friendly and welcoming despite their heavy schedules. The staff are also for the most part friendly and helpful, and since the institution was founded specifically for international exchange, the centre is very much accustomed to dealing with foreign researchers and with JSPS. Research facilities are excellent, including the vast library which held most of the materials necessary for my research on Buddhism. Books from other libraries can easily be requested to the centre through an inter-library loan, and the librarians kindly indulged my every request. On-site accommodation is inexpensive, extremely well-maintained and convenient. I was also highly fortunate in that spring is the most pleasant season in Kyoto.

It can be somewhat daunting to plan one's research in Japan from outside Japan, and unpredictability is inevitable. My research initially focussed on the role of three priests in the internationalisation of post-war Japanese Zen. However, when I arrived in Japan and got hold of the sources it became apparent that I would need to broaden my approach to look at wider doctrinal and political trends in post-war Japanese Buddhism, with very few previous studies of this topic to guide me. This produced far more significant and interesting research results than originally anticipated, and revealed the surprising political significance of Buddhism in post-war Japan. This naturally took longer, and so I remained in Japan for two months after the end of the fellowship to complete the research. Since one must be self-funding for this period, I would advise prospective fellows to apply for a substantial period of research in the first place if one's circumstances permit, in order to allow for the unexpected. The unexpected is, of course, what makes research exciting and worthwhile, and I am eternally grateful to Professor Sueki, Nichibunken and JSPS for providing my research with an ideal environment for both the implementation of the original plan and its development into a broader context, in interaction with the Japanese and international research community in Kyoto.