

Fellow's Experience

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Japan has long interested. As a social scientist, in the field of management, I have been particularly fascinated by how Japan became the first non-Western country to achieve economic take-off and how after 1945 it built and sustained one of the world's strongest economies.

I had been to Japan several times before, for conferences and short stays. I was therefore delighted when JSPS awarded me a Short-term Invitation Fellowship for 6 weeks. This was to visit and work with Professor Yoshihide Sano, of the Department of Management and the Research Institute for Innovation Management at Hosei University, Tokyo.

In line with my earlier interests, this was to research the development of management training and careers in Japan and the UK. We were both interested in retail in particular, as a large and growing sector, facing challenges of expansion and competition, in both countries.

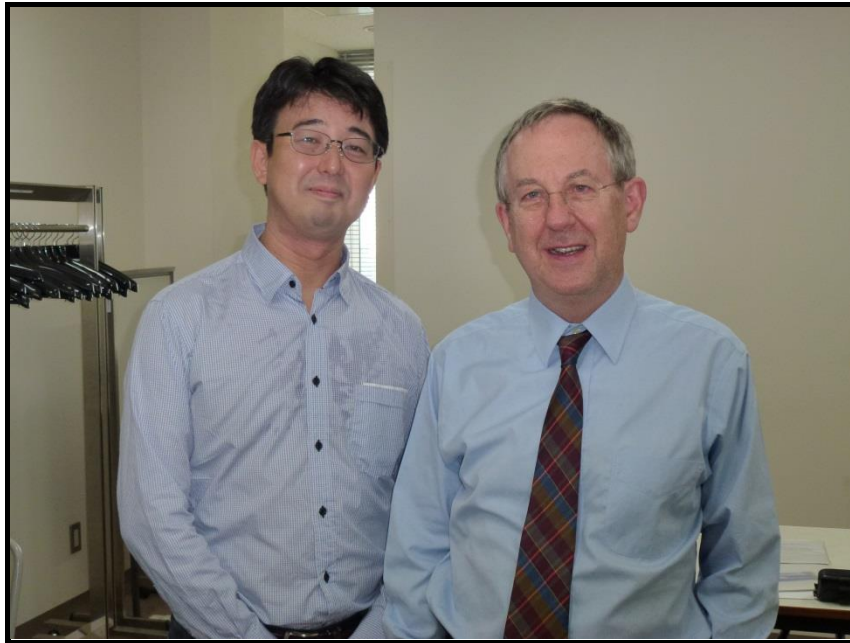
After giving myself the weekend to get over any jet-lag, I went into Hosei at the beginning of the week to meet Professor Sano. We had met before in London, some years earlier. Very importantly, we had also exchanged multiple emails, copies of papers we had written, and suggestions for how the research should be connected. The first week was spent on general discussion and also a seminar which I gave to staff and invitees at Hosei. After that the research began.

I would be happy to share the details of the research findings to date, and ultimately we intend to write a joint article. However, because of space, let me confine myself here to a few 'tips' about doing working and living in Japan.

On work, I would make three points. First, very importantly Professor Sano had already arranged visits to two companies, their headquarters and some of their stores to interview managers. This was most important because, in all countries, not least in Japan, it can take a very long time to fix up such meetings. Second, as a non-Japanese speaker, it was important to have a translator attending, at least at the most important meetings with interviewees. This should be built into financial planning, by both host and visitor. For less important meetings, or as work proceeds, the host may act as interpreter. Third, and one regret, I should have gone for longer, but commitments at my university prevented this! Always try to go for as long as possible.

On living in Japan, I make two points. First, it is important to find suitable accommodation before you go. Some Japanese universities provide accommodation and this can be very convenient. There is also International House of Japan which is a wonderful base for visiting academics. This time I found my own apartment and this worked very well. Second, the main aim is to do the research to which you are committed. But do find times for other things: giving seminars is a great way of meeting people; other universities will invite you to visit; and also find time to wander, by yourself, around the city you are visiting or to travel to smaller cities or to suburbs or the countryside at weekends or towards the end of your visit. This can be very rewarding.

Any new JSPS applicants or Fellows would be very welcome to contact me on either h.gospel@kcl.ac.uk or howard.gospel@sbs.ox.ac.uk



Professor Howard Gospel and host researcher Professor Yoshihide Sano