

Report on Professor Roger Cooter's JSPS-funded Visit to Japan, 20 June-7 July 2014

The purpose of this visit – my first to Japan -- was to conduct research on the practice of the history of science and medicine in Japan. To this end, at three international workshops, I delivered lectures on the latest bearings on these fields in the English-speaking world, opening out the methodological challenges and opportunities. (Programmes appended).

The visit was very professionally organized by Dr Akinobu Takabayashi of Seisen University, and was hosted by him and Professor Akihito Suzuki of Keio University.

For the whole of my stay I was accommodated at the 'International Residence' at Keio University -- premises with cooking as well as laundry facilities and internet connection. It was conveniently located for underground, buses and train stations. Nearby were shops and some of Toyko's finest restaurants. I rarely ate in. Night time club-land was a twenty minute walk away.

The first workshop, on 'Writing History in the Age of Biomedicine' was held at Komaba Campus, University of Tokyo. Conducted in English, the workshop was well attended by graduate students and generated useful discussion on the future of higher education in Japan in general (sadly, very similar to the UK), and on the problems facing the history of science in particular. The discussion was continued over some excellent cuisine afterwards.

The second workshop was held at Mita Campus, Keio University, on the topic of 'The Historiography of Medicine in the East and West'. It was attended by scholars from all over Japan as well as some from abroad, and generated an animated and informed discussion on the different (and not-so-different) historiographies and methodologies involved. The dinner afterwards provided an occasion to talk to the graduate students individually.

The third workshop, on 'Bioethics in Historical Perspective' took place at the University of Kyoto, and was jointly hosted by the Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, Ritsumeikan University. The workshop was entirely in Japanese and a translation of my lecture (on 'Historicizing the History of Bioethics') had been pre-circulated. A highly skilled translator (Dr Satoshi Kodama of the Department of Ethics at Koyto University, and a former student at University College London) was on hand to help me comprehend the other papers. I learned a great deal from this event about bioethics in Japan and ways in which my own thinking needed to be revised. Food and drinks followed, with introductions by the graduate studies on the subject of their dissertations.

Between the workshops I was able to visit various places of cultural and historical significance, among them the National Hansen's Disease Museum, outside Toyko -- the 'Leprosarium' that only in 1996 ceased legally to confine and sterilize its stigmatized inmates. In Kyoto I also visited many of the famous shrines as well as the famous Toei movie studios.

My tour was hugely enjoyable, intellectually and culturally. The exchange of knowledge was mutual, and agendas for future research and collaboration established.

A few practical tips

- It's useful to always to carry pen and paper – it's easier to draw what one desires in a restaurant than to try act it out in charades (eg octopus)!
- Frequent only those restaurants that have other occupants so that you can have the chance to point to dishes that you think might be tasty
- If working in Tokyo go up the Tokyo Tower sooner than later; it's a good way to get your bearings on the city as a whole.
- Take with you not only the internet phone connection but the cord that connects that to the plug-in (it's rarely provided)
- Tips are not expected in restaurants or taxis

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