

International students' exposure to Japanese Culture: Results from the field trips to Kyoto

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要旨：現在、多くの日本の大学が留学生の確保に力を入れている。今回注目する文化ツアーは、より多くの留学生に日本の大学に興味を持ってもらうための一つの方法としてこれまでも多くの大学で実践されてきたものであり、徳島大学国際センターでも、毎年、留学生のためにいくつかの見学旅行を開催している。その中でも、特に京都は日本文化を理解するため題材として最も有名で魅力的な場所であると考えられるが、今回の分析では、京都文化ツアーに参加した学生の全体的な満足度、ならびにこの文化ツアーで学んだことに関する具体的な内容や今後の日本文化ツアーに関する留学生のニーズと関心について分析を行った。

キーワード：留学生、日本文化、京都

1. Introduction and objectives

Although there is an increasing need for studying in Japan and Japan is almost achieved the "300,000 international students plan", statistics has shown that number of students enrolled at public universities which located faraway from metropolitan areas are not actually increased. Tokushima University is now putting more effort on attracting international students. One of the efforts is to expose international students to the Japanese culture.

The Tokushima University International Center organizes several study trips for international students every year to the places inside and outside Shikoku island such as Kagawa, Hiroshima, Nara, Kobe, Osaka etc. Among the destinations, Kyoto is the most famous and attractive place for learning to understand Japanese culture.

This analysis is being conducted for clarifying (1) overall satisfaction of students after exposure to the culture tour; (2) specific contents about Japanese culture that students have learned and have interests during this culture tour; and (3) the future needs and interests of international students about Japanese culture.

2. Overview of the activity

2.1. Targets and timings:

This Japanese culture study trip to Kyoto is being organized by the International Center on annual every year. Participants are currently international students of the Tokushima University (undergraduate students, graduate students, exchange students, pre-entrance students at Josanjima campus). The implementation period is December or February in each fiscal year, two-day

tour, and a tour at each cultural spot takes about 1-2 hours.

This culture tour is focusing on the most famous cultural spots in Kyoto: (1) Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji); (2) Kiyomizu Temple; (3) Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine; (4) Sanjusangendo; (5) Imperial Palace (Gosho).

2.2. Major points to learn:

The teacher explained the outline of the cultural spot on the bus in advance about the basic concepts and knowledge that students were to understand:

Kinkakuji (World Heritage Sites) is a Zen temple in northern Kyoto whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. It was originally a villa of a shogun, and according to his will it became a Zen temple after his death in 1408. Kinkakuji is an impressive structure built overlooking a large pond. It has burned down numerous times throughout its history. The present structure was rebuilt in 1955.

Fushimi Inari-taisha is the head shrine of the kami Inari. The shrine sits at the base of a mountain. Inari was the kami of rice and agriculture, but merchants and manufacturers also worship Inari as the patron of business. Each of roughly thousand torii was donated by a Japanese business.

Kiyomizu-dera Temple (World Heritage Sites) has the main hall, in which the eleven headed, thousand-armed Kannon Bodhisattva is enshrined, and the Kiyomizu Stage, which is the veranda of the main hall and extends over a precipice. "Kiyomizu" means "clear water." It takes its name from the Otowa Waterfall below the temple. Jisyu Shrine is a deity of marriage, once was a part of Kiyomizudera.

Nijo-jo Castle (World Heritage Sites) was

completed in 1603 on the orders of Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Castle served as the Kyoto residence of the Shogun. The 400-year-old Ninomaru-goten Palace, Kara-mon Gate and Ninomaru Garden, are unique survivals from the early Edo period.

Kyoto Imperial Palace had been the royal residence before the Meiji Restoration. The main feature of this palace is the Shishinden, where enthronement ceremonies have been held for more than 1,000 years. The other important landmarks include the Seiryoden and Otsunegoten or the earlier and last residence of the emperor, along with a strolling Oikeniwa Garden.

3. Method

After completing the study tour, participants were asked to submit a self-administered questionnaire anonymously.

The questionnaire consisted of general evaluation about the study tour using 5-level scale (“not at all satisfied,” “not satisfied,” “satisfied,” “more than satisfied,” “very satisfied,” numbering 1 to 5 as an interval scale). It also consisted of open-ended questions: “which place do you like the most?”, “what was your impression about each place”, “what impressed you about Japanese culture and people?”, “where do you want to visit the next time for learning Japanese culture?”.

The overall satisfaction of the participants was calculated by average score. Answers to the open-ended questions were classified by category qualitatively. The data for three consecutive years (2016~2018) was analyzed.

4. Results

4.1. Overall satisfaction

The overall satisfaction of the participants measured by 5-level scale was very high. The average score for overall satisfaction given by the participants was 4.9 points (2016), 4.8 (2017), and 4.6 (2018). The average score for the three times was 4.8.

Table 1. Overall satisfaction

	2016	2017	2018
very satisfied	34	33	27
more than satisfied	5	6	10
satisfied	0	1	2
not satisfied	0	0	0
not at all satisfied	0	0	0
Total	39	40	39

4.2. Impression about Japanese culture

The student-participants were in their 1st or 2nd year in Japan and have little exposure to Japanese

culture and for most of them, this is the first encounter to Kyoto. Some of the students have heard about Kinkakuji, Kiyomizudera or Fushimi Inari, but none of them have ever heard about Gosho or Sanjuysangendo. Basic knowledge and major information was explained to the participants in the bus (history, architecture, cultural values, characteristics etc.).



Figure 1. A group picture at Fushimi Inari (2018)

4.2.1. About Japanese culture

After the tour, participants have shown very high impression on what they have experienced about Japanese culture in Kyoto. They realized that Japan has very old and unique culture cultivated through a very long history. Most of the comments are such as: “Japan is the most beautiful, clean and peaceful country”, “Everything was different and unique”, “mature culture and interesting traditions”, “Japanese culture is diverse and attractive”, “Japan follows and follows culture”.

4.2.2. About Japanese history

Many students said that they have learned something about Japanese history and became interested in knowing more about history. Some have shown interest in the history of Kyoto and the turning point of Japan when the capital has been moved to Tokyo. After visiting Gosho, students have learned more about the history of the Japanese imperial family, and it has become a topic of interest.

4.2.3. About Japanese religion

Participants were impressed about Kyoto in such voices: “I was really surprised. Many shrines and temples”, “Japanese pray eagerly for respect and good luck to God”. The key concepts of Shinto and Buddhism were not familiar among students before the trip. After visiting the places, they came close to realize about spiritual life of Japan and be able to differentiate the concepts of Japanese religions such as between “temple” and “shrine”. The understanding of Japanese shrines and temple

culture went deeper, as “In Japan, I feel that Buddhism is very well developed in addition to Shinto”, “I learned the culture of Japanese God”, “I learned a lot about Japanese religion, temples and shrines”.

4.2.4. About architecture



Figure 2. Exploring the Imperial Palace (2017)

The students realized the unique architectural style in Kyoto as a mixing between modern and traditional styles. “There were many temples, shrines and towers. Everywhere was clean”, “Japanese aesthetics are sufficiently detailed”, “It is surprised that a new building and an old building are adjacent without looking contradicted to each other”, “harmony among old and new streets and high-tech industrial parks is not impossible”, “I felt the uniqueness of the architectural style of Japanese shrines and temples”, “Wonderful carpentry of wooden construction”, “The old building in Japan was very wonderful”. Students said some comments in comparison to Tokushima: “Kyoto is more international than Tokushima as there are many foreign tourists”, “I learned the difference between a famous big town and a small Kitajima town”.



Figure 3. Taking picture at Kinkakuji (2017)

4.2.5. About cultural preservation

Participants realized the importance of protection cultural heritage such as temples.

“Japanese people are very disciplined in terms of cultural property protection”, “I look at the World Heritage sites and understand it well, then I have gained a more serious understanding of Japanese traditional culture”. Not only old buildings, but also invisible values are well preserved. “Japanese kimono is very beautiful. The kimono culture is well preserved”.

4.2.6. About Japanese people

Participants still have some time to observe and interact with Japanese people during the tour. “Japan is a modern country but Japanese people are kind and value their own culture”, “Japanese people are kind and cute”, “Polite and compassionate attitude”, “Well organized, kind and helpful”. Some participants could “gradually understood the Japanese way of thinking and personality”, “It was wonderful because they care of the details”, “Japanese are punctual”. Besides, Japanese people seems to be very religious: “Japanese people often believe in shrines and temples”, “Japanese are superstitious and obedient to religion”.

4.2.7. Skills and lessons learned

Participants reported that they gained some specific skills and lessons during the tour. They reported that “I learned manners at shrines and temples”, “It was important how to wash your hands before entering the temple”, “I observed people to get red seal (shuin) stamped for worshippers and visitors to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan”, “I bought a charm (omamori) for good luck of myself”, “Kimono was very cute, many people are wearing kimono”, “We learned a lot about the culture of Uji Matcha”. Moreover, they “learn to value traditional culture”, “learn Japanese history, religion and culture”. Participants had a great experiences trying street (yatai) food of Kyoto: “I tasted Japanese food in Kyoto. was delicious”, “I understand Japanese culture and food well”. Participants also used this chance to interact with each other. “I made friends on this tour. I'm happy”.

4.3. About continuity and improvement

Majority of the comments emphasized on the need to continue this kind of Japanese culture study tour “because it was a very good study about Japan”, “I thought it would be nice to have more such trips”, “It was plenty of learning and discoveries”, “I was able to experience Japanese culture, learn Japanese history and religion”, “I want such a tour to be held twice a year.

The trip was evaluated as very exciting and well organized, however some improvements were suggested. Some participants felt that it may need more time for activity. “There was not enough time to read the explanations and interact with everyone”, “It is difficult to understand without a professional

guide”, “I want another day to avoid getting tired”, “Not enough meal time”, “Travel is wonderful, the longer the better!”. Some participants even want to have more activities: “no place to go in the evening”, “better to have onsen at the hotel”, “it could be more fun if we had a party”.

4.4. Future needs for studying Japanese culture

After visiting Kyoto cultural spots, the participants have shown a huge interest to see and learn more about Japanese culture. The desired destinations and categories of interest collected from participants in three years 2016~2018 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Places and contents want to visit in future

Category	Future needs for study visit 2016~2018
Kyoto	Ginkakuji, Heian Shrine, various temples, Gion, Arashiyama, Anime museum, Life museum etc.
Cities	Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Kobe, Nara, Osaka, Tokyo, Hokkaido, Okinawa
Temples	Sensoji, Honnoji Various shrine, temples with history
Castles	Himeji, Nagoya, Kumamoto, Fukuyama
Arts	Festivals, kabuki, Japanese dance, tea ceremony, matcha making, sake making, cuisine, manga, anime, Japanese sword, fireworks, traditional houses, clothes/kimono, sumo
Places	Mount Fuji, Matsushima, Amanohashidate, Miyajima, Otaru, Kamakura, Asakusa, Various mountains, hot springs, seaside

5. Conclusion

International students who participated in this study tour have gained basic concepts about Japanese culture, experienced the key cultural spots of Kyoto, deepened their understanding of the historical value of Kyoto and have shown their interest to learn more about the Japanese culture. The tours organized have a role of triggering the curiosity and interest of international students towards Japan, contributing to increased interest in Japanese culture. Students are changing their mentality towards Japan and have shown curiosity and willing to learn more about Japanese culture after this exposure.

International students also stated their future need to visit and learn about historic places and traditional Japanese culture country-wide. In order to broaden international students' perspectives on Japanese culture, it is necessary to continue similar tours, as well as to create more opportunities to go to cultural places outside Tokushima prefecture. Based on these needs, it is important for universities to consider educational opportunities so that international students can increase their motivation to understand Japanese culture.

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