

観光フォーラム

Memoirs of a Visiting Scholar to Wakayama University – November 2019

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I visited Wakayama University between mid- to end-November 2019 as part of the Centre of Tourism Research Visiting Scholar scheme. This was my first visit to Wakayama, but I have been in Japan numerous times as both an academic and also a tourist. Nevertheless, it was the longest time I have been appointed as a visiting scholar, and indeed opened my eyes to a new world. I have already known some of the tourism academics at Wakayama prior to my visit. These included meeting them at conferences, hosting a few of them at my own university a few years ago, and also as friends in either Australia or Japan. As such, the visit to Wakayama was somewhat strange in that whilst it was a totally new environment, I felt a sense of home very much due to the familiar faces around me.

The two weeks passed very quickly. Amidst the flurry of things, I delivered a guest lecture on mega event legacies using the case study of the Commonwealth Games 2018, two industry presentations on topics such as integrated resort landscapes in Singapore and destination governance in Australia. These encounters trained me to retrieve my limited Japanese vocabulary from memory, as I found being able to put together a few words or phrases in the native language built some bridges even before the presentation was delivered. It triggered a gentle reminder of the power of being at least bilingual, something that I have been perhaps blessed with from my ethnic background and national identity, but an area that I had not fully leveraged until very recently.

Language is such a powerful thing. Through numerous discussions with staff, students and administrators at Wakayama, the fast shifting sands of academic landscapes from traditionally delivering teaching and research in Japanese is swept up in a wave of globalisation. This focus on English as the lingua franca has perhaps raised tensions and made some feel rather uncomfortable as it shakes the comfort zone – one that may have been built up over past decades. As such, shifting teaching and research cultures may be easy for some, but for others a monumental task to undertake in a language

that they may not have been exposed to. Yet, it is becoming more apparent that the national metrics are now heavily skewed towards English based teaching and research outputs. This is not vastly different to what other Asian countries are facing but can create friction between emerging scholars who leverage on their ability to adapt to such changes very quickly and those that resist such tides confronting Japan's tertiary frameworks.

These issues notwithstanding, I highly admire the cohesiveness of everyone I meet to ensure things tick along daily. These include students who continue to dig deep and write their dissertations in English when the majority of their peers may opt to do so in Japanese, administrative staff who conscientiously ensure that paperwork and other facilities are made available when needed and staff who put in long hours devoting themselves for teaching, research and other service commitments. Yet, each person I meet, whether in the corridor or office spaces always has at least a minute to make me feel welcome, and at times, out of their way to be hospitable hosts.

Perhaps this is the Japanese way of demonstrating 'omotenashi', the Japanese style of hospitality. This, in turn, also spurred me on to also take time and speak with as many people to help. One of the first things I found amusing was a consultation sheet that I was given on the first day to document who I met and get them to summarise details of what our meeting was about. Without realising this, I had actually spoken to numerous staff, students and administrators separately. Each meeting to me was a privilege to peek into their world, their pride and their challenges. I shared my insights and areas where I could possibly be of assistance. I came as a visiting scholar and a guest, but I felt that I had left as a friend, and that the collaborations are likely to continue in future. Thank you everyone for giving me your precious time and space, and I wish you all the very best.

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