

The 2008 SCJ Culture Program: Analysis and Suggestions

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I am happy to report that the 2008 Culture Program of the Summer Courses in Japanese (SCJ) was highly successful, with all activities and lectures well-attended and generally well-received by the participants. This success was made possible by the enthusiasm of the participants, the expertise of the lecturers and instructors, and the excellent organization and support provided by Director Hirose, the SCJ staff, the three culture program assistants and numerous ICU student volunteers. It was a great privilege to work together with such dedicated leadership and staff.

This reflection on the 2008 program will begin with an overview of the four main components of the program: the lecture series, on-campus activities, off-campus trips, and the Culture Program Lounge. It will conclude with a list of recommendations for future improvements of the program.

I. The Lecture Series

Of the five lectures in the series, four were given by ICU faculty and one was by a calligraphy master from Osaka. Each is briefly described below. Finally, the section concludes with some suggestions for the lecture series in general.

Lecture 1: July 7, 1:30-3:30pm

“Japan and the Principle of Cool: From Metroethnicity to Multiculturalism”

Professor John Maher, ICU

Using colorful visuals from Japanese media, Professor Maher explained how perceptions of ethnic and cultural diversity in Japan have been changing from “monocultural and monoethnic” toward a perception that ethnic minorities are “cool” and more accepted than before. The lecture helped the audience see Japan from a variety of new angles including Ryukyu Japanese culture, Ainu Japanese culture and Korean-Japanese culture. Approximately 45 students attended.

Lecture 2: July 14, 1:30-3:30pm

“Lost in Translation: How to Get Familiar with Classical Japanese Literature”

Professor Tzvetana Kristeva, ICU

After an overview of the classic Tale of Genji, Professor Kristeva introduced a selection of hard-to-translate excerpts from the original Japanese and explained how they have been translated differently by Waley (1925), Seidensticker (1976) and Tyler (2001). A brief video segment of an anime production based on the novel helped the audience visualize the famous classic. The lecture provided valuable insights into the difficulties of translating classical Japanese literature and how the interpretations can differ from person to person, even among Japanese. Approximately 45 students attended.

Lecture 3: July 16, 1:30-3:30pm

“ICU Underground: Japanese Material Culture and Campus Archeology”

Professor Richard Wilson, ICU

Held in the Yuasa Museum on campus, this lecture-tour explained the archeological findings from a large number of well-preserved Neolithic, Jomon, and Yayoi period sites being dug right on ICU’s campus. After the lecture-tour, students were also treated to the rare experience of unearthing pottery fragments from an archeological dig a few minutes walk from the museum. Approximately 60 students attended.

Lecture 4: July 23, 1:30-3:30pm

“Let’s Enjoy Rhythmic ‘Sho’”

Master Eishi Sakuta, Naniwa Sho Association

This was an lecture, performance, and workshop designed to introduce the spirit of dynamic calligraphy which Master Eishi Sakuta calls “*Sho*.” Only a maximum of 30 students were able to participate in the workshop due to space limitations, but many others joined in observing Master Sakuta and his disciples express themselves with rhythmic brush strokes. The workshop participants had sets of ink, brush and paper to practice kanji and create a work of *sho* on a *shikishi* card to take home.

Lecture 5: August 4, 1:30-3:30pm

“Making Fun of the Revolution: Political Cartoons in the Meiji Restoration”

Professor M. William Steele

Using an interactive workshop format, Professor Steele introduced students to the concept of political satire in the U.S. and Japan and then proceeded to explain how commoners in Edo embedded hidden messages in cartoons to avert censorship and satirize the political movements of the late Tokugawa to early Meiji period. As a final group activity, students practiced deciphering the hidden symbols of several color-copied Tokugawa period political cartoons. A highly engaged group of 16 participated in the workshop.

Suggestions for the Lecture Series

All of the lectures this year were stimulating lectures by highly qualified experts in their fields. I attended all and enjoyed learning from each of them. At the same time, I have some ideas for improving the series:

1. *Stricter time management*: Many lectures ended up being close to 120 minutes with no break, and ended up with little Q&A time at the end. The lecturers probably should design the lectures for about 60 minutes or less, and the facilitator should signal the remaining time to the lecturers.
2. *More interaction among audience members*: In addition to listening to a presentation of key ideas, participants would most likely appreciate opportunities to discuss the topic with people around them. At the beginning and the end of the lecture, small group discussions could generate questions or opinions about the topic, which could then be addressed or commented on by the lecturer.

3. *A greater variety of topics and a greater variety of formats:* In addition to highly specialized lecture topics, some lectures could be designed as broad introductions such as “An Introduction to Japanese Religion” or “An Introduction to Japanese Education.” I believe this was done in past summers, so it could be revived. Also, as a new type of format, it may be interesting to focus some sessions entirely on discussion (in English or Japanese as the medium of communication, as appropriate) rather than lecture. Some reading could be assigned in advance as preparation for the discussion. If discussions with SCJ students are possible, ICU student volunteers may also actively attend for the valuable experience of exchanging questions and viewpoints about Japanese culture with foreign students.
4. *A more efficient way to collect audience reactions about the lectures:* If the lecturer feels comfortable with doing so, comment sheets like those used in many ICU classes may be useful for both the lecturer and the culture program staff to see the audience’s reactions. Or, on the same day as the lecture, an email questionnaire could be sent to the SCJ student mailing list to request reactions about the lecture.

II. On-Campus Activities

The following eight activities were offered on campus. For each, a summary of the activity and some recommendations for improvement are given.

1. Campus and Local Tours, July 5, 2-6pm

In small groups of various sizes, two culture program assistants and six ICU student volunteers took about 30 SCJ students on campus tours, going from the former cafeteria, past D-kan and the chapel to the sports complex and optionally to Taizanso. Also, after the summer heat softened around 5pm, a group of 15 walked to Musashi-Sakai station for the local tour.

All tours were a good chance to meet people and get familiar with the area, but organization was a challenge. The culture program needs to make sure participants and volunteers have a clearer idea of how the tour will be conducted in terms of who will explain what, who needs to stay with who, and how long it will take.

2. Meet ICU Students Party, July 8, 3-5pm

The Meet ICU Students Party was held in the Culture Program Lounge as a chance for SCJ students and ICU student volunteers to get to know each other early on in the summer term. The Culture Program provided drinks and snacks. About 30 SCJ students and 20 ICU students participated and enjoyed chatting freely. No particular program was arranged.

To make the party even better, some activities or games for meeting people with common interests could be arranged. For example, ICU students could invite SCJ students to join their club’s summer activities, or

SCJ students could use the party to look for language exchange partners.

3. Ikebana Flower Arrangement, July 18, 1:30-3:30pm

After Master Sousho Tsukamoto demonstrated the basic techniques of *ikebana*, each of the 25 SCJ students created their own flower arrangement. Nine hard-working ICU student volunteers helped with the time-consuming process of setting up, taking down, and cleaning 25 sets of flowers, ceramic vases, *kenzans*, scissors, and water basins.

No improvements for this activity come to mind except for possibly providing more reading resources about the background of *ikebana* prior to the event.

4. Japanese Traditional Music July 22, 1:30-3:30pm

Master Takahara of the *sho* and Master Nakamura of the *hichiriki* provided a very well-prepared lecture-concert that helped SCJ students understand the history of traditional Japanese music. The power of the instruments was breathtaking, pulling the audience into another world instantly. About 30 students attended this lecture concert.

In the survey, some students expressed an interest in seeing more types of instruments, so we could ask Ms. Takahara and Ms. Nakamura to see if any of their colleagues might be interested in joining next year.

5. Tea Ceremony in Taizanso, July 24, 1-2pm and 2:30-3:30pm

The ICU tea ceremony club invited two groups of 15 students (30 in total) to experience the tea ceremony in scenic Taizanso. I did not attend, but I heard that everything went very smoothly. We hope the *sado* club will sponsor the event again next year.

No improvements seem needed except possibly to provide students with more background information through a pre-event lecture on the history and culture of the tea ceremony.

6. Zori Making, July 28 and 29, 1:30-3pm

A very friendly team of 12 *zori*-weaving instructors led by Ms. Teranishi helped about 25 SCJ students hand-weave a pair of comfortable cloth *zori* sandals over a two day session. Six ICU volunteers assisted with the communication and some also made their own sandals too.

One point of confusion was whether volunteers and SCJ program instructors would also have to pay the 500yen fee for materials. It should be made clear that anybody who makes a pair of *zoris* must pay 500yen.

7. Suika Wari, August 8, 1:30-3pm

About 30 people took turns being blindfolded and swinging a *bokuto* to split (or smash) the 10 well-chilled watermelons prepared for the event. A large crowd (perhaps 50 or 60) stood by to get a share of the cold, sweet watermelon. In particular, Hirose-sensei's idea of having pairs of blindfolded students work together worked very well, allowing a large number to participate and test their teamwork. The ice-cold water fight that raged during the event was good fun as well.

To make this event even better, I recommend that the water fight (using the pool water for cooling the melons) that inevitably occurs during and after the watermelon smashing become an official event. It should be advertised in advance so that potential participants can come appropriately dressed and leave electronic devices at home.

8. Koto Club Performance, August 11, 1:30-3pm

The ICU *koto* club provided not only a *koto* concert performance, but also a chance for SCJ students to experience playing the *koto* and even a chance for SCJ students to try on a kimono. All who attended were very satisfied with this event and we hope it can be arranged next year as well.

No improvements to the *koto* event come to mind. It would be wonderful if other ICU clubs related to Japanese culture could also provide similar student led events.

III. Off-Campus Trips

Five official off-campus trips (all on weekdays) were arranged as well as a number of unofficial events on weekends. All were well-received and carried out largely without problems. A few events may benefit from minor modifications, but all are recommended for continuation next year.

1. Ghibli Museum, 7/9, 1pm-4pm

45 SCJ students, two culture program assistants, and five ICU student volunteers went by bus to see this museum dedicated to Hayao Miyazaki's popular anime films.

The event is very popular every year and this year tickets sold out quickly in a matter of minutes after the sales desk opened, leaving many dismayed students unable to go even though they had lined up on the day of sale. Thus, if possible, we may want to devise a way to find out in advance how many SCJ enrollees are interested and reserve tickets accordingly.

2. Osawadai Elementary School Visit, 7/11, 1-3pm

42 SCJ students and six volunteers walked to nearby Osawadai Elementary School and were taken around on group tours of the elementary school campus by about 60 energetic fifth graders. Since the fifth graders

spoke almost no English, SCJ students had many chances to use their Japanese to ask the children questions about *shogakko* life and play games with the kids. After the fifth graders went back to their classes, the principal of the school very kindly provided a Q&A time about Japanese elementary school education as well. This event was very well-received by both sides and should definitely be held again.

The only problem was the summer heat in the primary school gymnasium. Water bottles should be carried to the school by each participant to avoid dehydration.

3. Kabuki, 7/11, 5-10pm

50 SCJ students took trains down to the National Theatre to watch a short kabuki performance prefaced by an explanation of kabuki for beginners. The 90 minute performance of *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* was spectacular.

The English commentary on the earphones was very helpful, so renting earphones should be strongly recommended for all participants. Those who did not get earphones regretted it because the storyline is difficult for beginners to understand without commentary.

4. Zen Meditation, 7/18, 1:30-7pm

30 SCJ students experienced a half-day course of Zen including a temple tour, a lecture on Zen thought, training on Zen meal rituals, 45 minutes of meditation, a vegetarian Zen style dinner eaten in a ritual style, and a Q&A session. The five hour program sounds long, but actually goes by very quickly. Monk Kuruma is a very friendly and gracious host, and many SCJ students go back for longer meditation sessions or to listen to his lectures.

The activity is highly recommended and seems to have no room for change. The only difficulty was interpreting the lecture. Prior study of Zen vocabulary in English and Japanese would be helpful for the interpreter.

5. Jindai Soba and Pottery, 8/5 and 8/12, 1-4pm

19 students were picked up at ICU's bus rotary by the microbus of a very friendly soba shop in Jindaiji and enjoyed a tasty soba lunch there. Then, moving right next door, SCJ students tried their hand at creating pottery masterpieces. One week later, about half of the students went back to complete their pieces with coloring, while the other half took the option of allowing the pottery shop staff to color the pieces with a simple lacquer glaze.

The only request many students had was to allow them more time to explore the scenic Jindaiji area. Also, there was some confusion about whether there was a need to go back on the second day of the event a

week later for coloring or not, so the details of that coloring day should be made clearer within the description of the event.

Off Campus Events: In addition to the five trips above, many ICU student volunteers enjoyed taking SCJ students to various places in Tokyo such as Asakusa or Harajuku, to events such as fireworks or summer festivals, or on short trips to *onsens* or Mt. Fuji. These unofficial weekend events are wonderful opportunities for SCJ students to get to know Japan and should be encouraged by the culture program, but it is important for the SCJ program to obtain signed waivers from SCJ students to certify that they understand the program will assume no responsibility for problems that may occur during those unofficial activities.

IV. The Culture Program (CP) Lounge

The main functions of the culture program (CP) lounge were as follows:

- 1) An air-conditioned space for SCJ students to chat with each other or ICU students
- 2) A convenient place to buy food (onigiris and breads), drinks, and snacks
- 3) A place to learn about and sign up for culture program events
- 4) A place to ask the cultural program assistants for advice on how to travel in Japan or how to experience various aspects of Japanese culture they were interested in.

All of these functions seemed sufficiently fulfilled by the 2008 lounge. The three culture program assistants did a brilliant job of managing the lounge and selling the snacks and drinks.

V. Some Recommendations for the Culture Program in General

Below are my recommendations for how to improve the culture program in the future.

1. *New Events:* In general, the current line up events is well-received and may not need to be changed at all. Also, it should be noted that work load for the various events conducted in 2008 seemed close to the maximum capacity that the culture program could handle with a team of three program assistants. Finally, ideas for on-campus or off-campus events need to be realistic for weekday afternoons or evenings within a few hours. With those facts in mind, some ideas for new events to consider, partly derived from an informal survey of students, include:
 - 1) Martial arts or sumo related events such as a lectures, a training session, or visits to *dojos* or sumo stables;
 - 2) Sports events such as a visit to a professional baseball or soccer game;
 - 3) Visits to more types of public or educational institutions such as Mitaka's city hall a junior high school, or a pre-school;
 - 4) Visits to a Shinto shrine or some other chance to learn about Shinto;
 - 5) More events connected to ICU clubs such as the Taiko Club or the Japanese Traditional Dance

Club;

6) Events for learning traditional games such as *shogi* or *igo*;

7) Events related to food and cooking such as a sushi class at a cooking school in Tokyo (There is a good sushi class in Tsukiji, but a special class may need to be arranged to match the SCJ schedule).

8) Plan a “Performance Night” where SCJ students and ICU students work together to perform entertaining skits or songs in Japanese or English. The winners could perform in the final farewell lunch party.

2. *Numbers of Tickets + Surveying SCJ Student Interests and Requests for Activities in Advance:* As mentioned briefly above, it would be useful to know how many SCJ students are interested in going to certain popular off-campus events such as the Ghibli Museum or Kabuki before the reservation arrangements are made. If student interests could be surveyed in advance by email or some other system, then the program could avoid problems such as ending up with a surplus of unsold tickets or disappointing students by not having enough tickets. Though this may be logistically difficult, some type of system would be a nice improvement.
3. *Collecting Participant Feedback More Effectively:* One of the most regrettable results of the 2008 culture program was the relative failure of an experimental online system to survey student comments and suggestions. Traditionally, SCJ student comments and suggestions had been collected on paper by handing out a questionnaire in class. For 2008, this was experimentally changed to an email-based questionnaire linked to an online automatic survey form. The two-fold goal was to allow students more time to write many comments at their leisure rather than being rushed in class and to speed up the survey result tabulation process with computerization. However, the unfortunate result was that only 35 out of 130 students responded. It seems that many SCJ students were too busy or were unable to access email conveniently in the final week or the subsequent weeks after the program to fill out an email form. Thus, the system of obtaining feedback should be improved. One idea may be to have comment sheets that are filled after each event. Also, at the end of the summer, a paper survey form may get more responses than an emailed survey and so it seems best to return to the paper-based survey.

In conclusion, through some of the changes recommended above, it is my hope that culture programs of the SCJ will be more successful in the future. I would like to end by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Hirose, all of the staff of the SCJ, the participants of the SCJ program, and my talented and reliable team of culture program assistants for making the 2008 Culture Program a wonderful success.