

Report

In this July, I attended the summer course “Kierkegaard: The Individual in the Global Society,” which is offered by the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen. I have gained a lot from this eye-opening experience.

Before taking this summer course, I had not read about philosophy for a long time. Doing a master's degree got me more and more specialized in my particular field. Meanwhile, I felt uneasy, worrying that my vision is becoming narrower. When I read a book or a journal article, I read it in order to write a paper or my thesis. Gradually, I felt my study and research turned irrelevant to my living experience. I missed the days in college when I took philosophy courses and discussed the meaning of life with classmates. I missed the days of introspection and contemplation. This year, the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis have certainly changed many things. I was appalled by the fragility of life. And in face of the great and the probably almighty nature, human agency appears illusory. I was almost overwhelmed by nihilism. I knew academic and analytical discussions and exchanges would not help me rediscover the foundation for life. Fortunately, I had the chance to explore Kierkegaard's philosophy in Denmark.

Our lecturer Professor Brian Söderquist is a passionate mentor and friend. He allows our classroom discussion to deviate from the intended path and encourages us to voice

our deepest thoughts, concerns and anxieties. He also emotionally reads aloud his favorite Kierkegaard's passages to us. We are in the classroom, not to learn knowledge but to assume a brand new perspective to our particular existences. Once again, I feel I am studying for myself, not for a degree or for presenting and publishing, after all existentialism is no longer trendy in the academia. In this secular world, Kierkegaard persuades me to believe there is still faith and life still could be meaningful, although the lightness of being would haunt us from time to time. And Brian demonstrates that it is not a problem to be sentimental. Rather, to be sensitive might be a gift. It would be way too exaggerated to say this summer course has transformed me into another person. Nevertheless, I have more positive attitudes now. I am to be responsible for my own life and make myself a better citizen day by day.

Besides all the lessons I draw from Kierkegaard, Denmark, the country itself, is inspiring. Before going to Denmark, I had heard many things about social democracy and the welfare state that looks after everyone from cradle to grave. But when I actually live in this country, I am still impressed. The sense of security in Denmark is probably unimaginable in either Japan or China. It is understood that the cost of comprehensive social welfare is high. The tax rate in Denmark is indeed high, but I don't think the whole system is in deep crisis, as some neoliberals warn. I once had a discussion with a

Danish classmate about communism and social democracy, and we both agreed Neoliberalization is not the only future for this world and there are alternatives. Too bad in China people only refer to U.S. as an example. Moreover, as a feminist, Denmark makes me willing to believe women's situation could be improved in other parts of the world. To be frank, in Japan I am very frustrated by the conspicuous presence of housewives and the low percentage of female students and professors in Todai. In Denmark, fathers can have up to two weeks of paid paternity leave. And in streets, it is impossible not to notice that there are so many fathers walking their children around and taking their kids to school. Another aspect of Denmark that strikes me is the predominance of bicycles and bike lanes in Copenhagen, a very energetic city. In the 1970s, the city suffered from serious air pollution. To clear the air, ordinary people gradually abandoned automobiles and turned to bikes. Meanwhile, the municipality expanded bike lanes and made driving actually more difficult. Economic development is not everything. I think the Danes show us how to pay more attention to the quality of life. In this country, I am introduced to another way of life. I may not immediately adopt this more relaxed approach to life, but at least I am aware of different options and horizons.

What is also wonderful about this summer course is that the IARU network brings

students of diverse backgrounds together. Because all the students were born and are educated in different cultures and traditions, the discussions are always provoking and quite heated. The pulse of globalization can be felt within our small class. There is a student from Australian National University. His father is American and mother Singaporean. Although he holds an American passport, what bothers him is his identity as an Australian as the Asian community is rapidly expanding in Australia. I have read a lot on identity politics, but talking to this classmate let me truly discover the nuanced complexity of identification and subjectification. I have made many good friends in this summer, thanks to IARU. I will never forget those dinners during which we sometimes seriously debate on the existential situations of human beings and sometimes casually make fun of stupid politicians and celebrities.

In a nutshell, I strongly recommend this summer course to other students in Today. Actually, I am considering going to Europe for study in the future. I genuinely like the atmosphere there.

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