

Education in Singapore, and what I learned

1. Introduction

This summer, I participated in an IARU global summer program, “Southeast Asia in Context” which was hosted by the University of Singapore. What I experienced in the six weeks through June and July was totally incredible, and is something I will never forget. It is definitely the highlight of my third year in University, and memories are still vivid in my mind. I am truly thankful to the University of Tokyo and Mr. Tokuhisa from the Department of International Affairs who gave me this splendid chance to study overseas.



Dr. Pattana, our instructor of the whole course

2. Learning in a International Class, Learning in a Dorm

Alike other IARU programs, this course is a course that involves learning with international students, and learning in an international class. Students came from various countries: 11 from Singapore (National University of Singapore), 11 from Denmark (The University of Copenhagen), 5 from the UK (University of Leeds, Kings College, and University of Manchester), 2 from Australia (Australia National University), 1 from the United States (University of Yale), and the two of us from the University of Tokyo. Nationalities were more of a variety, as some came from France, Indonesia, Malaysia, Romania and Switzerland.

The course was based on anthropology, and how anthropology could be an interesting topic in Southeast Asia. For the first two weeks, our lectures took place in a classroom in the department of Southeast Asian Studies. We were given many

readings, and discussed about the contents during class. As this course was based on Southeast Asian studies, many students, although not all, had Southeast Asian backgrounds in their majors. This led to very high-level discussions in the class and in group projects. However, those like myself who did not major in anthropology and Southeast Asian studies were not left out, since the readings were plenty enough for acquiring basic knowledge, and the professors were always ready to offer help. Students were also helpful, and the ones experienced in anthropology would lead the group and discussion in projects.

But this was not the only interaction we had with the international students. At the NUS, we were given rooms at the dorm called Prince Georges Park Residence, or the PGP, on the edge of the NUS campus. The students and the TA on the course were given rooms on the same floor. So every morning you would meet each other, eat breakfast together, and go on for a drink, at times. Staying with all these people for 2 weeks made me informed with a lot I never knew about the Danish, English, and American, some which I can't describe here. If not for this course and this 2 weeks, I don't think I would have come to know that the Danish have a custom to go into the shower together. Or was I just cheated?

If someone would make a plan to go clubbing, or play football, or anything, everyone interested would just pop out, and go out together. The time spent in the PGP was a very enjoyable one, and something I believe very unique to this course, where you spend a whole 6 weeks together on the same course.



On our visit to a hawker center (a public food stalls)

3. Singapore as a place to study, as well as a place to study in

Spending time in Singapore was an experience by itself. The weather was so humid and so hot, something I didn't expect in June. The food, everything was so delicious, even the cafeteria's on the campus, and nothing cost more than 3 dollars, or about 200 yen. Public transportation is cheap, taxi's are cheap, and there are many places to see, so you could spend your whole free time having fun. Singapore is a very developed country, and indeed a very nice place to spend time and study in.

But that is not the only reason why studying in Singapore is special. Singapore's geographical location is a very significant one in the Southeast Asian region, and from anthropological views, it has many meanings. Singapore, on the edge of the peninsula, has been a very important place for trading. It has attracted many people starting from the British, and has been a place of interaction for many years. And that is why peoples' ethnicity, or identity, comes out very strongly and vividly. Singapore is known for its multi-ethnic policies. The public housing or the HTB's are very strict on the fact that the people's ethnic groups in the HTB should be a certain ratio, namely the ration of Chinese, Indian and Malay. And this is exactly why this course was opened in the NUS, in Singapore.

When confronted by other ethnic groups, your own ethnicity will be challenged, and you will be asking yourself who you are, what ethnic group you are in. This is something I came to know as I spent my time in Singapore with all the peoples from different groups and countries, and it is also what is happening in Singapore in everyday life all the time. Although this is something that we learned through are lectures, what is amazing is that you can get the chance to actually explore for yourself what happens, there in the real world. This is the group work I have been talking about, and something that makes time studying in Singapore really special.



Thai migrant workers hanging out and spending their day off.

4. Anthropology in Southeast Asia

As I have said, your ethnicity is something that comes out strongly when confronted with other ethnic groups. And that is why Southeast Asia, a place with multiple and very diverse ethnic groups, is the ideal place to go on a field study for traces of ethnicity. Ms. Cynthia Chao was the professor who assigned us to this group project, to find something that you can challenge the ethnic theories that already exist, by going out in the city.

One group went to see a Malay wedding, a traditional style of wedding for the Malay people. What that group found out was, although the bride was Malay, the groom had Indian blood in him. So they managed to take in parts of the Indian wedding tradition, in this case a yellow umbrella, into the Malay style wedding. This is a sure example that ethnicity is nothing something static but a dynamic process, with changes going on all the time, however managing not to change too much to lose its original state.

Another group went out to study the void deck, which is another name for the ground floor of the HDB's or public housing. It is something unique to Singapore, and was originally made so that people could interact there. It is now a place for conversation, eating dinner, playing chess, and at times, weddings take place there. It is a place where you can see interesting mingles of ethnic traditions through the uncles there.

Our group went to find out how chili pepper could be an indicator for ethnicity in the Southeast Asian cuisine. Peranakan cuisine, which is another name for the cuisine the Chinese who have come to live in Singapore have made, is known for its spiciness. We made interviews to chefs in restaurants, groceries selling chili peppers, and people in the hawker market, which is the local food stalls. We came to find out that indeed the people of Singapore, whatever ethnic group they may come from, have something to say about the chili in their foods, and is something that shows what ethnic group you come from.

Studying anthropology in Singapore was very challenging, and the activity you could have out in the field was something very unique and special.



The Malay Wedding group, in traditional Malay outfits

5. The Field Trip

The section before was what we could experience in Singapore with several hours, by the new knowledge that came to us through studying for 2 weeks. What happened after that was so much more splendid and eye-opening, and definitely the highlight of this whole course.

After the first two weeks of class and after all the assignments were handed in, the class sent off to Cambodia, and Thailand. After all, the class came to find out a lot of new things in the hours spent in the field. What couldn't you find out if you had a whole 11 days of time as a field trip?

It was an incredible 11 days. Students were paired so that we could stay in double rooms. People became to know each other a lot better, and I cannot easily express my friendship towards Dani, my roommate.

Cambodia was a thriller altogether. It was the first time I had went to a developing country, and the people, the culture, their history, everything was important and had special meanings. Angkor Wat was indeed a great place, just as you would see in television. But the people living there, the guides, and the children trying to sell souvenirs, those were not something that would be shown on TV, and was something that made you think a lot. We were able to see a village that stood on a river, 3 hours away from any other city, whose people made a living on the tourists that came to see them living. This was also not something you could see in regular tour. So many other hands on activities were there, such as rice planting and riding ox carts, each that lead to knowing what life was like in that region.

Thailand was also something to see. How strong the influences of Buddhism were on the Thai people was something in a way very shocking, as a I come from

Japan where most people are known to be “free thinkers”. Ayutthaya was also a place we visited and I can remember the places that are shown drowning now, on TV. With the anthropological lens, Cambodia and Thailand were not only an entertainment, they were a place of huge intellectual shock, that is only what I have to say now.



A cut from Cambodia, in Angkor Wat

6. Gratitude

I cannot thank too much the university and other people such as our professors who made it possible for me to spend this special time in Singapore. This is my report of the whole event, and I highly recommend this program to others who may go after me.

2011年8月17日

IARU Summer Program 参加報告書

はじめに

5週間に渡って、シンガポール国立大学において Southeast Asia in Context を履修した。本プログラムでは、シンガポールをはじめ東南アジア諸国の歴史を振り返るとともにどのように現代の国家が形成され、西欧諸国からの影響と東南アジア諸国の相互関係が形成されてきたかマクロおよびミクロ的観点の両視点から学んだ。プログラムは約3週間に渡る集中講義と10日間のカンボジアとタイへのフィールドトリップの合計5週間にわたるプログラムによって構成されており、授業および日々の課題はかなりインテンシブな内容であった。日本からのこのプログラムの参加は今期が初めてということで、教授や受け入れスタッフの方々に歓迎してもらえた。参加メンバーは、私を含め東京大学から2人、デンマークからの生徒が11人、イギリスの各大学から5人、オーストラリア国立大学から2人、アメリカイェール大学1人、そしてシンガポール大学の生徒10人であった。人種も様々な生徒で構成されており、異なった文化が交じり合うなかクラスが一つになりみんなが協力し理解しあえ大変有意義な日々を送ることができた。

授業について

授業は、必修科目と選択科目のそれぞれ一科目ずつとることが必須であった。必修科目ではシンガポールをはじめ東南アジア全体の歴史と文明開化、諸外国との関係や東南アジア諸国内の相互関係を主に学んだ。選択科目ではよりミクロ的観点から東南アジアの歴史と文化を文化人類学的に考察していった。私自身、シンガポールの外国人労働者政策を研究していることもあり、教授によるシンガポールに関する講義は今まで学ぶ機会がなく大変貴重な体験であった。更に、どのようにシンガポールの大学で教育されているかも知ることができ大変有意義で自身の研究を同時に深めることができたと思う。学生の中には、東南アジアを専門に勉強をしている学生や全く勉強の分野が違う学生が参加しており、基礎知識の差がみられたものの、全く分野の違う学生でも新しい分野の知識として学ぶ素晴らしい機会だったと思える。異なった国からの様々な人種

の学生によって構成された授業での議論は様々な視点から意見を聞くことができ日本の大学とは違ったスタイルの授業で楽しむことができた。

課題について

5週間における課題の量は莫大であった。1000文字×1、1500文字×2、プレゼンテーション×1、5000文字×1のレポートと授業の予習として毎日60ページ位のリーディングアサイメントが課せられた。短期間でのこの量の課題は大変厳しいものであった。しかしざ終えてみると、ここで学んだ全てのことを新たな知識として蓄積され今後の勉学に反映されることが確信できた。今後このプログラムに参加する学生は課題の量であまりストレスに感じず、新しい知識と経験を学ぶ上での課題ということに有意義に時間を使うことを勧めたい。教授もクラスでの勉強や課題だけではなく、実際に外に出てシンガポールの文化や人々と触れ合うことを毎日勧めてくれた。しかし、実際のところ、課題の量が莫大過ぎて完璧に課題をやり遂げるには外に出る十分な時間はない位であった。そんな中、クラスのみならず協力的な学生同士で計画を立てシンガポールを観光する合間を作ることもできた。みんなが協力して計画を立てることができたからこそ、外に出て実際のシンガポール文化や生活を体験できたことだと思われる。

フィールドトリップについて

フィールドトリップは10日間にわたってカンボジアとタイをバスで回った。毎日のスケジュールは大変過密で、体力的に厳しい内容であったがその分多くの場所の訪問と貴重な体験ができた。このプログラムに参加していないと経験することが難しいこと、例えばカンボジアでの floating village にある小学校の訪問やタイの村での田植え、お寺での瞑想修行など大変貴重な経験をさせていただいた。観光ではなかなか行けない場所を含め、各訪問場所での教授陣による詳しいガイド説明はこのプログラムに参加してこそ経験できるものであり、単なる観光ではない大変有意義なフィールドトリップであった。

カンボジアでの滞在は4日間と短い期間であったが、トイレや衛生面など生活の違いに戸惑うことが多々あったが、すぐに慣れることができた。衛生的にきれいなレストランやホテルでの食事ばかりであったが、辛い食事が毎日続き体に合わない学生はお腹を壊しがちであった。胃薬を常備することを勧めたい。

生活について

シンガポール大学での講義期間は学内にある学生寮で過ごさせていただいた。各自の部屋にエアコンが完備されてなく慣れるまで夜寝られず寝不足の生徒が

多く、少しでもお金を多く払ってでも部屋を変更したいと希望する生徒が多かった。私自身、滞在費が少し高くなったとしてもエアコンが完備されている部屋の方がよかったと思う。しかし、部屋にエアコンがない代わりに、寮の共有部屋であるスタディールームで図書館が閉まる7時以降はクラスのみんなが集まり、一緒に課題をしながら親睦を深めるきっかけともなった。寮にはコンビニや質はよくないがフードコートも完備されており、不自由のない生活を送ることができた。私自身シンガポールの生活には慣れており、気候や食生活で苦労することはさほどなかったが、ほかの学生は気候と食生活の違いから体調を崩しがちであった。

フィールドトリップでは、カンボジアに行くということもあり、多くの学生が自主的にマラリアの薬やその他予防接種を学内の病院で受けていた。学校からはマラリアの薬は必要がないといわれていたが、シンガポールの学生を含めほとんどの学生もマラリアの薬を摂取しており、万が一に備え私たちも病院に行って診療費込み約100シンガポールドルで手に入れ摂取した。マラリアの薬も様々な種類があり、他より高かったが副作用がない安全なマラリアの薬を選んだ。自国からもってきたマラリアの薬や、安いマラリアの薬で副作用に悩まされたり間違った摂取をして体調を崩したりする生徒が何人かいた。自己管理は必要であるが、マラリアの薬の接種について学校側から指導があればより改善されると思われる。

フィールドトリップ中、比較的とても綺麗で安全なホテルに滞在させてもらい食事や安全面において大変気を使っていた。ベジタリアンや宗教上の理由で食べられない学生を考慮してbuffetスタイルの食事がほとんどであった。しかし、タイでのクルージングディナー後に体調不良を訴える学生が多くでた。3週間に及ぶ集中講義と課題を終えてカンボジアでの慣れない生活と炎天下の中での過密なスケジュールによってかなりの疲労もあったため、体調を崩す生徒がしばしば目立ってくるようになった。フィールドトリップは過密なスケジュールが続くので体力勝負なところもあり、体調を万全にしていく必要があると思われる。

最後に

このプログラムに参加したことによって大変貴重な体験をさせていただきました。私が期待していた以上の豊富な内容の講義とフィールドトリップは今後の研究に反映させていきたいと思います。プログラムを通し知りあった学生とは今後も連絡を取り合い将来的にも交流を続けていく仲を築くことができました。学生だけではなく、先生方もとても親しくしてくださり、今後も研究を進めていくうえで連絡をとり続けていくことを許可してくださいました。今後、この

プログラムがより発展し少しでも多くの日本人学生が参加する機会が増えることを願ひ周りの学生に推薦していきたいと思ひます。本プログラムをとりまとめ計画してくださった職員の皆様と先生方、大変お世話になりました。本プログラムに参加させていただき誠にありがとうございました。このプログラムを通して学んだ知識をもとに今後の研究を発展し専念していきたいと思ひます。