

Ise Study Program Report

Before participating in the Ise Study Program at Kogakkan University, I had some basic knowledge about Ise and the various shrines here, but really, I knew very little coming into the program. I had actually come to Ise once before almost nine years ago on my first trip to Japan, but at the time I couldn't speak much Japanese at all, and I didn't understand the huge cultural and historical significance of the site I was visiting nor did I know that there was an entire complex of various related shrines around the area. My friend from Mie took me to what I now know is the "Naiku", and I thought that was the Ise Grand Shrine in its entirety. After spending several years living in Japan since then, I realized that Ise was more important than I had realized, so when I got the email from my professor about participating in this program, I decided to apply.

I was nervous at the beginning of the program for a number of reasons. My field of study in graduate school is not related to Japanese history or religion at all, so I was worried that there would be a lot of things that I would not understand. At the same time, this meant that I had more to gain in a way since I was starting off with relatively little historical understanding. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic was a constant worry throughout the program, but Tamada-san and the other staff at Kogakkan University did a great job organizing everything despite the unusual circumstances they were presented with. The other participants and I worried a lot waiting for the results of our PCR test, but luckily all of us tested negative, and we were able to continue the program as planned.

Through the lectures we had in the mornings each day, the professors at Kogakkan University provided us with an excellent background in not only the religious significance of Ise, but also that of the people who lived here and have supported the shrine over the centuries. The real star of the program though were the places we went for field studies. Of course we went to the "Geku" and "Naiku", the main shrines of Ise central to the Shinto faith, where countless tourists flock to every year, but we also saw different parts of Ise. We went to Kawasaki, a historic area of the city along the river where goods arrived and were produced to support the pilgrims, and the last remaining "onshi" house, where the "onshi" acted as a sort of liaison between pilgrims and the shrines. Through these places, among many others, and the tours and explanations given by experts in the field and people with long family connects to Ise, I really feel like I have a much better understanding of the area's significance to Japanese culture as a whole after participating in the program. I was also able to meet some interesting people and even make some new friends, and I plan to come back to visit Ise again in the future.

2021年「伊勢」と日本スタディプログラム 最終レポート

皇學館大学での本プログラムに参加する前、伊勢と伊勢神宮について、私は基本的な情報を持ってはいたが、なぜ「伊勢」が日本の文化や宗教にこんなに重要な場所であるのか、あまりわかっていなかった。9年ほど前、少ししか日本語を理解できなかった私は、一度伊勢を訪れたことがあった。しかし、伊勢神宮は三重出身の友達が単に案内してくれただけの一つの神社だと思い、重要かつ深い歴史と文化を持つところであるとは思いつけなかった。当時は伊勢の神宮は内宮のみで構成されていると思っていた。その後、私は何年か日本に居住することとなり、段々と「伊勢」は日本人にとって重要で、神聖な場所であるとわかってきた。昨秋、このプログラムについて、指導教授から紹介を受けた時、すぐに申請してみようと思った。

最初はこのプログラムに参加するのに不安があった。私は日本の歴史や宗教を研究しているわけでもなく、自分の知識不足のせいで講義などを理解できないかもしれないと思ったからだ。しかし、その反面、その知識不足のおかげで私は学びを深めることができたとも言える。新型コロナウイルスの感染流行にも常に不安が付きまといはしたが、玉田さんやスタッフの皆さんの努力のおかげもあり、プログラムは成功し、無事の内に終わることができた。プログラム開始にあたり、三重県入りした際には、他の参加者と共にPCR検査の結果を心配しながら待ち、そして全員が陰性だと判明した時の安堵の気持ちを思い出した。

毎朝、皇學館大学の先生たちの講義を受け、私たちがフィールドスタディで見学先を訪問する前に事前学習ができたために、伊勢の神宮だけではなく何百年もの間、参拝者と神宮を支えた伊勢の人々や町の歴史や文化を学んだ。毎年、多くの観光客が訪れる内宮や外宮はもちろん、伊勢にとって重要な役割を果たしてきたのに存在さえも知らなかった様々な地域に足を運んだ。物流と生産に溢れていた河崎という川沿いにある商人の町にも行き、参宮客と神宮の繋がりになっていた御師について学び、現在まで残る旧御師丸岡邸も見学した。専門家の先生と先祖代々伊勢で暮らす古老たちの話を聞き、より深く伊勢のことを理解した。その上、様々な面白い人に出会い、新しい友達もできた。私はいつかまた伊勢に戻ってきたい。

以上