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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



### 2017 JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR SPECIALISTS IN CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC FIELDS (SHORT-TERM) BY GINA KIM

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Already three weeks has passed since my successful completion of the 2-month language training at the Kansai center, but I still dream about Osaka, the region's friendly vibe, summer rain and ocean, and above all things, my dearest friends, teachers and staffs whom I met throughout the program. My experience at the Kansai center during the 2017 Japanese Language Program for Specialists was something unforgettable, which not only provided me an opportunity to develop my language and academic skills, but also offered me a genuine life experience in culture and more.

Although the Kansai center is nestled in a tranquil ocean village far from the hustle-bustle of Osaka city center, the building was always filled with lively energy from many different training groups from all around the world. '17 CA 2.' That was how my class of 16 cultural and academic specialists from 10 different countries was called throughout the period. Our trainee's life CA 2' had started with an excitement as well as a fear of the new setting, but proudly

completed with a great assurance. We were very privileged as every resource there including human resource and facilities was extremely benevolent for us to achieve our individual academic goals. The program was very well organized and coordinated by the cooperative system among faculty, staffs and librarians, always taking a step forward in response to trainees' requests and needs.

This program was specifically designed for researchers and cultural specialists, mostly graduate students in the stage of writing thesis or dissertation. During the day, our group was divided into small classes, not only based on comprehensive assessments of grammar, kanji, reading, speaking, listening and writing capabilities, but reflecting each participant's academic fields and needs, which I believed to be the biggest strength of the program. I was placed into the highest level in kanji, grammar and speaking as a mandatory section, plus which, I could choose few more optional classes for my best use such as 'speed reading,' 'discussion,' and 'news' classes. Thus, each participant had a customized class schedule, which allowed us plenty of flexibility. Also, there was a very advantageous mentoring system; four students in related fields were assigned to a tutor, who offered us inclusive academic advice, individual reading sessions, and even personal cares for any difficulties. My tutor Ms. Yazawa made a sincere mentor for me from the day of arrival to departure. I cannot thank enough for her endless feedbacks for my public presentation, e-mail writings, and research plans and assessments. The faculty members are truly helpful with their great understanding of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds; for example, my teachers paid a great deal of time to correct my pronounciational and grammatical errors coming from my mother tongue.

We were strongly encouraged to utilize the time between and after classes for our own research projects. The library in the center was very accessible with a fair amount of cultural and academic publications and the convenient inter-library system. Above all things, librarians were exceptionally generous and supportive. They dedicated extensive time and efforts to accommodate each of us with resources as may as possible. I often received surprise messages from the library that they found out additional books and articles related to my project and collected them from other libraries. Ms. Hatakenaka, my librarian, even so kindly provided ferry and bus information from Osaka to Kyushu for me in order to browse in-library use books in Oita University.

The program was less like a mere series of classes and tests than an incubator for well-rounded Japan specialists. Throughout the program, there are several tasks and activities given to the trainees besides cultivating language proficiency, such as participating in cultural experiences and building professional and friendly networks. During the first week, we were asked to explore famous spots in Osaka city with some tasks such as interviewing Japanese people and eating local foods. In the following weeks, we participated in a home visit program, an exchange meeting in Kobe University, Japanese Puppet Theater (Bunraku), four days of research trip to Tokyo, Japanese Tea Ceremony, etc. Those activities were the crown jewel of the program. In particular, the home visit program was a great opportunity to experience Japanese life style and build a local friendship. My host Mr. and Mrs. Shigemoto so warm treated me, showing Japan's omotenashi, wholehearted hospitality to guests. The home

was not a one-time event. My host family often contacted me by phone or text, and came to the Kansai center to see me, and attended my completion ceremony. We still keep in touch through letters and messages.

At the end of the completion ceremony party, many of us were moved to tears as we so much appreciated the program in whole heart. We promised to reunite there in few years, not as trainees but mature Japan specialists. My summer in the



Kansai center as part of 17 CA2 became a turning point of my career. I feel that I laid another important cornerstone of my life as a Japanese art historian. Even though it was only 2 months, my instructors guided me how to carry my academic language skills to the highest pitch in a short amount of time. The Japanese Language Program for Specialists demonstrated the example of educational omotenashi.

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Breeze #121



Breeze #120



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