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## The Oxford Chalet Tradition and its Okinawan Adaptation : The Ryudai Reading Party Project, 1989-1992

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## The Oxford Chalet Tradition and its Okinawan Adaptation: The Ryudai Reading Party Project, 1989-1992

A. P. Jenkins

### INTRODUCTION

With the aim of increasing the language proficiency of students in the English Department at the University of the Ryukyus, the 'reading party', a long-established tradition, maintained by three colleges of the University of Oxford, has been adapted for the benefit of 'Ryudai' students under the supervision of a native-speaker teacher and several Japanese faculty members. Between 1989 and the present an annual period of up to six days has been set aside during the autumn break so that groups of as many as fifteen students may experience complete immersion in English. These reading weeks have been held at the university hostel at Oku in the forests near the northern tip of Okinawa proper. The annual activities have usually comprised the reading and discussion of a novel, a couple of short stories and a play, a poetry reading, and watching film adaptations of celebrated pieces of literature and films as highly regarded original works. In addition, there has been a range of miscellaneous activities including informal debates and word games to promote the English language abilities of those participating. It is argued here that the reading party concept is of pedagogical value especially with regard to the development of reading abilities, but also in advancing aural and spoken competence. It is therefore recommended, first, that consideration be given to institutionalising the reading week and making it credit-worthy along the lines of the week-long intensive courses already a part of degree courses in Japan, and, secondly,

that the Ryudai scheme should be held up as a prototype for other universities which are looking for means of improving the practical communicative abilities of the students in their English departments.

## THE ORIGINS

In 1865 a minor British politician, David Urquhart, built a chalet in the French Alps. It was inherited by his son Francis Fortescue, known to his students by the nickname 'Sligger' Urquhart, a history fellow of Balliol College, Oxford.<sup>1</sup> From 1891 'Sligger' started to take members of his 'brilliant company of undergraduate friends'<sup>2</sup> for two-week stays during the summers on vacation reading parties. Those visiting the chalet on these expeditions included two later prime ministers, Herbert Asquith and Harold Macmillan, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, and a host of literary giants and scholars including Lord Clark of *Civilization* fame.<sup>3</sup>

One of Urquhart's pupils at Balliol was Christopher Cox, who later extended the reading party to New College, though Urquhart had never invited him to the chalet.<sup>4</sup> Cox, having won a junior fellowship at Magdalen College, eventually took a fellowship at New College in 1926 in Ancient History. His attachment to his undergraduate pupils was described by the late Professor Sir H.L.A. Hart in these words:

In his tutorials there was the delightful sense of being treated as an equal, so that the most callow, or the wildest of one's utterances was never dismissed out of hand but was respected as worthy of consideration and his acute though delicate criticism.<sup>5</sup>

He was 'infinitely accessible, apparently always in his room, apparently always ready to listen...' <sup>6</sup> and an 'outstanding teacher'.<sup>7</sup>

'It was... very hard... not to behave towards an infinitely accessible don like Christopher Cox as if one were not somehow his "equal".'<sup>8</sup> 'He invited us to sherry or to lunch, and we asked him to our own parties: he was welcome everywhere... and bulked large in the life of the junior members.'<sup>9</sup> His period as a university teacher came to an end in 1937 when he was appointed to a senior civil service post as Principal of Gordon College and Director of Education in the Sudan:

...he is still regarded in the Sudan as the man who left behind him the essential foundations on which the University of Khartoum has risen and flourished.<sup>10</sup>

At the time, though, it was regarded as a temporary secondment from university teaching. After two years he was brought back to Britain but promoted to Educational Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and then continued as a highly placed Whitehall official until his retirement in 1970. His duties lay in the field of educational planning and 'preparation in territories moving towards independence of the educational structure which would secure their future needs.'<sup>11</sup> This work took him on innumerable tours, first on behalf of the Colonial Office and from 1964 on behalf of the Ministry of Overseas Development to Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. In recognition of his astonishingly successful work in founding and developing universities in the newly independent states, he received no fewer than five honorary higher doctorates from Belfast, the two Hong Kong universities, Leeds and finally Oxford. In 1950 he had been knighted by King George VI.<sup>12</sup>

In 1937 he had been elected a supernumerary fellow and then in 1970 an honorary fellow of New College and almost uniquely for an

honorary fellow in the second half of the twentieth century allowed to keep his set of rooms at the college, occupying them *in toto* for 56 years. Since 1937 and when not abroad, he had always travelled back for weekends to New College on the assumption that he would eventually return to a teaching career there. Thereby, he kept in touch with succeeding generations of undergraduates whom, from the early 1960s, he would assess as potential reading party members at the same chalet in the foothills of Mont Blanc shared from that time by New College.<sup>14</sup> Because he enjoyed the company of undergraduates, he had started to organise a similar kind of vacation reading party to which he had not been admitted in his own student days.

With increasing age and from 1966, Sir Christopher gratefully accepted the aid of two junior fellows of the college in planning his summer reading parties.<sup>15</sup> A dozen or so undergraduates were invited for their merits of intellect and personality. Everyone had to choose reading material both germane to his subject and of general interest. The pattern of each day, set down in manuscript by Sligger, was dutifully followed. Mornings were devoted to uninterrupted reading, afternoons to Alpine walking, conversation, coping with the chalet garden and cricket games played between teams nominally composed, for example, of the great figures of history *versus* the great figures of literature.<sup>16</sup> The evenings were primarily reserved for discussion of the morning's reading. And, as Cicero would have declared, '*O tempora, o mores*', with the disappearance of cheap domestic service, a self-catering and housekeeping rota was instituted after the war.

Sir Christopher remained the central figure in the New College chalet tradition until the year before he died at the age of 83. He had provided Oxford students with the most rare of opportunities to spend time with a diplomat, administrator and scholar. He had been

personally familiar with the leaders of the newly independent countries of Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world; he had been a man at the heart of government, and the co-author of a definitive text based in large part on his own extensive archaeological fieldwork which collated all the Roman inscriptions found in Asia Minor (modern Turkey)<sup>17</sup> and one renowned for his sparkling, if unceasing, conversation. Despite Sir Christopher's death in 1982, Oxford chalet reading party expeditions continue as a privileged and prized event with considerable academic and personal value to those participating. In his will, Sir Christopher left £5,000 to the chalet, 'bearing in mind that the New College chalet tradition has laid great emphasis on undisturbed individual reading as well as the opportunity for mountain walking and informal evening discussion.'<sup>18</sup>

### THE OKINAWAN VERSION OF THE READING PARTY

Though, like Sir Christopher Cox, the present writer was never invited to join a reading party while a student, he felt that an adaptation of the chalet tradition to the needs and abilities of third and fourth year undergraduates in the English Department would produce considerable benefits. Taking advantage of the university's hostel at Oku during the autumn break, it seemed that a group of up to fifteen students could be accommodated with profit to themselves as a manageable reading party. To this end a scheme was devised which included the following elements: that the organiser of the scheme should be present throughout the period and be joined by colleagues paying what are usually visits of twenty-four hours' duration to lead discussion of material which they had prescribed; that each day would be broken down into morning, afternoon and evening sessions; that

those taking part should endeavour to speak English at all times throughout the period of the reading party; that prescribed texts should be read largely in advance; that the materials chosen and the approach to reading and discussion should be different from those adopted in regular class activities; that there should be an equal share of duties with regard to catering and cleaning; that living together for about six days should provide students belonging to different years with an opportunity for becoming better acquainted and that those participating should gain a deeper understanding of human nature through living together in an isolated silvan milieu. Looked at from another perspective, the goal is to provide an enriching, memorable and enjoyable extra dimension to university life.

## READING MATTER

### A. The novel

The principal literary element in the Ryudai reading parties has usually been a full-length unabridged modern novel. In the first year, 1989, it was *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark (128pp.), in the second *A Room with a View* by E. M. Forster (256pp.), in the third *Goodbye to Berlin* by Christopher Isherwood, though only the 'Sally Bowles' section of the novel (65pp.), and in 1992 *Where Angels Fear to Tread* again by E. M. Forster (169pp.). For 1993 *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), the first novel by Ishiguro Kazuo (183pp.), has been chosen, a work ideally suited to Japanese readers not merely for its merits (it won the Winifred Holtby Prize and had by 1989 been translated into thirteen languages<sup>19</sup>) but because it concerns Japan and is written by one who at the age of six left that country for

Britain. It presents material which should provoke a direct and strong, critical undergraduate response.

The four novels so far read have all received high literary acclaim, yet are not (even those by Forster) usually taught at undergraduate level in Japanese universities. The students discovered a great deal of satisfaction in finding themselves able to read works which educated native English-speaking readers select for pleasure. They were also pleased to find themselves able to discuss the contents in an informal context and above all in English.

Judging from the response over the past four years, it seems that these students have gained considerably in self-confidence as readers and see themselves as having stepped forward, intellectually speaking.

For Japanese students to read an English novel of up to 256 pages, beyond existing course requirements, demands perseverance and time. In order to give ample opportunity for such an accomplishment, the novel was distributed in June prior to the summer vacation and every encouragement given to finish it before the busy September examination period would make extracurricular reading impractical. Students were encouraged to absorb and annotate the text in readiness to discuss the contents.

In the first two years, an evening was set aside for treatment of the novel. In the third and fourth years, though, it seemed far more productive to break the book into four sections and approach the sections consecutively during morning sessions. In 1991 and 1992 pairs of students were asked to take responsibility for each session in order to introduce their part of the book, i.e., to outline the plot, trace character development, identify themes and comment upon specifics. With the help of the teacher present acting as a moderator



of discussion, the consecutive-session format greatly added to the students' sense of reward in having come to terms with the novel concerned. It thereby deepened their appreciation and visibly added to their pleasure and self-esteem as readers. It was noticeable that there was some dedicated late-night reading and re-reading of the text in preparation for the next morning's discussions.

## B. The short story

In the first two years a short story component was part of the reading party and will probably be reintroduced in the future. In those years the stories were of American origin in order to balance the British novels. The material was selected in June for summer vacation reading. In the first year, Faulkner's 'That Evening Sun' (12pp.) and Steinbeck's 'The Snake' (11pp.) were the choices. In 1990 two stories from John Steinbeck's Red Pony sequence were chosen, viz., 'The Great Mountain' and 'The Leader of the People' (35pp. *in toto*). In both cases the students were led by a teacher who followed a Socratic question-and-answer technique. In that year also, the same faculty member read a paper delivered by the author earlier the same year at the Third International Steinbeck Congress held in Hawaii, entitled 'Steinbeck and the West: Beyond Disillusionment'.<sup>20</sup>

In place of short stories in the third year, those attending saw a slide show with commentary on a trip made to Britain and the United States tracing where Steinbeck's forebears had originated, the places most intimately connected with Steinbeck's life and writing, and the libraries where his MSS are housed.

### C. Play reading

More material presented well before departure was the text of a short play. In the first year, Alan Bennett's 'Afternoon Off', a 1979 British television drama involving a young Vietnamese man's hunt for a female acquaintance. The range of reactions he as an oriental encountered in a town proved a little disturbing, though eye-opening, for our students. They were, perhaps for the first time, sensing with some unease the range of western reactions to an oriental of undefined nationality as he entered shops, hospitals and factories. In the second year an American piece, Susan Glaspell's 1916 drama 'Trifles' was treated as a play-reading, and as a source for discussion thereafter.

### D. Poetry reading

In the first year the students considered certain poems from the First World War, particularly a number by Thomas Hardy, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. These were dealt with after a similar fashion to the novel and short stories in that they were read and discussed in an informal seminar setting. In subsequent years, poetry was not pursued in the same way, but should a faculty member again offer to discuss a defined set of poems, the offer will gladly be accepted.

The location for the Oku reading week was in part inspired by a successful series of poetry readings conducted as a kind of field trip and part of a Ryudai advanced level American Poetry course. The Oku reading party poetry activity has each year required students to choose a poem early on and to make photocopies for other students so that, as an aid to comprehension, the poems could be both listened to and read. Every student was asked to choose a short poem familiar to

himself or herself for recitation and commentary, with other students free to ask questions. The sources for choice have usually been the Modern American Poetry and Romantic Poetry classes, secondary school poetry encounters, or some verses connected with religion. Predictably when the onus of choice lay with the students, they drew upon what they had encountered in college classes. It indicates that except where Christian influence has been brought to bear, our students' choice of a degree subject in many cases has not led them to explore their field beyond what is prescribed for coursework.

All of the discussions associated with the foregoing reading matter took place at *Oku no sanso* itself, but the poetry readings have all been held on one of two beaches in the vicinity of Oku and have been accompanied by a barbecue. In 1992 a published poet and faculty member joined in order to read some of his own material and to encourage discussion of other people's choices of poems.<sup>21</sup>

## MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

### A. Films

On each occasion a television and a video deck were taken with a range of films, mostly the choice of the teachers attending. In the first year the Oscar-winning film version of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* naturally complemented the novel, likewise in the second and third years the film versions of *A Room with a View* and 'Sally Bowles' in *Goodbye to Berlin* (the latter the basis for 'Cabaret') provided a ready source for discussion on comparisons of a book and a film. Regrettably it was not possible to obtain the recent film version of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, much to the disappointment of

the students. Other films on video taken for discussion were the 'Far from the Madding Crowd', the BBC version of 'Twelfth Night', 'Death in Venice', 'Romeo and Juliet' and part of the acclaimed television production of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Among those brought by the students themselves were 'The Dead Poet's Society' and the controversial 'Last Temptation of Christ'. The motion picture is an art form which Japanese students find conducive to discussion.

## B. Talks and presentations

Among events dictating a more passive involvement, there was a talk in 1990 on some of the peripheral aspects of an international conference on linguistics held in the city of Prague. The talk included a video tape illustrating both the novelty of a conference opening address delivered in Latin and the architecture of Prague. Another talk explained the university entrance system in France. A set of presentations in 1989 summarised the outline which graduation thesis writers intended to adopt, the subjects including Pragmatics, aspects of Wordsworth's, Gary Snyder's and Robert Frost's poetry. In 1989 one student who had spent a year in England and travelled widely in Europe gave a talk illustrated with slides as did another in 1992 who had taken a three-week holiday in Egypt and Turkey.

## C. Other poetry activities

Among activities tangentially concerned with poetry, a series of transcribed First World War songs provided an adjunct to the session concerned with First World War poetry. The words were read while the students listened to the audio cassette tape and then used the material as a basis for discussion and to provide a counterpoint in perceiving contemporary reactions to the Great War. In 1992 a group

of discussion, the consecutive-session format greatly added to the students' sense of reward in having come to terms with the novel concerned. It thereby deepened their appreciation and visibly added to their pleasure and self-esteem as readers. It was noticeable that there was some dedicated late-night reading and re-reading of the text in preparation for the next morning's discussions.

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There was a talk on features of medieval Italian history and architecture as background to the setting of the novel. 'Death in Venice' was one of the film selections, Verdi and Puccini opera was played as background music, and Dr. Larry and Mrs. Maria Latona spoke on being Italian Americans in an Italian New York neighbourhood. Our hopes, though, for an Italian buffet lunch on our return journey cooked by Signor Paulo Berti at the Ramada Renaissance were frustrated.

#### **F. Physical recreation**

For physical recreation students spent time playing various conventional and improvised outdoor games on what used to be a baseball diamond at the hostel. They also took walks among the tea groves and orchards hidden among the forests and other exploratory walks down to the beach.

#### **G. A video record**

Thanks to one faculty member, it has been possible to make a selective video record of the 1990, 1991 and 1992 reading parties.

#### **H. Report writing**

Academic staff involved in planning the schedules felt it important that students should write reports on their experience. In the first year most of them completed questionnaires with varying lengths of answer. A very small number of the students collaborated to write a report of some worth, but the majority failed to produce what was requested. In the second year, the students voiced a strong opinion that it was unjust to be asked to comply with such a suggestion for an activity which was not a regular academic or coursework requirement.

## A FUTURE WRITING ELEMENT

Sligger Urquhart made his chalet-ites keep a detailed log of daily reading and other activities. It has become a tradition at the Oxford chalet faithfully to maintain a communal journal.<sup>23</sup> In view the difficulty of getting the Ryudai students to write reports on their reading party experience, it is proposed to institute a similar log or journal at Oku and make daily entries in a sturdily bound volume a group activity integral to the reading party. Thereby it would be possible for all participants to add the fourth language-learning skill, i. e., writing, to those already exercised.

## ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A series of meetings precedes each reading party in order to make certain decisions. The most problematic matter is to get a list of those willing to commit themselves to attending. Unlike the Oxford scheme, participation is not by invitation but by soliciting for volunteers who are accepted on a first-come-first-served basis. An early decision is necessary since reading materials have to be obtained not later than the beginning of July.

It is advantageous to appoint one student to act as leader for the reading week. This person completes all the bureaucratic procedures at the Department of Student Affairs. He or she also acts as leader over a range of other activities. In addition, a treasurer is nominated who collects a fee at the rate of one thousand yen per day from each participant. Others are appointed or volunteer to plan menus and to buy provisions en route. Travel arrangements are left to individual students, but it has been found that there are residual monies for reimbursement of at least part of the fuel costs of those who took cars.

It was pleasing to learn that a number of students commented that it is cheaper to live *en famille* at Oku than in their own apartments. As one student commented in the 1989 questionnaire returns; 'I only spent less than about ¥900 a day!!! which means I spent less there than I usually spend.'

It was necessary to take a range of equipment from a television and VCR to mosquito coils and toasters, though not basic cooking equipment. Bedding is supplied although some preferred to take their own.

## CONCLUSION AND A PROPOSAL

The students' exclusive immersion in as much English-speaking culture as possible and their close proximity to native English-speaking members of the academic staff and Japanese colleagues prepared to join in this aspect of the experiment has been a principal aim of Oku. This report has been written to press the claim that the spoken language proficiency of a number of students studying English at the University of the Ryukyus owes something to the Oku reading parties and to other similar activities such as the annual November visits to Tokashiki.<sup>24</sup> It has also been written to apprise other universities of what can be done to widen students' access to English. Furthermore, it has been drawn up to point out the academic coherence of the main activities of the reading parties both in terms of their relation to twentieth-century literature and to a high level of integrated skills activities such as comprise, at a lower level, the Ryudai English I & II courses for English Department freshmen. It is argued that these two coherences bespeak the worthiness of this yearly activity to the earning of credits on the part of those who attend.



By its nature such an activity as a voluntarily attended reading party does not lend itself to a quantifiable demonstration of its effectiveness. Some unedited comments from the 1989 questionnaire illustrate student reactions. 'Living in English only was a very precious experience for me having no circumstances to do it.' 'I personally think the reading week project was successful.'

'The most surprising thing was that everyone was trying hard to speak only English there. In classes at school, I've never experienced such a atmosphere.' 'It gave me a good opportunity to speak English. I benefited from it very much.' After the 1990 reading party, a candidate seeking entrance to the university, on being asked at her interview why she wanted to enter Ryudai and the English Department, replied one reason was that she wanted to take part in the Oku reading parties.<sup>25</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A considerable number of English Department teaching staff have given their time and energy to making the Oku reading party a success. Professor Hiroshi Yabiku has come to be known as the 'Godfather' of the Oku visits since it was he who made suggestions as to how the Oxford scheme might be adapted to Ryudai. It was he who smoothed the way through the Department of Student Affairs and made it possible to occupy the hostel for more days than normally permitted under regulations. Professors Kozen Nakachi and Kiyoshi Yoshimura have attended each year, the former to moderate discussions on short stories and subjects relating to Steinbeck, and the latter to direct consideration of poetry, drama and a range of other activities. Dr. John Reid attended twice to guide our thoughts on poetry and two of the novels. Professor Hiroichi Kawahira immersed non-French language students in French in 1990, while in 1991 he described his trip to Prague and spoke on the entrance system to French universities. It was also he who kindly and trustingly lent his video camera so that we might make a record of our doings. Fräulein Corinna Engemann taught German to non-German speakers. In 1992 Mrs. Maria Latona attended to conduct the *haiku* composition group and was joined afterwards by her husband, Dr. Larry Latona, in talking about Italian Americans. Dr. Eric Shaffer at-

tended to read his poems and lead the poetry beach party in the same year. Professor Susumu Yamauchi, the adviser of the 1990 student intake, accompanied some of his charges in 1992. All those who have participated and benefited are deeply grateful to these faculty members and to those who have given their support to this scheme. Kenichi Nakayoshi, now of Kyuyo High School, gave the talk and slide show on England and Europe in 1989 and Wako Asato, presently a research student at Ryukoku University, the one on Egypt and Turkey in 1992. I am obliged to Miss Kanako Taira, currently studying for her Master's degree in the United States, for lending me her comprehensive 1989 and 1990 reading party files. I am very grateful to Dr. John Whalen-Bridge for having read this article in its draft form and for his valuable comments on its content, points of style and coherence.

Appendix 1

Table: a partial reconstruction of the activities at Oku between 1989 and 1992

	1989	1990	1991	1992
Novel	Spark, <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> (APJ)	Forster, <i>A Room with a View</i> (JR & APJ)	Isherwood, <i>Goodbye to Berlin</i> (JR & APJ)	Forster, <i>Where Angels Fear to Tread</i> (APJ)
Short Story	Faulkner, 'That Evening Sun' & Steinbeck, 'The Snake' (KN)	Steinbeck, <i>Red Pony</i> 'The Great Mountain' & 'The Leader of the People' (KN)	- (Lecture on Steinbeck) (KN)	- (Talk and slides on Steinbeck) (KN)
Play	Bennett, 'Afternoon Off' (KY & APJ)	GlasPELL, 'Trifles' (KY)	-	-
Poetry	Hardy, Sassoon, Owen (KY) (Poetry reading cancelled)	Poetry reading (APJ)	Poetry reading (JR)	Haiku writing (ML); Poetry reading (ES)
Videos	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> , <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> , <i>Amadeus</i> , <i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i>	<i>A Room with a View</i> , <i>The Elephant Man</i> , <i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i>	<i>Cabaret</i> , <i>Brideshead Revisited</i> (part 1), <i>The Last Temptation of Christ</i>	<i>Death in Venice</i> , <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i>
Misc. Activities	Debate on topical controversies (HY); Graduation thesis introductions; World War I songs (APJ & KY); idioms of comparison; TEFL cross-words; talk and slides on stay in England & Europe	Talk on visit to Prague (HK); talk on French university entrance (HK); newspaper misprints (APJ); intensive French & German (HK & CE)	Debate on purpose of foreign teachers (JR & APJ) (early return - typhoon)	Japanese English (KY); 17th cent. palaeography (APJ); talk on Italian Americans M&LL); Talk & slides on Egypt & Turkey

CE - Corinna Engemann; HK - Horoichi Kawahira; ML - Maria Latona; LL - Larry Latona; KN - Kozen Nakachi; JR - John Reid; ES - Eric Shaffer; HY - Hiroshi Yabiku; KY - Kiyoshi Yoshimura

## Appendix 2

### BIBLIOGRAPHY: MATERIALS READ BY STUDENTS, 1989-92

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22. For the texts of the *haiku*, see M. Latona, 'A New Harvest', in the 'Shimpo Weekly News', *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 31 Oct. 1992, p.m. ed., p.2.
23. Warren, *loc. cit.*, p.18.
24. For an account of the principal activity at Tokashiki, see A.P. Jenkins, 'Guy Goes to Tokashiki Never to Return', in the 'Shimpo Weekly News', *Ryukyu Shimpo*, 6 June 1992, p.m. ed., p.2.
25. *Ex inf.* Professor Hiroshi Yabiku.

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\* Articles published in British learned journals do not generally carry a bibliography. References are conveyed through footnotes or endnotes. To comply with the American practices adopted by this journal, a bibliography has been abstracted from the endnotes.

## 論文要旨

### オックスフォード大学山小屋読書会琉大版 琉球大学読書会 1989-92

アントニー P. ジェンキンズ

オックスフォード大学の歴史教授 F. F. Urquhart（皇太子妃雅子様が学ばれたカレッジの教授）が1981年夏、教授所有のフランスアルプスの山小屋へ約20人の学生を招き、読書、ディスカッション、討論を通して専門及び専門外の分野における学生の知識を深めることを目的として始めた。今世紀に入り、オックスフォードの他の2つのカレッジにも読書会は広まった。夏休みにそれぞれのカレッジの学生をフランスアルプスの山小屋へ招き同じ主旨の下に読書会は実施されている。計画・運営された教授には著名な Sir Roger Mynors や Sir Christopher Cox 等もふくまれている。参加した学生の中には後日の英国首相二人、カンタベリー大聖堂の大司教、更に Lord Clark のような著名な学者の卵も大勢いた。

1989年以来、琉球大学においても英語専攻の学生を対象に、語学学習を目的とする読書会が実施されている。同会では秋の休暇を利用して、最高15名の学生が自主参加の形式で6日間大学の『奥の山荘』で寝食を共にする。毎年参加者は事前に課題小説を読むことを義務づけられており、短編や戯曲、詩等も課題の対象である。詩の朗読、フィルム・ビデオ観賞、種々の言葉ゲーム、野外活動等も読書会のプログラムに含まれてる。一日を朝・昼・夜のセッションに分割しプログラムを実施する。オーガナイザーや外国人教師は全日程、学生と共に過ごし随時トピックに詳しい日本人ゲストや外国大学からの参加者を交えてのディスカッションも実施する。参加者は全日程を通じてイングリッシュ・オンリーの原則を厳守することが義務づけられてる。

読書会は正式なプログラムとして計画実施されたわけではないため、学生の読解力・聴く力・話す力の評価はその目的ではない。しかし、参加者の読書会

への高い評価と共に1992年に出版した英語俳句集等は読書会の意義と価値を実証するものである。読書会を今後も継続させたいとする要望があり、これまでに得られた経験と学生の反応を考慮しつつ修正を加え更に、この読書会を他の大学へのモデルとして提示したい。