

# 琉球大学学術リポジトリ

## The Ryudai German Department's Kaigai Bunka Kenshu Programme -A Review after Ten Years-

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## **The RyuDai German Department's Kaigai Bunka Kenshu Programme – A Review after ten Years**

**Till Weber**

Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen.

("He who does not know foreign languages understands nothing about his own.")<sup>1</sup>

Was ist Reisen? Ist fröhlich leben.

("What is travelling? It's a joyful life!")

(*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, 1749-1832; German author, scientist, politician, and traveller)

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### **1. The Beginnings of the German Study Trip Abroad Programme**

The first organized study trip to a German-speaking city by a group of students from the University of the Ryukyus' German Department and other learners of German took place in 2000. A small group of students spent two weeks in the Northern city of Bielefeld, studying at a language school while doing a home stay. There was no round-trip to other regions attached and no credits (tani'i) awarded for participating.

Since then, much has happened. The official partnership with Heinrich Heine

University in Düsseldorf, established in 2001, gave us the opportunity to have the students take part in the International Summer Course conducted by the Department of German as a Foreign Language there, at a discounted rate and with home stay accommodation until 2008 (guest house since then). To lay a solid groundwork for the programme, we conducted a survey among over 100 RyuDai students in 2001 in order to learn about their opinions and expectations.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Themes, Aims and Components of the Programme**

Obviously, a prime objective of any such programme will always be improving participants' command of the target language. However, just studying the language and making international friends means missing another opportunity which a department of foreign languages and cultures should not do. There is usually an implicit element of getting to know a country's everyday culture involved in the language course routine at the host institution. However, this does not constitute systematic cultural studies as contents equal to and separate from the language-learning side. Because of the huge interest expressed by our students in cultural studies in the 2001 survey, where interest in culture even surpassed interest in language, we decided to limit the language course phase to two weeks and add an additional round-trip of about ten days devoted to cultural studies. Conducting this after the language course meant that students will have settled into the new linguistic environment and will be ready for cultural studies in a more specific sense. The changing cultural themes and destinations also make each Kaigai Bunka Kenshu (Study Trip Abroad) unique and more memorable.

Ten years ago the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu concept was created according to these ideas. The 2002 and 2004 editions still had rather vague themes for the ten-day round-trip, but since then the themes have become much more specific to focus on selected historical, political, cultural and intercultural subjects (fig.1).

### Themes of German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu trips, 2002-2012 (fig.1)

2002	Aspects of Everyday Culture in Germany
2004	Living and Working in Germany's South
2006	"United in Diversity" - Europe from Within. (Joint Programme with the English, French and Spanish Departments, supported by the European Union)
2008	Central Europe's Historic Capital Cities
2010	Division and Reconciliation: How Germany and Poland became Friends
2012	Goethe's "Italian Journey"

While the aim of the first two weeks of language courses is to strengthen the students' command of German and giving them confidence to interact with local people, the ensuing round-trip aims at deepening the students' understanding of the culture of (mostly) German-speaking countries.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, the aim was to introduce the historical and cultural interconnectedness of capitals (and their countries) in Mitteleuropa (Central Europe). We visited Vienna, capital of Austria, and Prague, capital of the Czech Republic which had been an integral component of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918 as a tricultural city (containing Czech, German, and Yiddish speakers). Afterwards we re-entered Germany to visit Dresden, former capital of the Kingdom of Saxony, and Berlin, former capital of Prussia and the German Empire (1871-1918/1945). The students learned through experience that the German language has a large variety of regional forms and is useful

even outside German-speaking countries.

2010 saw a bus tour from Düsseldorf to East Germany and Berlin, and then on to Poland with several places of interest visited. The relationship between Germany and its smaller neighbor Poland has been rocky and sometimes violent, but recently both countries have developed a bond of friendship and cooperation that extends further than the cooperation asked for in the context of both countries' membership in the European Union. Scars are visible at the site of the former Nazi Concentration Camp Auschwitz/Oswiecim, but also at the grand castle of Marienburg/Malbork, built by the Order of the Teutonic Knights when these parts of Poland were still contested between German and Polish speakers. The formerly mixed city of Danzig/Gdansk is the birthplace of one of Germany's most respected authors, Günter Grass, but it also saw the birth of the Polish Solidarnosc union movement which shattered Communist rule and helped to create the conditions under which East Germans were able to overcome their own misrulers in 1989.

2012 had, for the first time, a literary theme. One of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's most liked books is the diary of his Italian journeys undertaken between 1786 and 1788.<sup>4</sup> Armed with a guide book over 200 years old, 18 students and two professors recreated the Northern part of Goethe's journey from Regensburg and Munich in Germany to Innsbruck (Tyrol, Austria) into Southern Tyrol, the German-speaking Northernmost region of Italy, into Italy "proper" (Lake Garda, Verona, Venice).

There is a third component of German Study Trips Abroad besides studying language and culture. The third part, the final 3-4 days before departing together for Okinawa from Frankfurt, has more general educational aims. One major aim of the programme is to make the students "grow up" a little more by exposing them to new experiences; to give them the skills and the confidence to move successfully in a foreign environment; and to teach them to act independently and to take responsibility for themselves. For the final days, the students are entirely on their own or travel in groups of two or three to a destination of their choice to study a topic of their own choosing (which usually provides some of the contents of their written reports as required by the programme).

Checking out travel options and organizing accommodation is all done using the Internet, and a little advice from professors while still in Okinawa; once the students have started this part of the programme, much convenience such as guidance and translations provided by professors is gone.

So far, an estimated 100 students have taken part in the third phase over ten years. Each one of them arrived at the appointed time in Frankfurt – not a single student has ever disappointed the organizers in this respect. One might call this experience a “final test” even more valuable than any number of reports or in-class tests.

To sum up the phases and aims of the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu, please see fig.2.

**Phases and Aims of the German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu (fig.2)**

Phases	Aims
Language Course at Düsseldorf University (2 weeks)	Improving the students’ command of German; Getting used to the new environment
Study Trip according to overall Theme (10 days)	Studying specific aspects of German-speaking countries’ cultures in-depth
Short individual journeys organized by students for themselves (3-4 days)	Planning and conducting study trips on their own; gaining confidence by being exposed to a German-language environment and mastering the challenges

Compared to “Study in Germany” projects organized by universities in Kyushu and further away, the special element (in fact, as far as I am aware of, the unique element) is the 10-day Study Trip covering a specifically designated cultural topic.<sup>5</sup> It is also the

largest piece of work for professors preparing and conducting it, but so far the effort has always yielded rich dividends.

### **3. The Context of the Programme**

The German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu is a regular part of our curriculum. Of course it serves as a “flagship” course as it motivates students to study German hard even beyond their freshmen year (students may participate in the programme after having studied German for at least three semesters; about 50-60% of participants are second year students, the others third or fourth year). “Culture” sells “language” to more people than vice versa. For many students the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu experience is one or the highlights of their four-year B.A. course.<sup>6</sup> The financial effort necessary means that everybody is looking forward to the programme from many months before.

But travelling is not only “a joyful life” (Goethe), it is also a serious study effort. The students wishing to enroll for Kaigai Bunka Kenshu (usually between 12 and 20 students) are required to participate in a number of preparatory classes. Since the German department is very small, we use regular classes as much as possible for preparation; most if not all elements in the fields of language and culture are useful also to non-participants. Over the last ten years, all colleagues in the German Department have taken an active role as teachers in the preparatory phase as well as taking turns accompanying the groups abroad.

In early March of any given Kaigai Bunka Kenshu year the annual four-day German Winter Camp at Oku no Sanso is themed according to the theme of the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu to introduce it, but also to start team-building and acquainting the future travellers with each other. In 2012, the theme for Oku no Sanso was “Longing for the South – Minami-e agogare”. Students from RyuDai, but also from Düsseldorf University and from Nanzan University in Nagoya studied the curious phenomenon that people from Northern countries or regions often long for the warmth, relaxed life-style and charms of more Southern countries or regions, whereas Southerners sometimes envy the economic opportunities and degree of efficient organization some

Northern regions offer. A host of images and stereotypes emerges from this mind-set. The motive of “Longing for the South” is not only evident inside Japan and has helped to generate a travel boom to Okinawa, but it is also a part of German culture with respect to Mediterranean countries. This sentiment has found its most revered literary expression in Goethe’s “Italian Journey”.

In the summer semester during the preparatory phase for the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu the students are required to take several classes that cover three elements:

1. At least one German language class that focuses on practical communication and suits the students’ individual levels. For second year students “German Communication I (Doitsugo Kaiwa-I)” is recommended.
2. A class that covers cultural aspects the students will encounter when abroad. We usually use a formal lecture series on German culture that is tailored to cover many important topics. In 2012 for instance, these lecture topics included: Introduction of Goethe; History of Painting in Germany; Medieval Architecture; Germans and Immigrant Minorities; The Educational System including Universities; Student Life in Germany; The historic city of Regensburg and others.

Classes coming under 1) and 2) are regular classes open for everybody qualified. There are regular credits given to all participants that pass the final exams.

3. A smaller, but significant amount of time is dedicated to preparing for practical aspects. This regularly includes: Getting acquainted with the City of Düsseldorf, our host city for the first two weeks, its map and the public transportation system; getting prepared for differences in everyday life (e.g. shop hours; shops are closed on Sundays in Germany); considering appropriate clothing, currency, gifts, health insurance, incompatibility of some electric devices, forms of communication when abroad; and finally there is an anti-pickpocket training. Awareness of this danger and preparedness is very important for Japanese travellers abroad who unfortunately are one of the most popular groups of potential victims. So far, in ten years, we had only one case of theft from our groups. Finally, there is money to be collected, flights and trains need to be booked, and bills to be settled.



There are four credit points awarded for successful participation in the Kaigai Bunka Kenshu. The base for awarding specific grades consists of conclusions drawn from consultations with the students' language teachers at Düsseldorf University and the quality of a number of reports (usually two) to be written and handed in by the students within two weeks after returning to Okinawa. These reports usually offer insight in how the students benefitted from the third and final phase of the programme in Germany.

#### **4. Participants and Financial Aspects**

One of the basic principles of the German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu programme is its openness to all RyuDai students. From the beginning, there was no limitation or preferred treatment given to German majors or Gengo Bunka Gakka students. The above-stated aims are relevant for all students in this university with the required minimum ability in the German language, and in fact some former participants from various faculties have moved on to take a Master's degree in Germany or to work in Europe.

Also because there is no official financial support for students in this programme by the University of the Ryukyus, the costs to participate needs to be kept as low as possible; still, there are always students who are financially unable to afford the costs of between 310,000 and 380,000 Yen for four weeks.<sup>7</sup>

This price is similar to or cheaper than the other, comparable projects this author is aware of; many Japanese universities charge above 450,000 Yen for such a programme which often does not even contain a cost-intensive extended round-trip phase. This happens mainly because some universities turn over much of the practical preparatory effort to commercial tourist agencies which charge a premium for their work. Also, some of these tour prices include all or part of the travel expenses incurred by accompanying professors.

None of the professors' travel expenses at the German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu at RyuDai are covered in this way. Various forms of support from university institutions needs to be patiently accumulated, in some cases even some private money had to be spent.

All preparatory efforts (selecting of hotels and transportation options; reservations, bookings and transactions, liaison with persons and institutions abroad) are made by the organizing professors. Instead of relying on professional (and paid) local guides and translators we perform these roles ourselves, involve students or use our network of friendly contacts abroad.

Despite these efforts, the price for some students sadly remains out of their reach. Ideally, this university could in the future establish a support system for students which would help them cover a part of, not all, costs incurred. A model is provided by the Fukuoka Women's University which supports all qualifying students with the sum of 50,000 Yen each. Several other universities in Kyushu have similar systems.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the University of the Ryukyus seems to be one of the few institutions in this region that is not prepared to support the students in the Study Abroad programme conducted by its German Department or other departments in the field of European languages and cultures. The number of students to whom support is awarded could be limited, and also the amount given could vary according to the students' individual achievements. Less qualified students could still take part, but would have to cover all costs by themselves. In any case, official support through the university would signal recognition and help to maintain or increase the number of students taking part in an environment where young Japanese people are increasingly inward-looking. Investing in our students' future in this way would bear a massive dividend as the final paragraph is intended to show.

##### **5. Towards an "Evaluation"**

Professor Sven Holst of Fukuoka Women's University who has been instrumental in conducting the Kyushu Study Trip to Germany programme for many years sums up several consequences of a successful programme:

"It is possible to bring Germany very close to a part of the students. Many maintain personal contacts for a long time and visit their host families later again. For many this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, possibly the highlight of their student life. Some go

on to study in Germany; a few are now living there permanently... Networking beyond the confines of just one university or students of the same grade is especially valuable for students from smaller, regional universities.”<sup>9</sup>

One might add that Holst’s observations match the experiences made at the University of the Ryukyus precisely.

Obviously it is methodologically difficult to document the exact individual impact of a venture such as a Kaigai Bunka Kenshu on the participating students. Most people who have travelled and stayed abroad for some time with an open mind will agree to some degree with Goethe’s observation (“He who does not know foreign languages understands nothing about his own”). This could easily be extended to include knowing another country’s and one’s own culture. Comparing, for example, the typical selection of foods in Japanese supermarkets with those in European supermarkets makes it clear, how unique and different Japanese *shokubunka* is. Seeing first-hand how men and women, or old and young people, interact with each other abroad in ways different from Japanese culture defines Japanese social customs and manners as something specific to Japan’s culture. This not only opens up alternative concepts to young people, but also can serve to reaffirm commitment to one’s own background (“One only has to travel abroad to get to know the Good which one has at home.” – Goethe<sup>10</sup>). In any case, enlarging one’s horizons through direct exposure to different cultures will add strength to one’s ability to reflect one’s own identity as a member of a specific cultural community.

Fortunately we have collected the students’ written statements after the various study trips (see Appendix). Instead of attempting a complete interpretation including numbers and figures using documents that were not originally intended for statistical purposes, here follows a rather typical selection of students’ statements from 2012 that help to shed some light on the experience’s effects on personalities and the magic that a study trip abroad can create.

## **Appendix:**

### **Selected opinions collected from students from the University of the Ryukyus after they took part in the 2012 German Kaigai Bunka Kenshu programme**

#### Student Opinion 1

語学研修のときに自分のドイツ語力を思い知らされました。

文法のレベルは自分と同じか、少し上ぐらいのレベルだったのに、発言しようとする力が足りないことを実感しました。もっと自分から発言する力をつけたいと思います。

My level of (German) grammar was about the same as those of the other (students from different countries), but I couldn't speak out. I understood this. I would like to acquire this ability.

#### Student Opinion 2

自由旅行で

先生や友だちがいないうちで行動したことは最初は不安だったけど道をきけるようになったりできて良かった。

During my individual journey I was without my teachers and friends, and therefore I was a little afraid. However, I was able to ask for directions. That was good.

#### Student Opinion 3

国境を隔てるだけで人や習慣が違うのを実感できた。(島国では体験できないから)

I became aware that people and their customs are different when I travelled across borders. (You cannot experience this when living in an island country.)

#### Student Opinion 4

ヨーロッパ(ドイツ)に長くいることで日本との文化の違いや習慣の違いを実

感した。

If you stay a little longer in Europe (Germany) you will understand the differences of cultures and life styles between Japan and Europe.

### Student Opinion 5

本当に楽しかったです。色んな国に行ったことにより、改めてドイツ好きだと思えた旅でした。

It was really fantastic. By visiting several countries I realized once more how much I like Germany.

### **Notes and References**

1. Maximen und Reflexionen II; Nr. 23, 91 (1833).
2. Published as: Till Weber: *Going on a Study Trip to Germany - Opinions and Expectations of 108 Ryukyu University Students from a 2001 Survey*. In: Ryudai Review of Euro-American Literature 46 (2002). 65–92.
3. For 2006, see Till Weber: “*United in Diversity*”– *Europe from Within. Reflections on Educational Aspects of the RyuDai Study Abroad (Kaigai Bunka Kenshu) Project of 2006*. In: Ryukyu University Bulletin of the Educational Center (Ryukyu Daigaku Kyoiku Center-hoo) 13 (2008) 1-8.
4. J.W. von Goethe: *Italienische Reise*. Textkritisch durchgesehen von Erich Trunz. Kommentiert von Herbert von Einem. München: C.H. Beck 1981.
5. See for example Kumamoto University (4 weeks language course in one city plus individual small group trips): Anne Gellert, Eberhard Herzog: *Bericht über die Einführung eines Jahreskurses mit Sprachkursaufenthalt für Hörer aller Fakultäten an der Universität Kumamoto*. In: Deutschunterricht in Japan 7 (2002). 77-86. For the all-Kyushu project see: Sven Holst: *27 Jahre Kyushuer Studienreise*. In: Lektoren-Rundbrief Japan 37 (Mai 2010) 10-12. Online at: <http://www.deutsch-in-japan.de/lektorenrundbrief/>). Here a one-month study trip to Germany is organized by professors from several universities in Kyushu which is similar to the RyuDai project in its phases

1 and 3, but offers not a culture-focused round-trip in phase 2 but rather a home stay with families in a rural setting.

6. Cf. the surveys of students' opinions after each Kaigai Bunka Kenshu, kept by the German Department.

7. This figure includes all flights and other train or bus transportation in Europe; course fees; accommodation, breakfast and some other meals as well as tickets for all museums, concerts etc. visited. The fluctuations in the Yen-Euro exchange rates contribute to price fluctuations.

8. Information kindly provided by email by Prof Holst, dated October 4, 2012.

9. Holst, p.12.

10. Man muß nur in die Fremde gehen, um das Gute kennenzulernen, was man zu Hause besitzt (from a letter to F. Kirms, dated August 24, 1797).

## **Abstract**

This paper is concerned with the Study Abroad in Germany Trip (Kaigai Bunka Kenshu) as offered biannually by the German Department of the University of the Ryukyus. Since 2002 it has been offered to all students at this university. It consists of a half-year preparatory phase in Okinawa which includes the German Gasshuku at Oku no Sanso in March as well as the following summer term, followed by a four-week trip to Germany including visits to neighbouring countries if the theme of the programme makes that seem appropriate. While in Germany, the students spent the first two weeks in an intensive language course at our partner university Heinrich-Heine-Universitaet in Duesseldorf. The second part is a round trip of about ten days focusing on a theme of historical, cultural, political or literary significance. This part is especially prepared and conducted by the German staff at RyuDai and is unique among university study trip programmes from Kyushu/Okinawa to Germany. During the third part, which lasts 3-4 days, the students are conducting short study trips without help from their teachers, often alone or in groups of only two students. Exemplary quotes from the students' evaluations of the 2012 edition show that the main aims have been reached (1.

Improving the students' command of German; 2. Studying specific aspects of German-speaking countries' cultures in-depth; 3. Letting the students gain confidence by being exposed to a German-language environment and mastering the challenges involved).