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August 5, 2025

Final Report of Visiting Fellows Program 2024-2025

Thanks to the generous support of Kokugakuin University, I was able to spend the past ten months in Japan conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My dissertation examines Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 1588 sword hunt and the resulting social and political functions of weapon control laws implemented under the Tokugawa shogunate. This research aligned well with the expertise of Dr. Yabe Kentarou, whose work focuses on the political history of early modern Japan and the evolving relationship between the shogunate and the imperial court.

During my stay, I made regular visits to the National Diet Library in Tokyo, where I concentrated on examining compilations of legal documents to better understand how laws regulating swords were interpreted, enforced, and communicated across the early modern period. Many of these volumes are unavailable outside of Japan, and access to them was essential to advancing my dissertation. I also took advantage of the resources at local city and prefectural libraries, which allowed me to explore regional histories and uncover relevant sources, by chance more than design—a process integral to historical research. Finally, I had the opportunity to visit sword museums across Japan, where I not only discovered valuable archival materials, but also gained a deeper understanding of how swords are interpreted, displayed, and valued in the present day—insights that have allowed me to more fully contextualize their social significance in the early modern period.

In addition to my independent research, I was invited by Professor Yabe to participate in his graduate seminar. Each week, graduate students presented on the progress of their own research projects, fostering a dynamic and rigorous intellectual environment. As my home institution has relatively few specialists in Japanese history, this seminar offered my first opportunity to engage directly with ongoing scholarship produced by historians of Japan. Through these discussions, I gained invaluable insights into the methodologies, interpretive frameworks, and scholarly debates shaping the field in Japan today.

There remains a significant gap between Japanese and Western scholarship on Japanese history, shaped not only by linguistic barriers but also by differing academic traditions and research paradigms. Neither perspective is inherently superior, and I believe that both communities stand to benefit from deeper mutual engagement. I look forward to applying the approaches and insights I gained from Professor Yabe and my colleagues at Kokugakuin to continue to enrich my research.

In these ten months, I was able to further my research and language capabilities and expand my scholarly network—as well as make friends who share the same passions as me. For this, I am enormously grateful for the support of Kokugakuin University, Professor Yabe, and the staff from the International Exchange Office who support the Visiting Fellows Program.