

## 10<sup>th</sup> DSC APRU Conference, Kyoto, Japan

Review by *Catherine Wade*

PhD Candidate, Faculty of Health Sciences

Thank you to the University of Sydney Office of Graduate Studies for the opportunity to attend the APRU Doctoral Students Conference in Kyoto this July.

It was a fabulous experience. Presentations were from a broad range of disciplines, many of which were well above my comprehension. However, I allowed myself to be open to hearing about research methods and new findings from fields beyond my own, and guess what ... it wasn't such a painful experience! One thing the culturally diverse group of delegates had in common was their passion to ask questions and seek answers. The cultural diversity was incredible! It was inspiring to hear an American student, studying at a Japanese University, talking about Chinese international relations. And I made new friends who are closer to home – to my fellow delegates from the University of Sydney, it was great to get to know you all.

A highlight on the social side was a traditional dinner out with some new found friends, sitting cross-legged at a low table on the balcony of a river-side Japanese restaurant. Kyoto is a beautiful city, and has an incredible blend of modern city and old-world Japanese architecture. We rode to the conference each day on free bikes provided by the hotel. We also experienced a traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony led by students from Kyoto University.

The APRU DSC is a fantastic way to delve into cutting-edge international research in a supportive, stimulating, and fun environment. I strongly recommend that students pursue the opportunity to attend future APRU events. Students can also take advantage of the opportunities highlighted on the APRU Doctoral Students Network website (<http://aprudsn.ning.com/>) including funding and job advertisements.

Review by *Shahriar tanvir Hasan Murshed*

PhD Candidate, School of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and IT

I set out for Kyoto on the afternoon of 04/07. Even though I did Internet check-in for our Singapore Airlines flight to Osaka via Singapore, I didn't realise that there was a separate queue for internet check-ins at Kingsford Smith. So, after waiting for more than an hour in the Singapore Airlines passenger queue, I, suddenly realised that there was a separate queue which had always been almost empty! I was simply annoyed with myself. Anyway, trip to Osaka was a pleasant one by Singapore Airlines, who seem to be very cool and caring throughout the journey. We arrived in Osaka next morning, 05/07. All the participants from Sydney uni became aware of each other before crossing the Japan immigration, in the Kansai airport. After passing the immigration, one of our colleagues, Catherine Wade took over and skilfully led us to Kyoto, without any incident. When we reached our pre-booked hotel in Kyoto it was only 11 am and we realised that we couldn't get into the hotel room until 1400 pm. Anyway, we all got into our own rooms after 1400 pm. I was staying in a single room so missed all the excitements of sharing room with other APRU participants.

The next day we headed to the conference at Kyoto University. After all the formalities we sat for welcoming speech by the president of Kyoto university and a very interesting lecture about Monkey intelligence by a very well-known Kyoto University Professor. All the participants were truly amazed by his presentation of his research works which he had been doing with monkeys since 1978.

My presentation was on the second day of the conference, 7<sup>th</sup> July. It was good in the sense that no one really asked hard questions! As the conference was of diverse nature, it was really hard to find other participants who were doing research in the similar area. However, I met some very good friends from various national and ethnic backgrounds. I hope to keep in touch with most of them. One thing I must say that organisers were really serious about the attendances during the conference. They even took our attendance every day until the conference came to an end.

The organisers also organised some social programs. The most interesting one I attended was 'Japanese Tea Ceremony'. We learned traditional Japanese way of life in that gathering. Things like, how to sit, what to say, how to drink tea (which was more like blended tea leaves rather than any type of conventional tea) etc. were elaborately discussed and demonstrated in that ceremony. The participants also required to demonstrate what they had learned. In another social program I visited Kyoto university observatory, which gave a brief idea of life in inner and outer space.

The host university did very well in terms of organising and facilitating the whole conference. They had been very helpful and cordial in every aspect. One of the organisers even allowed me to use his laptop to call home. In general, Japanese seemed very friendly nation, who are really proud of their own culture and heritage. This was my first time in Japan and I'm sure I'll go back again and again to experience their hospitality, more specifically, their food.

It was a wonderful experience for me having met so many PhD students from Asia Pacific region's leading universities. From social networking perspective, this type of conferences is great. It reminds me of the fact that PhD study is not all about research it's also about creating and maintaining a network of cross-disciplinary researchers who can cooperate with each other in future endeavours.

**Review by** *Elin Lehnborn*

**PhD Candidate, Therapeutics Centre, Faculty of Pharmacy**

I travelled to Kyoto, Japan, along with four University of Sydney post-graduate fellow students to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) Doctoral Students Conference (DSC) at Kyoto University, 6-10 July 2009.

The conference is held once a year and provides doctoral students from various Pacific Rim Universities to meet and share their research. It was a very busy week with presentations, workshops and social activities. The opening lecture given by Professor Tetsuro Matsuzawa, focused on his research on chimpanzee intelligence and let me tell you, I would not like to play Memory with a chimpanzee! The theme of this year's conference was "Promoting

Originality and Diversity in Research". It was indeed a very diverse group of over 80 students presenting their research in fields including law, humanities, agriculture, biology, economics, medicine, engineering, sociology and much more. The conference chair, Mr Hideki Aoyama, and his team had not only successfully organised an academic program but also different social activities from; participating in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony, trying our skills in calligraphy or visiting the Kiyomizu Temple and other sites. The closing lecture was given by Professor Shin Kubota and one of the highlights in his presentation was when he sang karaoke to music he himself had composed.

For many students, this was their first attendance at a conference, most were prepared before their presentation. The idea of presenting in front of a large audience was quite nerve wracking for most students but the relaxed atmosphere and the knowledge that we were all PhD students put us at ease. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet and mingle with PhD students from Pacific Rim Universities and I strongly recommend you submit an abstract for the 11<sup>th</sup> APRU DSC to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia.

**Review by** *Franklin Oben-Odoom*

**PhD candidate, Department of Political Economy, Faculty of Arts**

Being a non-specialist conference, the 10th APRU Conference might be taken by some to have been a mere social gathering to see people from different parts of the world and see a new country. Indeed it was! It afforded the opportunity to see the beautiful Kyoto city and learn a few 'Japaneisms'.<sup>1</sup> But it also provided a forum for many scholarly opportunities. For want of space, I outline just three of these.

The conference showcased a variety of methods. Coming from different disciplines, presenters used different research methods for even similar questions. This accorded well with the conference theme, *promoting originality and diversity in research*. But the diversity also was a source of some confusion, which was cleared when one remembered that one was not to uncritically accept all the methods, but to observe how different insights could be produced by different methods. To this extent, the conference provided some inspiration on different research methods.

While not many topics converged, the organizers made the best out of the situation by pairing presenters working on similar topics as roommates. This way, presenters developed deeper networks, as opposed to broader ones. I shared my room with another PhD candidate working on a similar topic as mine and we have stayed in touch, giving each other feedback on drafts, since our meeting at the conference.

A final benefit, albeit an indirect one, was the opportunity to share 'our' worries, hopes and fears as PhD candidates, and to learn from one another some 'coping strategies'. Of course one could share these with one's supervisor, but there are other positive and quiet distinct positive effects when this sharing is with *colleagues* outside one's *parent university*.

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<sup>1</sup>For my impression of the city, see Obeng-Odoom F, 2009, 'Kyoto, impressions of a visitor', *Urban dev*, [http://urbandev.ning.com/notes/Kyoto%2C\\_impressions\\_of\\_a\\_visitor](http://urbandev.ning.com/notes/Kyoto%2C_impressions_of_a_visitor) (accessed 10-08-09).