



KAKEHASHI Project 2018

Visiting Program to Boston and New York by Japanese Jewish Studies Researchers

18-24, Mar. 2018

What is KAKEHASHI Project?

KAKEHASHI Project is:

- A program launched by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in 2013.
- Its goal is to promote a cultural exchange between Japan and other countries, selecting participants who are expected to play active and important roles in various fields in the prospective future. The North American Program is called “Kakehashi” (“bridge” in Japanese) program to promote an understanding of Japanese culture and society in order to better enhance diplomatic relations between Japan and U.S.
- Our visiting program is organized by JICE (Japan International Cooperation Center) with fully cooperation with AJC (American Jewish Committee), and attended by Mrs. Barbara Kilkka, Field Director of YFU (Youth For Understanding) USA.

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Who We Are

We all are Japanese researchers of Jewish studies and have various research themes.

Joe Sakurai (Leader, Lecturer, Otsuma Women’s Univ.)

Rabbinic Literature, Conversion to Judaism and Jewish Identity

Shinichi Yamamoto (Postdoctoral Researcher, Ben-Gurion Univ. Israel)

History of Sabbatian Movements

Satoko Kamoshida (Lecturer, Tokyo Univ. of Foreign Languages)

Yiddish and other Jewish Languages

Masahiro Shida (Postdoctoral Researcher, Waseda Univ.)

Medieval Jewish Polemical Literature against Christianity

Ryoka Aoki (Doctoral Student, Univ. of Tokyo)

Israel Salanter and the Musar Movement

Mina Lee (Doctoral Student, Univ. of Tokyo)

History of the Jewish Community of Venice in 17th Century

Kyosuke Shionoya (MA Student, Univ. of Tokyo)

The Biblical Study on the Book of Samuel



Visit to Consulate General of Japan, Boston

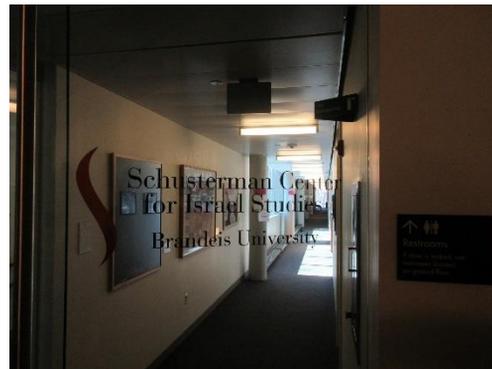
On the morning of March 19, we visited Consulate General of Japan in Boston. After passing the entrance of Federal Reserve Plaza, we went up to Consulate located on the 22nd floor. In the lobby, we saw the miniature of the famous Byodoin Temple (平等院) in Kyoto on display and a reading room full of Japanese books.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Rokuichiro Michii, Consul-General, warmly welcomed us and gave us a short introduction on the close ties between the cities of New England and those of Japan. During his speech, he repeatedly stressed the importance of the need to build the Japanese presence on the East Coast in general and in Boston in particular and hoped that much more Japanese students would come to study at colleges and universities in Boston.

As we introduced ourselves, we shared a little bit of our various research fields of Jewish Studies. Mr. Michii was surprised that a number of researchers/graduate students were interested in Judaism and Jewish culture. He attentively listened to each of us, asking stimulating questions and making comments on each of our fields. Since he has built close ties with the Jewish community in Boston, we all also hope to construct a strong relationship between Japanese researchers and a wide variety of the Jewish people in Boston, including but not limited to academics to further promote a lively cultural exchange.

Mr. Michii willingly agreed with us to let the Jewish community in Boston know about our program. He noted on a comment to us: "This meeting was actually so encouraging and grateful. I hope your visiting will be successful and promise to give this briefing to the Jewish community in Boston to share it." We would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Michii and all the staffs for welcoming us in our visit to Consulate General .





Visit to Brandeis University

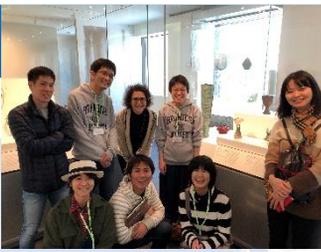
On March 20, we visited Brandeis University to join a meeting organized by Prof. Jonathan Sarna, Chair of its Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program. Prof. Sarna is one of the most influential scholars on American Jewish history, and the author of his masterpiece, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2003), selected by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) as part of his "Canon of Jewish Literacy."

Several graduate students and scholars of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department attended the discussion. Some of them are from Israel, South Korea, and other foreign countries. After introducing each other, we all managed to answer various questions from them such as: How is education on Judaism and the Jewish people in high schools in Japan?; How are Judaism and Israel perceived in Japan?; How is interaction between the Jewish communities in Japan and Israel?; Where and how do Japanese students learn Hebrew?; Are there any courses of Jewish studies offered in universities in Japan?

Prof. Sarna and the participants from Brandeis also answered our questions. Although they actually have different themes and approaches, and a variety of their viewpoints in such a remarkably open atmosphere enabled us to engage in such productive and fruitful discussions. All the participants enjoyed conversation even during the discussion and coffee break. Some of our members found similar themes with the graduate students at Brandeis, and thus exchanged contact with each other. We all hope that we will be in touch and build good relations with those wonderful scholars and students at Brandeis.

After the discussion, Liat, the department's student staff, took us on the short campus tour. As we walked around the campus, we saw many foreign students, mostly Asians, studying at every corner of the campus, realizing that we could not help but be amazed at Brandeis's remarkable openness towards students of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which seems to reflect the school's emphasis on Jewish values that appreciate human diversity regardless of racial and ethnic origin. Brandeis's deep appreciation for openness, inclusiveness and diversity is also reflected in its respect for other faiths as well. Especially we were also impressed at three on-campus chapels (Church, Mosque and Synagogue respectively), thus creating open venues for students and faculties of respective faiths on campus. Witnessing all this, we learned one important aspect of how students and faculties view the discipline of Jewish Studies as a site for learning about tolerance and diversity in American colleges including but not limited to the Jewish community in particular and a wider spectrum of American society in general. All in all, we all would like to thank Prof. Jonathan Sarna and all the participants for welcoming us and organizing this incredibly engaging meeting.





Visit to Museums



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

On March 20 Tuesday, we visited Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. At the entrance, we met a marvelous curator, Ms. Simona Di Nepi. She is originally from Rome (She lived in Israel before coming to Boston) and working as the FIRST curator for Judaica collection of the museum. Simona introduced us various exhibitions regarding Jewish history and culture, such as a candle stand for Hanukah (Hanukiyah), a Kiddush cup for Shabbat, beautiful ornaments for Torah scroll, and so on. These Judaica objects were not exhibited as a separate collection, rather among different cultural exhibition. We realized in this style that the Jewish people always have lived among different cultures and Jewish culture, influenced by different cultures, has been cultivated throughout the ages. Then we saw an object of modern art of Hebrew letters, consisting of a biblical verse. It is formed like trick art, made by an American Jewish artist born in Germany.

In the Museum, aside from exhibitions about Judaica, many paintings by famous artists were exhibited, among whom are Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet. So these were well worth seeing. Finally, we entered the floor for a special exhibition by Takashi Murakami, a famous Japanese modern artist. We were impressed by his unique works.

Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York by Kyosuke Shionoya



Museum of Jewish Heritage is located near the skyscrapers in Manhattan. It also takes about 12 minutes from 9.11 Memorial & Museum. They showed us various exhibitions on display. We had a chance to learn about the then social and political situations surrounding the Jewish communities in Europe on the eve of the Holocaust, which gave rise to the cultural movement of anti-Semitism under the Nazi regime, which eventually led to the Holocaust. I wrote “movement” because the cultural movement had a mass appeal in Europe at a significant level. This museum exhibits the cycles of Jewish life before and during the Holocaust and its aftermath, which shows how the Holocaust has affected the foundations of Jewish life in Europe and how the survivors pass on their memory and experience to their descendants as part of cultivating the group’s collective memory in American society.

It was not until I came to America that American Jews were often interested in Japanese and Japanese culture. For example, I met some Jewish people who can speak Japanese, and others greeted us with *Arigato* or *Konnichiwa*, which means “Thank you” or “Hello” in Japanese. Witnessing this, I suppose I can come up with one possible explanation; many of today’s Jewish people in America are children or grandchildren of the Jewish immigrants from Europe in the first half of the 20th century, some of who are descendants of the Holocaust Survivors who fled to America with the Sugihara visa. Therefore they are very thankful to us Japanese despite the anachronistic portrayals of Japan as invisibly oriental due to the recent decrease in Japan’s presence in the US over the decades. I have no idea whether this is true of American Jews or not, but I think this question – why they are interested in Japanese – may be somewhat similar to the question that we were asked in America over and over again – why we Japanese study about the Jewish people. That’s because I assume both Jews and Japanese can easily identify with and find some similarity with each other due to their mutual cultural ties deeply rooted in the course of modern history.

Visit to Universities in New York

Yeshiva University by Masahiro Shida

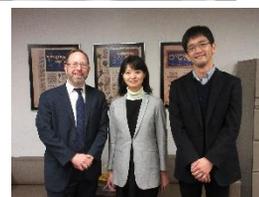
Before visiting New York, I had impatiently been waiting for that day, March 22, nearly for two months!! Ms. Mina Lee and I visited Yeshiva University with a warmhearted invitation by Prof. Mordechai Z. Cohen. We met him last summer at the 17th World Congress of Jewish Studies 2017 in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Dr. Cohen listened to my lecture and made some comments. Ms. Lee also met him there, and talked about each research subject. So we frequently e-mailed for this meeting.

In the office of Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, we also met Prof. David Berger. It was a moment that my dream had come true because I could not finish my doctoral dissertation on Moses Nahmanides (Ramban) without his great work. Thus I could not believe that I actually talked with him: He asked me "How did you meet Ramban?" Yes, this is a typical question, I was asked so many times. But, this time is really special simply because it is from that Prof. Berger!! It is he that asks me!! Just unbelievable!!

We were so surprised that they were so interested in Jewish studies in Japan: They eagerly asked many questions on our situations. Dr. Cohen has good relationship with institutions for Religious studies and Jewish studies in China, and offers Ms. Lee two occasions for lectures upon her subject, Jewish history in Venice. I wish her the best of luck!

Both of us would like to thank Dr. Cohen, Dr. Berger, and their colleague Rona Steinerman for inviting us and setting up the meeting with us. We spent a wonderful and inspiring time. I hope we our relationship will continue and some day we will engage in joint research together.

News on our visit to Yeshiva Univ.!!
<https://blogs.yu.edu/news/japanese-scholars-meet-with-revel-faculty/>

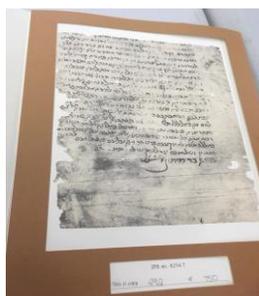


JTS (the Jewish Theological Seminary) by Joe Sakurai

Our visit to JTS, one of the most academically prestigious graduate institutions of Jewish Studies in North America, was perhaps quite an experience for most of our participants (I am the only one in our delegation who attended and graduated from JTS almost decades ago). Prof. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, dean of the Gershon Kekst Graduate School along with Chancellor Dr. Arnold Eisen warmly welcomed and hosted us with deliciously cooked Kosher meals (they were amazingly tasty!) We had a great privilege to schmooze and discuss with amazing faculty members and doctoral students from one of North America's greatest graduate institutions of Jewish Studies.

Although we were unable to take a tour of the beautiful main campus due to the current construction of many of its facilities, we were very fortunate enough to look up closely at carefully preserved collections of Hebrew manuscripts and fragments including but not limited to the beautifully tailored Machzor and Haggadah as well a letter of a certain judge signed by Rambam. Completely awestruck by such remarkable collections of rare materials, this made us all instantly realize and even appreciate that JTS's uncompromising commitment to promote scholarly research is closely intertwined with its effort to preserve and transmit chains of Jewish textual tradition and culture in a wider spectrum of American Jewish life for the next generation.

The very agenda in our discussion, most of all, concerned the implications of how non-Jewish scholars can examine certain academic themes of interest in Jewish Studies, which obviously offers different approaches and contexts to the studies of Jewish textual tradition. Some of the questions that we raised seem to have challenged them and even piqued their interest in knowing more about our approaches to Jewish Studies. Although our meeting was brief, it was such an honor for us to meet and freely discuss with wonderful JTS faculties as well as doctoral students. We all would like to thank Prof. Schwartz, Chancellor Dr. Eisen and all the JTS faculties as well as doctoral students for schmoozing with us.



Yiddish in Japan – one of the best way for a *goy* to enrich the understanding about Jewish culture by Satoko Kamoshida

I, Satoko Kamoshida, a Research Scholar at the University of Tokyo (Linguistic Department) have been teaching Yiddish at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies since 2016. I teach Yiddish because I love this language and believe teaching Yiddish is one of the best way to enrich peoples' understandings about the Jewish people. I have learned the language through several Yiddish summer programs in Vilna (Vilnius University 2003 and 2004), New York (YIVO, NYU, 2005), Tel Aviv (TAU, 2007), and also participating in Yiddish courses at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and private Yiddish gathering in Israel (2006-2008). In Israel, I did field work about Yiddish learning activities and completed my doctoral dissertation on *Yiddish Private Publishing and its Learning Activities* in 2011 (Sangensha, 2014) at the University of Tokyo.



Currently, I'm also attending the Yiddish online courses provided by the Workmen's Circle in New York. It helps me a lot. First of all, the teachers and students there warmly welcome me and inspire me a lot. My Yiddish classes in Japan are so much helped by the online courses.

My students in Japan are coming to learn Yiddish because they are interested in the language, its culture and history. In their school education, they haven't learned so much about Jews besides in the context of the Holocaust and international affairs. Students want to know something new before their. Also, there are people who had read about Yiddish in book or heard about it but don't know its details. Opportunities to learn about Jews and Judaism are limited in Japan. I believe that Yiddish is one of the best tools to broaden their interests. In 2018, 28 students came to learn Yiddish at the university class.

However, I have a big concern regarding which I can continue this wonderful teaching career. Currently, I am not sure for how long I can teach the course. *Oy gevalt!* In order to officially offer the course at least in two semesters a year, it should be funded from outside of the university (if you could help me, please do so!). Since I know the importance and meanings of Yiddish education in Japan, I really hope to continue to offer the course at the university.

Though I have been teaching Yiddish for those years, I have not been to New York for more than 13 years. So that when I saw Manhattan from the air plane, I was so much excited (honestly I almost cried)! I thought, "Why I haven't been here for such a long time, though I've really wanted to visit here? I should find a way to visit New York every year or live there."



In New York, I visited three Yiddish speakers: Mr. Nikolai (Kolya) Borodulin (Associate Director for Yiddish Programming at Workmen's Circle), Prof. Gennady Estraiikh (NYU) and Mr. Alec (Leyzer) Burko (Doctoral Candidate at JTS). Mr. Borodulin is one of my online Yiddish teachers. It was the first time to see him face to face (!) and I was so much excited. Then, I visited the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, which is well known for its scholarship on Eastern European Jewry and its archives. There I had meetings with my favorite great Yiddish linguists, Prof. Estraiikh and Mr. Burko. Prof. Estraiikh is known as the author of *Soviet Yiddish: Language-Planning and Linguistic Development* (Oxford UP 1999). And Mr. Burko is known as one of the most important and great Yiddishists in the Millennium! Afterwards, I visited Brooklyn in order to update the image of Yiddish speaker's districts.



Visit to Consulate General of Japan, New York

In Friday morning on March 23rd, we visited Consulate General of Japan in New York. In the lobby, we saw an impressive yellow and red flowers on a black flower stand. Behind this object, there was a gold folding screen covered with golden leaf, called “Kin-Byobu” (金屏風) in Japanese.

Firstly, we were invited to meet Consul-General, Mr. Reiichiro Takahashi. After our greeting with self-introduction, Mr. Takahashi talked to us about some interesting topics, such as various attitudes and responses of the Jewish people in New York towards recent political activities of the U.S. government upon Israel, a familiar friendship between Jacob Schiff, a famous Jewish-American banker, and Korekiyo Takahashi, head of Ministry of Finance in Japan, in the beginning of 20th century, and so on.

After that, we gave a briefing of this visiting program with participants from the Consulate General. Consul Ryoko Sasaoka and Researcher Hanako Ishikawa attended this meeting, and we all gave presentations with our academic subjects. Our time had originally been scheduled to be 45 minutes, but actually it took more than one and half hours. Ms. Sasaoka, who is so interested in Middle-Eastern studies, Hebrew and Arabic languages, and Ms. Ishikawa, who finished her doctoral dissertation on Winston Churchill, made quite suggestive comments on each presentation of us. Our discussion was much more impressive than what we had imagined. We really enjoyed a wonderful time.

They warmly welcomed us and promised us to keep our relationship and help us to send this news letter to the Jewish community in New York and AJC. We would like to thank Mr. Takahashi, Ms. Sasaoka, Ms. Ishikawa, and all the staffs in Consulate General.





Shabbat Service at B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue and Shabbat Dinner by Mina Lee



A wonderful Shabbat night at B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue, and a comfortable Shabbat dinner at Mr. and Ms. Altmann's Home. It was very lucky that we attended a Shabbat service at B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue. This conservative synagogue was founded in 1825 by a Ashkenazic group. They give weight to keeping their faith and have introduced less formal worships such as music with electrical instruments and dance around synagogue. The worships are led by four cantors, one of whom was a young woman. Although all prayers were offered in Hebrew, cantors often informed which page to go in Siddur, the prayer book, which is written both in English and Hebrew as well as in the pronunciation in alphabet. Therefore, if someone can't read and understand Hebrew, he can follow all the worship.

We enjoyed upbeat music played by musicians with a variety of professional backgrounds. The music director, Dan Nadel told us that one of the synagogue musicians came from Japan. During Lecha Dodi praying (the most impressive music for me), the dance began suddenly. Some people stood up from their seats, went forth toward the walls, and started dancing in a circle. We all joined it, which made us feel a part of the congregation. We also participate in making Kiddush, blessing over wine, with other guests and first visitors. All of rituals had a family-friendly atmosphere. B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue posts the video and livestream on the website, which allows you to enjoy Shabbat service whenever and wherever you are (If you don't mind watching PC on Shabbat...).

The congregation is very zealous in social justice. Ms. Lilli Platt, the organizer of our participation, said that, it is not enough for participants only to come to the synagogue and to pray, but everyone should take actions and contribute to peace and justice for the world. Indeed, just before concluding the service, a teenage girl stood up on the platform, addressed the audience and appealed to participate in the gun-control demonstration tomorrow. I was very surprised again at what I noticed during the trip, which many Jews in the US make a deep commitment to American society with a strong identity of being Jews as part of the society. I felt as if I saw a representative scenery of American Jews.

After finishing the Shabbat service, we said goodbye to many curious people who surround us to talk with us, and went to the Altmann's house, who kindly invited us to a traditional Shabbat dinner. We were all welcomed warmly and had a comfortable time staying with them. We enjoyed many delicious meals, such as Challah, a special bread for Shabbat; Kugel, a baked casserole of potato; grilled vegetables; and grilled chicken, with sweetened wine, over which we talked about the history of the Altmann family and our research and background. I was moved to see in front of me the very process of a Shabbat dinner, which I had learned only through films. They were so kind that they served a lot of Jewish traditional tasty sweets. Because we didn't have enough time to enjoy fully they packed them for takeout to the hotel. We really appreciate their warm hospitality and giving us the excellent experience worthy of wrapping up our trip.

Video of the service on YouTube!!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw5pK71r0Ac&feature=youtu.be>

