

Teaching Sabbatical: Final Report
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I thank STINT for this opportunity to explore Japan and Japanese academia during a semester at the University of Tokyo.

Introduction:

The University of Tokyo (Tōkyō daigaku), in Japan referred to as Tōdai, which is translated into UTokyo, is a leading and very prestigious research university in Japan, established in 1877. In Times Higher Education's ranking of the best universities in Japan in 2023, the University of Tokyo is the second best one, after Tohoku University. The University of Tokyo has ten faculties, among them the College of Arts and Sciences (at Komaba), the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Sciences, and the Faculty of Engineering and fifteen graduate schools, including the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (at Komaba), Graduate School of Economics, Graduate Schools of Law and Politics, Graduate School of Public Policy, Graduate School of Science, Graduate School of Engineering, and Graduate School of Mathematical Sciences (at Komaba).

Its three core campuses are Hongo, Komaba and Kashiwa, among which the Hongo campus is the research-oriented main campus and the Komaba campus is the teaching-oriented campus, which essentially is a liberal arts college, although some research institutes are located there. All undergraduate students of the University of Tokyo spend their first two years at the College of Arts and Sciences at Komaba, the junior division, while the final two years, the senior division, can be done at another campus as well as Komaba. PEAK (Programs in English at Komaba) belongs to the College of Arts and Sciences, while GPEAK (Graduate Programs in English at Komaba) belongs to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Hence, while Hongo is a university campus, Komaba is essentially a college campus within the University of Tokyo. PEAK has two branches of study, Environmental Science and Japan in East Asia.

Preparation and Planning:

In December 2019, STINT offered me a Teaching Sabbatical at the University of Tokyo – PEAK in the Fall Semester 2020, and informed me about the STINT Seminar in February 2020 as well as about my two contacts at the University of Tokyo, one academic and the other administrative, the latter for the preparation stage, helping with arrangements for the planning trip as well as later making the housing application and providing the required documents to obtain a residence card and make a visa application, which are very bureaucratic procedures.

After having been informed about the Teaching Sabbatical offer at the University of Tokyo, I accepted and wrote to my academic and administrative contacts in December 2019 and we had regular communication in January and February 2020 to organize my stay and to arrange for my planning trip that was scheduled to May 2020. After having attended the STINT Seminar in Stockholm in February 2020, which gave general information about the Teaching Sabbatical program and various practical aspects involved, I bought my flight tickets to Tokyo and arrangements had been made for short-term housing on campus, at the Komaba Faculty House.

However, in March 2020, Japan closed its borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which started a long period of uncertainty. First, I had to cancel my planning trip, which led to struggle to be reimbursed for my flight ticket. It took several months and I did not receive all money back, but most of it, in August 2020. Second, I tried to maintain my communication with my Tōdai – PEAK academic contact concerning my stay, as well as STINT. While my communication with STINT worked smoothly, my communication with PEAK did not. Eventually, in May 2020, involving STINT, it was decided to postpone my Teaching Sabbatical to Fall Semester 2021.

Consequently, I wrote my academic contact in February 2021 to start planning for Fall Semester 2021, presuming he was going to be my academic host during Fall Semester 2021, as I had not been informed otherwise, but he informed he that the directorship for Japan in East Asia (JAE) rotates, so I got another academic contact. Eventually, it turned out that he was going to be my academic host anyway, while the other person was my official academic contact as director. I started communicating with my new academic contact and we had an online planning meeting in April 2021, and we were now two incoming STINT fellows, for Fall 2020 and Fall 2021. The discussion was general and the program structure remained

unclear, but we had some general discussion about a junior division course (for the first to second year students), which had to be somewhat easier, and a senior division course (third and fourth year students), which would also be a graduate division, where complete freedom was given to teach on your own research. The senior division/graduate division course would count as two courses, although it was one. I became somewhat concerned that my own research in evolutionary economics and monetary history were both suggested for a junior division course. As the Komaba Campus and PEAK offer liberal arts education, I expected the library to be able to have books on reserve to be used as course readings, but I understood that the PEAK faculty provide pdf files of the course readings themselves, so involving the library was complicated. Nevertheless, I told that I use books provided by the library, when I teach, and I was told to send the lists of the course readings, so the library would buy the books.

As the Japanese borders remained closed, the Teaching Sabbatical was eventually postponed again to Fall 2022. By then there was another rotation of duties, so my original academic contact, became so again, as Director of the Organization of Global Japanese Studies, as well as being my academic host, whose meaning remained unclear. In April 2022, the International Research and Cooperation Office did the housing application for University of Tokyo housing on my behalf and starting the application procedure for a residence permit as professor and visa. In May 2022, I was offered a small apartment at the Komaba Lodge Annex, which I accepted. In June 2022, while waiting for approval from different committees, I developed my two courses, *Evolutionary Economics and Monetary History*, as junior division course, and *Digital Currencies and Monetary Evolution*, as senior division/graduate division course, out of my own research interests, each course involving thirteen weekly ninety-minute sessions, but without any feedback, so I was not sure how well they would fit in within PEAK/GPEAK. Later being there, I discovered that PEAK/GPEAK has a rather loose structure. Nevertheless, the lack of feedback and clear information made the planning unnecessarily cumbersome.

In July 2022, I bought my flight tickets. The University of Tokyo applied for a Certificate of Eligibility to the Tokyo Immigration Bureau on my behalf. In August 2022, I received the necessary documents to make my visa application at the Embassy of Japan and in September 2022, a few weeks before going to Japan, I was able to pick up my visa there in person. At the same time, I struggled with my UTokyo Account, which had been opened for me.

Tasks and Responsibilities:

My task and responsibilities were to teach my two courses. During the first day in office, I contacted those who were responsible for the junior division and senior division to meet them and to have some general introduction and ask questions. One of the two persons responsible for the junior division was not present at the meeting so I had to make an appointment with him some weeks later to have more information about PEAK. That was the only meeting I had with them. The first day in office I also met my Teaching Assistant (TA) for the senior division course and she was very helpful in sorting out the mess with complicated administrative procedures related to teaching at PEAK/GPEAK and showed how to use various systems, including at the end the system used to check for plagiarism, which was in Japanese.

However, accessibility of the course readings was a major concern. The books existed in the Hongo Campus library, but not in the Komaba Campus library, but some arrived there in the beginning of October. I found out that the library did not put books on reserve for courses, so they were like regular library books, but they had books in pdf format. However, as I noticed I would have to pay to use them, I asked the library, telling me that both faculty and students need to pay, while my academic contact said faculty provide course readings to make students read. Anyway, my TA scanned, made pdf files, and uploaded them, including articles I had as pdf files, for my senior course readings, some chapters of which I also used for my junior course, while the PEAK office scanned and made pdf file for the other junior division course. Having sorted out that issue I was able to focus on the actual teaching.

I taught my two courses, *Evolutionary Economics and Monetary History*, as junior division course, and *Digital Currencies and Monetary Evolution*, as senior division/graduate division course, within Japan in East Asia, where they were the only two economics courses given. During my stay, I conducted my teaching with full academic freedom, but also in isolation from PEAK/GPEAK faculty. My TA and the PEAK Office provided administrative help when needed. Apart from that I had my office space.

Evolutionary Economics and Monetary History gave the foundations of evolutionary economics, studying the economy as a process, a complex, evolving system. The starting point was the basic evolutionary model and its elements, before turning to human history as an evolution of artifacts, involving exchange and reciprocity, and commodities as an ecosystem, considering energy and entropy. An evolutionary approach to economic history

was outlined and monetary history was analyzed as evolution of monetary arrangements, considering units of account and media of exchange. This course mixed lectures and seminars, consisting of seven seminars, where students were expected to upload a brief memo, answering the seminar question at issue, by using the assigned readings, the day before the seminar, in addition to writing a final essay.

Digital Currencies and Monetary Evolution considered money as a social institution, a clearing device for the settlement of accounts, based on monetary heuristics, and a measure of value independent of commodities, where the evolution of units of account and media of exchange brings in heuristics, considering cognition and money as social institution.

Interactions between monetary arrangements and the capital structure were analyzed for heterogeneous money. Studying an ecology of digital currencies, the course considered the two trajectories, complementary currencies and cryptocurrencies, involving blockchain as institutional technology. Complementary currencies and cryptocurrencies in East Asia were assessed considering malinvestment and financial instability, and compatibility with Buddhist economic principles. This course was a seminar course, consisting of twelve seminars, where students were expected to upload a brief memo, answering the seminar question at issue, by using the assigned readings, the day before the seminar, in addition to writing a final essay.

Activities during the Semester:

In order to for my stay to cover the entire semester from October 3, 2022, to February 10, 2023, I arrived in Japan, on September 29, 2022 and stayed until February 15, 2023. After two nights at a hotel, I moved into the Komaba Lodge Annex on October 1, 2022, and stayed there until I left Japan to return to Sweden. There were many practical matters to settle in the beginning, such as obtaining an office key, making the UTokyo Account work smoothly, sorting out the academic affairs systems UTAS and ICT-LMS, which are connected, but not fully, obtaining a library card, and becoming able to connect to UTokyo wifi, which was not the case in the beginning, but also reporting my address in person at the Meguro City Office and signing up for the National Health Insurance, which is mandatory if you stay in Japan more than three months.

My main activity at PEAK/GPEK was to teach my two courses, working isolated from others, so I had to figure out the background knowledge of the students myself. My courses used interactive teaching, as usual. After initially having explained what a seminar is, students became used to the format and they became increasingly active, especially in my

senior division course. In my senior division course, I had mainly Western students, who tend to talk, while in the junior division course, I had Asian students, who tend to listen, but they responded to questions. During the first two weeks, students were shopping around before deciding what courses to take, but then those dedicated to taking my courses were left, giving small groups to teach, which increased the opportunities for interaction around the topic.

There was little interaction with PEAK/GPEAK faculty, apart from the Global Faculty Development meetings, usually at lunch, but sometimes in the evening. These meetings were occasionally hybrid, but often online. Different topics were discussed and sometimes it was open discussion. There seemed to be a small core group with a Western dominance, but who attended varied. These meetings, online or hybrid, occurred about two or three times a month. I attended sometimes, but I did not see a clear purpose, beyond having some social interaction, and its role within PEAK/GPEAK remained unclear.

The Global Society Program (GSP) Research Workshop, which was online, allowed graduate students to present their drafts and research ideas with faculty commenting, one being assigned as discussant. I attended sometimes and gave comments, when the topic happened to involve my own discipline, which was usually not the case. Students received comments from other faculty than their supervisor, which is fruitful, and then the graduate students continued the meeting on their own. This format I found interesting for supervision.

Working very much in isolation at PEAK/GPEAK, where no one who was interested in what I was doing, and missing regular research seminars, I focused on my courses and looked for external research connections, starting within Tōdai, at the Hongo Campus. I found a research connection there, who was very interested in my work and in collaboration, so we met several times during my stay to discuss research collaboration mixed with cultural activities, such as going to concerts and visiting art galleries. We planned for writing an article together and discussed the possibility for me to obtain funding to return to Japan for research. In November, he invited me to present my latest book at the Hongo campus at a research workshop, a lecture followed by discussion, and he invited two other economists to attend, who in turn invited me to make a presentation at their universities in January. Hence, I presented my latest book at the University of Tokyo – Hongo, in November, and at Chuo University and the Good Money Lab, Senshu University, in January. For my own research, my stay in Japan was fruitful. In Japan, I was able to find research connections I am lacking in Sweden, but that was outside of PEAK/GPEAK and the Komaba Campus.

Compare and Reflect on the Teaching Experience:

There are three essential differences between Japanese and Swedish academia, comparing Tōdai and my Swedish home university:

- (i) Academic freedom is much stronger in Japan as crucial to high quality teaching: The freedom of Japanese faculty to develop their own courses based on their own research interests, respecting their expertise, without collective collegiate approval and interference provides teaching based on research, pedagogical development, and more committed faculty than with Swedish academic constraints, involving collectivistic collegial approval and time-consuming formal decision-making with bureaucratic and political interference without any respect for expertise and endless meetings to produce detailed course plans, which makes teaching rigid. Nevertheless, Japanese bureaucracy is very demanding and time-consuming, leading to various organizational complications, such as information overload through trees of links and QR codes. Isolation from colleagues, which may prevent coordination of courses within a program, seems to be a survival strategy. However, endless meetings in Sweden may not lead to substantial coordination either, but rigid course plans.
- (ii) There is more emphasis on quality than quantity in teaching in Japan: Excellence in teaching is highly valued, while the teaching load is light, thus giving room for research, which provides for course development. A course consists of 19.5 teaching hours at Tōdai, compared with 30 hours in economics at my Swedish home university. Developing and introducing new courses are a faster process in Japan than in Sweden. Teaching in small groups and a variety of courses are appreciated in Japan, in contrast to Sweden.
- (iii) Highly competitive selection of students through entrance exams and interviews is crucial to high-quality education. Tōdai is hard to get into, but easy to get out from with a degree. Good students are easy and fun to teach, because a higher level of intellectual interaction is feasible, while good students tend to reinforce each other. The throughput is very high. However, there tends to be some grade inflation with highly selective entry requirements. The selection instruments are not perfect, so all students are not that good, but the overall level is good, tough not outstanding. Overall, my students did their assignments fairly well for their respective level.

Important Lessons:

Referring to the comparison above I see three lessons:

- (i) Academic freedom in research and teaching allowing for fast development and introduction of diverse, new courses stimulates learning and attract good students.
- (ii) A reasonable teaching load allow for cross-fertilization between research and teaching in small groups, stressing quality and excellence in teaching.
- (iii) Being more selective in accepting students, using various tests, gives a better overall level of students, which makes it feasible to have high-quality teaching.

Action Plan:

I started collaborating with a faculty member at the University of Tokyo Faculty of Economics at Hongo, to write a paper together and to obtain funding for me to return to Japan for a research stay. I also discussed the possibility for research collaboration in connection with my presentation at the Good Money Lab, Senshu University, given shared research interests.

Summary and Conclusions:

The STINT Teaching Sabbatical provides the opportunity to obtain experience from teaching at the University of Tokyo, which is another context. However, while teaching at PEAK/GPEAK gives you the freedom to develop your own courses based on your own research interests, it means being isolated from the regular faculty. The academic environment is hard to find. Yet, it is a platform for developing research connections in Japan.