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# Learning How to Look – Report of Doctoral Fieldwork

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# Learning How to Look

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Host Institution: Department of Aesthetics and Art Theory, Faculty of Letters,  
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Host Researcher: Fumikazu Kishi

Fellowship Period: February to June 2013

My doctoral research is an iconographical study of the depictions of courtesans and pleasure quarters in 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan. My hypothesis is that depictions of the journey to and through the pleasure quarters were influenced by the spatial structure of medieval tales of a male traveller to a strange land. The image of the courtesan was accordingly influenced by that of fantastic inhabitants of these strange lands.

My fieldwork consisted of surveying the iconography of courtesans and pleasure quarters within genre scenes, illustrations to popular tales, and the emerging ukiyo-e genre, especially in the various media employed by the artist Hishikawa Moronobu. I have therefore examined artworks by Moronobu in Japanese museums, as well as consulting manuscripts in libraries, attending exhibitions and interviewing art historians. As a result, it has become clear that the space of the pleasure quarters was depicted as a nested structure, created through the interplay of inside/outside (this world/other world) and front/back (public/private). This is structurally identical to earlier tales of visits to a strange land. Therefore, the hypothesis of this research has been sufficiently verified, and I have gathered precious materials for further doctoral research.

I participated in the seminar on the History of East Asian Art and Aesthetics, organized by my host professor, by presenting on my research and commenting by graduate students on their own research. The discussions that ensued were enlightening. We also visited exhibitions together, exchanging ideas and opinions in front of the original artworks. In this way, I came into contact with other methodologies and approaches which will enrich my own research methodology.

Research tips:

- Talk to everyone, get to the persons that can open doors
- Take all the opportunities to do research, even if not directly related to your current research.
- Keep a journal where you paste news clippings, leaflets etc.
- Take advantage of the cluster of libraries in north Kyoto: Kyoto University, Doshisha, Ritsumeikan, Bukkyo University, Otani, Seika, Kyoto Prefectural Library.

### Experience tips:

Explore a little every day. Soak in the thermal baths (onsen). Explore Kyoto, it has many things to offer, such as the Arashiyama area. Any time of year there will be a festival of some sort, check the news. Bring drinks and make friends in the evening on the riverside near Sanjo Bridge or Imadegawa. Buy the latest issue of Kyoto Journal, it's worth it [kyotojournal.org/](http://kyotojournal.org/) look at the Experience Kyoto section. Travel around the Kansai area, explore Nara, Osaka, Kobe. When you travel to Tokyo or elsewhere, the best alternative to trains are night buses.

Thank you to JSPS for sponsoring my fieldwork and enabling me to live in Kyoto, which I had always wanted to do.



**The members of Professor Kishi's graduate seminar**



**During fieldwork at Tokyo National Museum**



**With art historian Yonekura Michio**