

Professor Koji Mizoguchi

Organization: Kyushu University

Location: Fukuoka, Kyushu

Collaboration details

Collaboration name: Global Social archaeology

Type: Japan Massive Open Online Course (JMOOC)

Partners: Kyushu University, JMOOC and Flinders University

Dates: March 2014 to October 2014

Summary: An online course served over a MOOC



Potential applications: To open academic knowledge up to the general public and in particular to support indigenous communities to protect their histories, to remind people of the vulnerability of their past and in the best of all circumstances to help rejuvenate communities by helping them regain a sense of belonging. This activity and feedback also serves to enrich our scientific endeavours as well.

Faced with the challenge of making Kyushu University's expertise accessible to a wider audience, Professor Mizoguchi decided to develop an online course in social archaeology using Japan's Massive Open Online Course platform (JMOOC). The project delivered a series of firsts: it was the first foray for Kyushu University into MOOCs, and one of the first English language courses on JMOOC, and the first to bring Australian and Japanese knowledge of social archaeology together.

“Social archaeology is a discipline that is reintroducing cultural, economic and political context into the science of archaeology. As a framework it is particularly useful when working with the general public and Indigenous communities in particular. Historically, archaeology is steeped in the rise of the nation state where feudal communities needed to be put together fairly artificially to form a unifying structure. For that purpose shared past and ancestry were considered useful for the construction of national identity. We tend to forget that kind of background to archaeology. So my desire is to get that sense back into practice. My goal is to make archaeology more open to the public and I have had exciting and sometimes unexpected feedback in terms of how to interpret a piece of evidence from different points of view. So for that reason alone it was an excellent opportunity to do the very first MOOC for Kyushu University on social archaeology and one of the first English language courses on JMOOC.

When I started to consider how to bring social archaeology to a much wider audience I realized that I could do pretty much everything about social archaeology except Indigenous archaeology. To cover this gap, I decided to bring in a world expert in the field. The name that immediately sprang to mind was Professor Claire Smith from Flinders University in South Australia. Claire has been a good friend of mine for a long time and someone I value in research collaboration and she is also my predecessor as the President of the World Archaeological Congress. One of the missions of the Congress is to promote indigenous rights and the importance of indigenous heritage. So this JMOOC course concept fitted with the objectives of the Congress, with the objectives of Kyushu University and with my own background and training.

Australia is one of the advanced countries when it comes to connecting archaeology to the general public and more specifically with the aboriginal population.

If you confine yourself to a rigidly defined science you are discouraged from making any speculations including interpreting what subjective meanings are attached to a particular artefact or landscape feature. But for the aboriginal population that type of emotional attachment to their landscape and ancestral relics was the most important thing. So the dry analysis by archaeologists proved to be harmful to aboriginal individuals and communities. In response Australian archaeologists began to develop a very practical and pragmatic work ethic or code of practice when doing archaeology with aboriginal people. This framework is cutting edge. Working with Australians in this sense benefits not only me but also my Japanese colleagues, allowing us to draw on the same sort of ground and to learn how we can do the same sort of thing, for example, with the Ainu population, the officially recognized indigenous population of Japan.

I contacted Claire to see if she was available for that kind of project and she immediately said yes. Fortunately we also had a very generous funding to help her come over. She visited twice, once for a short period of time to discuss the contents of the course in March and then again in August when most of the shooting of her section took place. In addition to shooting relevant footage Claire's role was to advance and peer review the quality of the manuscript of the lectures and also advise on the appropriate ways to show aboriginal images.

The course was advertised on the JMOOC designated website and Claire kindly posted a message to the World Archaeological Congress mail list which I couldn't do as the president. That was very helpful and thanks for that we had quite a few students from Australia – 68 or so. In all we had students from 53 countries across the world with about 400 from Japan and another 400 from abroad. The lecturers ran from 25 September to 23 October this year. Along with the lectures there was also a comments board where students could post questions to the lecturers and also exchange ideas with their fellow students.

The next step is to extend the course and put it on Edex or Coursera and again Claire has promised to join us. Claire is coming here soon to help with this and also I have started another, and at this stage informal collaboration with her to educate students about social archaeology. Hopefully this will be advanced in the future with other Australia universities. In the meantime, Claire will be a visiting professor at Kyushu and will give 12 lectures plus convene a three hour workshop for students between November this year and January next year.

I am keen to deepen my relationship with universities in Australia and am looking to see how I can send students to Australia and also bring Australian students here to study Japanese archaeology. At the site of the new Kyushu campus there are the Jomon (hunter gatherer), the Yayoi (early rice farming), the Kofun (mounded tomb) and early Historic (Asuka and Nara) age sites of national significance that are still to be thoroughly examined. I am convinced we can offer a very attractive place for Australian students to come over and experience Japanese archaeology and our students can go to Australia and experience cutting edge social archaeology there.

I have come to be convinced that unless you spend at least a couple of years abroad in an English speaking circumstance, you never become comfortable to write, listen and speak English at a level sufficient for conducting serious academic debate in English. I am determined to send as many of my students abroad as I can to offer them that type of opportunity. In the future I would like to send my students regularly to Australia for them to have that exposure.”