Stories in which Kyoto plays a leading role

Looking for Kyoto in literature

This university held a series of lectures in the second half of 2004 on “City Planning” and “Town Creation Theory”. In the first lecture Kyoto’s history and the changes in the city were introduced. In addition to attending the lectures, students were asked to compile reports on stories in which Kyoto takes centre stage. The purpose was not just to find a way of making students read; the main intention was actually to have them come to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of Kyoto from these writings and therefore to become more familiar with the background of Kyoto’s various historical periods and the influence of its geography. In this way I desired that the students should become conscious of what were Kyoto’s strategic points.

A total of 112 reports were submitted. 90 stories or books were read. Most were novels; in this genre 7 people read “The Lemon Tree” by Motojiro Kaji, 7 read “The Temple of the Golden Pavilion” by Yukio Mishima, 5 read “The Old Capital” by Yasunari Kawabata, and 4 read “Rashomon” by Ryunosuke Akutagawa. These works were the most popular ones. The books were chosen by means of the displays at bookshops, television and the internet. Through the reports, it was established that a literary walking map could be composed based on the discoveries made by the students as they formed their images of Kyoto. Such a map could very well be a step in the right direction to help dispel the present sluggishness of Kyoto’s tourist industry.

Other positive results of this assignment were that for the students to write their reports they had to collect literary materials and data, they had to make on-site investigations and they were able to rediscover Kyoto’s wonders for themselves.

At times reading has the power to change people’s lives. One is able to deepen one’s knowledge of a particular field through finding a shared enjoyment of a piece of literature. If the number of students able to experience this increases, reading will become more pleasurable and the problem of many people finding it too troublesome will be solved. By connecting “Kyoto” and “Literature” and adding a peculiar essence, further development is to be expected. Those students who involved themselves in the effort of submitting this report will have found their own individual reading style and thus will have made their student days in Kyoto more bountiful.