

My Home Away From Home: Shigaraki, Japan
Lydia Chamberlain

My study abroad trip to Shigaraki, Japan, was the catalyst for my budding passion for Asian studies and design. Every activity, landscape, ounce of culture, and most importantly, every person that I interacted with along the way changed how I would approach the rest of my college experience. The program at the core was a communication and community building experience with locals of the small town of Shigaraki. By designing with them and not for them, we could bridge the gaps between our different cultures and create special connections, learning new things all the while. The time we had with elementary students was perhaps the most impactful experience, which really made me realize in context how much design is human-centered, and requires empathy to properly create solutions. Without people, design is meaningless, and every creative solution does not affect every individual the same.

We used art and design to be our source of communication when words would fail us. I remember explicitly the bond I created with one young girl named Miki, who was too shy to use her English, and my Japanese too rough to be helpful. Yet together, using just gestures, symbols, and drawing, we proudly created a beautiful clay lion that would be fired and displayed in their school. Because of amazing moments such as these, it would lead me later into another program with students from Suwon, South Korea. The same core concepts would apply and further my passion for the intersection between design and Asian studies.

Since then I have enveloped these experiences into my practice through other avenues, such as becoming the Design Chair for the Asian American Association here at Michigan. That was my first foray into design work that would reach others across the University. That opportunity eventually led to my work-study position at the Nam Center for Korean Studies, where I could work with design in a professional context for a culture I am passionate about.

So for all of these changes in my life, beginning with my study abroad program in Japan, I am deeply honored to have experienced such a once in a lifetime opportunity through the Stamps School of Art & Design. Also, I am deeply grateful for the support I received from donors and the Stamps School to make it happen. It will forever be my marker as the turning point in my college career where I found my passion for Asian studies and design.

Lydia Chamberlain
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Miki and I with the clay lion we created, using gestures, drawings, and symbols to communicate. Even though we had a language barrier, we still managed to design an awesome sculpture and have a wonderful time.



Logo and T-shirt designs for the Asian American Association. We wanted to display that we were an inclusive Asian organization without using symbols exclusively from one culture.



*Another iteration for a t-shirt design, Asian American Association.
This design wasn't used but remains one of my favorites from the process.*



T-shirt design for the student radio organization WCBN for their yearly fundraiser. Some of their previous designs used Japanese icons, so I wanted to use this opportunity to create more dragons! Dragons are symbols within many Asian cultures, holding different but equally special meanings to each one.



*Logo designs for the Nam Center for Korean Studies upcoming 10th Anniversary.
The Nam Center has provided me with so many opportunities to further my skills as a
graphic designer.*