

*August 3-
Arrived at city of Yarboa, by means
of airplane. Am very excited about
studying the Yarboan religion
firsthand.*

*3pm (local time)-
Ran into some problems trying to
exchange currency. Apparently the
Yarboans have little interest in
currencies other than the Yen.*

*Fortunately, the bank tellers seemed
genuinely concerned, and helped me
locate a Chinese man who was
willing to trade for some of my
Euros.*

*After wandering the city for a few
hours, I found a surprisingly cheap
place to stay over a local tavern. I
intend to eat my dinner here and
then call it an early night.*

*August 4-
Found out why accommodations
were so affordable. It seems that
Yarboan law is very strict on public
drunkenness. Especially in regards
to operating vehicles.*

*To this end, it has become
customary, expected even, for any
place that serves alcohol to also
offer some sort of rudimentary
accommodations. In this case, very
low-budget lodgings.*

Regardless, after being rudely awoken by the hangovers of the other tenants, I decided to grab breakfast from the renowned street markets. This turned out to be a great experience.

I already knew that Yarboans have a fairly high number of festivals each year, but I learned today that their festivals rotate on a eight year basis. Only a handful of festivals happen more than once every eight years.

From talking to a local boy, as best as I can understand it is currently the "earth" year, so a lot of the festivals center around grains and such.

To illustrate, the boy sold me some kind of grain-balls with berries mixed in. They were quite good, and I found myself reminded of Lughnasadh, though there wasn't a bonfire in sight.

Further study throughout the day proved frustrating. The Yarboans accept the festival into their daily lives much the way that prayer at meals is accepted back in England. When asked about it, they have difficulty understanding the question, much less my horrendous attempts at their language.

The day was not wasted however, because I did manage to find a building I am fairly sure is a temple. I am unsure about customs regarding foreigners and temples, so will retire and do some quick research.

*August 5-
Decided that I must find new accommodations before everything else. My sleep was terrible and I got very poor internet speeds on my handheld. Will dedicate entire morning to finding new place if necessary.*

*3pm-
Fortune is with me again! Found out that local library will let scholars sleep in the corners of the building (tower rooms, to be accurate) during their research.*

It is apparently so common for people to pull multi-day research runs that the corners have become remarkably well furnished: the one that has been flagged for me has a little electric stove, a pile of blankets, and the window has a wide space between the two panes, allowing for refrigeration.

The other scholar on my floor is a charming young woman who speaks a bit of English. The floor we're on is primarily concerned with history and religion, so she was able to help me find some excellent resources.

*11pm-
Yarboan literature is incredibly beautiful to look at, but excruciatingly slow to decipher. My handheld is able to transliterate the text for me, and I am processing it through the university back in England to get translations, but I am still having to stop and manually translate a lot of sections.*

Nevertheless, I am spellbound by the contents of the books. Looking into the rotating festival system, I discovered that seven is a sacred number to the Yarboans, "The four fingers with respect to the spaces between" as they would say.

I don't completely follow the logic, but Yarboans will frequently count to seven using their fingers and the gaps between the fingers. They count zero as being a part of this holy number, which is how an eight-year cycle fits to the number seven.

Again, I don't completely follow their logic (include 0 when convenient, perhaps?) but maybe it's because I've been pouring over books all afternoon and evening.

*August 6-
I asked Rinzen (the other scholar on this floor) and she explained that visiting the place I found yesterday would be no trouble, so long as I was attentive. Am quite excited now.*

Found out quickly upon arrival what Rinzen meant. The place is more of a Shaolin Monastery than anything else, but the place is dangerous. Training duels will sweep through the place without warning or consideration, and it is your responsibility to get out of the way.

Once I got used to getting out of the way of fierce but almost silent young men battling their way from room to room, I found that the other monks were quite considerate. I suppose one gets used to the constant combat. (Or perhaps that's the point?)

One monk in particular was helpful, a man who was somehow able to convey an intense sensation of danger while barely being five and a half feet tall. He spoke no English but was able to grasp what I was asking.

Immediate questions that I was able to get solid answers for: yes, the Yarboans were polytheistic. No, they did not believe in reincarnation. The practicing to non-practicing ratio seems to be pretty high (he claimed 4 in 5 to about 9 in 10).

The religion does not seem to be rooted in Buddhist concepts, though you can quickly spot influences. More likely is a basis in Shintoism, which would make sense in light of the obvious Japanese heritage.

Exhausted, so returned to library and took nap. When I awoke, asked Rinzen about proper shrines and temples.

Once we overcame translation hurdle, she spent five minutes laughing at me. Seems that Yarboans rarely worship in groups larger than 20 or so.

Instead, Yarboans either go to the monasteries (she implied there are at least 3?) or more commonly stop at little shrines that I hadn't even noticed.

Yarboans make shrines to 'djo-kei' (some of nature spirit? lit. "space between souls?") all over the place, in the form of little arches, umbrellas, or cubbyholes, depending on the type of djo-kei they believe to be at that spot.

As best Rinzen could explain, there are two types of kei: the kind that we think of when we hear the word soul, and then djo-kei, which are sort of like minor patron gods.

Djo-kei can fall into three types: monet-kei, which take care of objects such as doors and sand dunes, and are enshrined by arches.

Then you have ko-kei, which are patrons of actions, such as baking or fighting, and are honored with circular cubbyholes (note: storing object related to that action in the cubbyhole is fine).

Finally, there are the chin-kei, who tend to the relationships between things, especially people. These are represented by sturdy umbrellas, and Rinzen had the most trouble trying to explain these to me.

Chin-kei seem to be in a paradox where they exist only when a relationship exists (such as the love between a couple) but Rinzen also seemed to be saying that the relationship could not have existed without the influence of the chin-kei.

I asked about the nature of the kei, but ran into translation problems we couldn't overcome. It seems that kei might be eternal, but can cease to exist if they want? Rinzen used the term 'sathcuun' which lit. means 'emerging from the sand'.

*August 7-
Went back to monastery for clarification, but walked away more confused. Sathcuun seems to be a surprisingly deep concept.*

According to monks, the best interpretation of sathcuun is that a kei that had ceased to exist in the traditional sense can simply come back and fulfill a need: for example, the monks said that a kei had to become a djo-kei in order for our cultures to talk and thereby form a new relationship.

This gets into the afterlife beliefs of the Yarboa, which the monks were able to explain surprisingly well, by means of a simple story. (I assume this is told to children?)

The Yarboans believe that when a person dies, their kei falls from our world ("as if from a great height" as they put it). The kei, which echoes the original form, lands lightly upon the top of a mountain.

The mountain is formed by falling fragments of the person's history: the most meaningful events and impressions becoming landmarks which form the face of the mountain.

At the base of the mountain is a dark swirling mist, and in the distance you can see other mountains. The kei, alone in the echoes of its life, is left to its own devices indefinitely.

The Yarboans teach that all kei wander eventually into the mist, though they have no teachings for what lies below or within it. Somehow, some of the kei that enter eventually exit and begin to tend to the needs of the world as djo-kei.

This is also the explanation the Yarboa give for why there is suffering and inequality in the world: the djo-kei, being finite beings with histories and preferences of their own, cannot tend to the world perfectly.

Somewhat overloaded with information, I returned to the library to process and ask Rinzen some more questions. I feel quite guilty, I am probably delaying her research by days.

Upon arrival at library, found Rinzen packing up her notes. Apparently I have redirected her research: she was studying religious education and my questions have given her a whole new idea for her thesis. She asked me to join some of her classmates in celebration.

While walking to her friends' house, Rinzen asked me a most peculiar question. She asked if I was ok with her using me as research material and vice versa.

I am still bewildered by the Yarboa, their unusual religion, and their convoluted cultural details. Their views on dating are completely undocumented.

*...but honestly?
I couldn't care less.*