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# Beyond Borders

ESSAYS ON A 10-DAY VISIT TO JAPAN

Beyond Borders No. 2 2025

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Beyond Borders is a collection of essays that discuss the short-stay visit experience in Japan of the University of the Philippines Center for International Studies (UPCIS) students and other stakeholders that maintain close linkages with the Center. It is published at least once in two years and is one of the official research and extension publications of the East and Southeast Asian Studies Division of the University of the Philippines Center for International Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City.

The views and opinions expressed by the contributors do not necessarily reflect the position of the Center.

*Beyond Borders: Essays on a 10 Day  
Visit to Japan*

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*for Professor Hiromi Kabashima*

for her unwavering hard work and dedication in ensuring active partnership between the University of the Philippines-Center for International Studies and Yokohama National University which created opportunities for cultural dialogue between Japanese and Filipino students, faculty, and artists.

With all our love, respect, and gratitude for her service from 2015-2025.



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

It was November 8, 2022, a little more than two years after Covid 19 had been declared a global pandemic, when Chiho Ogaya Sensei, my counterpart professor in the many years of fruitful academic partnership with Ferris University, gave me the good news that the JASSO Short Stay Visit (SSV) program, a Ferris University (Ferris) and Yokohama National University (YNU) consortium, could then be revived onsite.

With the suspension of face-to-face engagements, we shifted to an online version of the program in 2020 and 2021. This, however, did not quite fulfill the purpose of providing students experiential learning and familiarizing them with Japan's culture and society through interactions with the people, especially with their teachers and fellow students.

But not wanting to waste opportunities, I agreed to push through with the onsite implementation – to be held between January to March 2023 – despite misgivings because of its winter schedule. Before the pandemic, we would hold the SSV in the autumn season to avoid the icy cold winter. Having only two seasons – rainy and dry – we Filipinos are not used to a winter climate. We wear summer clothes all-year round and investing in winter clothes to use for only 10 days seems a little wasteful. More importantly, with the COVID virus thriving in very cold places, it seems to be a risky venture to go to Japan in winter.

Little did I know that more than the cold weather, it was an increase in the program's total cost that was going to be a major concern. Before the pandemic, the JY80,000 scholarship grant by JASSO could cover airfare, transfers, guest house and living allowance. The students are requested to raise a pocket money of JY30,000 for extras like souvenirs and gifts to bring home.

Because of the fuel surcharge imposed by airlines due to the pandemic, program costs increased threefold. There was also difficulty in finding accommodation in Yokohama because the guest houses used by the program no longer accepted short-stay visitors to avoid Covid infections.

How does one invite students to join a program if they need to raise a counterpart amount of JY100,000 to use for ten days? This is a big amount of money for us Filipinos, more than three times the usual JY30,000 pocket money which students are asked to raise for personal expenses.

Knowing the conditions here, Chiho Sensei said there was no pressure to proceed with the program in case it was going to be difficult to find students whose families would be willing to shell out hard-earned money. Out of the 25 Japan Studies students invited, we were able to get two interested ones – Ann Jeline Pablo and Patricia Marie Reyes, undergraduate students of Comparative Literature and Journalism, respectively.

I requested the assistance of both Laureen Liaonag and Philip Noveras, members of the UPCIS Noh Ensemble and former participants of the program, to help me plan UPCIS participation.

I asked Liaonag to reach out to the Office of Institutional Linkages-System (OIL-System) and inquire if we could apply for counterpart funding through the Mobility for Vigor and Excellence – University of the Philippines (MOVE-UP) Financial Assistance Program. Fortunately, OIL was more than willing to support the onsite revival of an international exchange program.

With funding now available, I invited three Lumad students – Kat Dalon, Joe-ann Bazar and Angel Enoc – who were admitted into the Malikhaing Pagsulat Associate in Arts program of the Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas.

Bazar and Dalon were beneficiaries of the UPCIS extension project, Kami, Tayo, Sila -- Malikhaing Pagsulat (Creative Writing), and English and Country Studies for Indigenous Peoples. The project was part of UPCIS advocacies for indigenous people's right to education and the promotion of Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Development as convener of Save our Schools Diliman.

The project involved collaboration with the Creative Writing Center (CWC), then headed by Prof. Roland Tolentino, who had recruited CWC fellows to hold an online creative writing workshop on short story, poetry, drama and children's stories for interested Lumad high school students stranded in the university because of the pandemic.

The seven students who participated in the 2023 SSV also included MA Linguistics student and a former CIS staff member, Patricia Anne Asuncion, and Apple Mae Delute, a student in the Associate in Arts Major in Dance program and a member of the UPCIS Noh Ensemble.

Noveras assisted them in preparing the documents needed for their visa application, especially the invitation letter from Japan.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. I say it takes the whole UPCIS, UP's international offices –OILD and OIL System – and our partner universities – Ferris, YNU and Japan Women's University and their international offices to send students to an SSV program.

Amparo Adelina C. Umali, III  
Editor

# INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Short Stay Visit (SSV), held from January 30 to February 8 in Yokohama and Tokyo, Japan, was a joint endeavor between Ferris University, Yokohama National University and the UP Center for International Studies (UPCIS). The program revolved around the theme “Japan Studies Program as Liberal Arts in the New Era,” and aimed to nurture global awareness by introducing aspects of Japanese culture and society to students from other countries. This installment was the first in-person SSV since the program temporarily halted in 2019 due to travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This collection features essays written by seven UP students who were given the opportunity to learn and inquire about facets of Japanese life through a ten-day exchange program. Having set foot in Japan for the first time, the cohort recounts how different and similar this foreign country is from their own, and ponders how contrasting characteristics and practices shape the lived realities of the two nations’ own peoples. Engagement with students from three Japanese universities provided insight into educational systems and concepts of development. A visit to a Noh theatre and a brief training session with a Noh master raised curiosity about cultural preservation and the value ascribed to traditional art forms. Consumption of local meals, exposure to media and communication platforms, and travelling both by train and on foot prompted reflections on what a good quality of life means and how this contributes to the betterment of society in general. Through this publication, the 2023 SSV cohort hopes to offer a glimpse into the nature of the exchange program, and show how different forms of cooperation and immersion are crucial to providing accessible and holistic education beyond the confines of a classroom.

This is also a tribute to UPCIS on its 25th founding anniversary as it continues to remain true to its commitment to nourish scholarship, strengthen academic partnerships, and foster intercultural understanding and dialogue.

**Patricia Anne Asuncion**  
Associate Editor

# THE PULL OF JAPANESE MEDIA



## AND POPULAR CULTURE

Patricia Marie Reyes

I have always been fascinated by the media. It has the power to captivate audiences and it has an influence that exceeds far beyond the media industry. Different countries have varying media industries. And, when it comes to media, I believe that no country is as unique and as interesting as Japanese media and popular culture.

In 2011, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established the national campaign of “Cool Japan” (Tao, 2018). This project aims to utilize the cultural products of Japan, including more contemporary forms like animations, manga characters, and games to improve their soft power (Cabinet Office Intellectual Property, n.d.). Southeast Asia is one of the target markets of the Cool Japan campaign (Alfarisy, 2021).

Upon arriving in Japan, every place reminded me of the anime, manga, and popular culture that I am fond of. Visiting Shibuya Crossing and Tokyo felt surreal because I’ve only ever seen it on television such as in the Netflix series *Alice in Borderland*. Yokohama, where our group stayed during the trip, was the setting for the anime *Bungo Stray Dogs*. Furthermore, the various Studio Ghibli stores that we visited reminded me of the beautiful films of Hayao Miyazaki. There is also a Hello Kitty Shop within the vicinity of the Sky Tree Tower where I bought several *omiyage* or *pasalubong*.

In the Philippines, we associate Japan with the ideas of delectable cuisine, reputable technology, and, of course, manga and anime. In fact, decades before Cool Japan, Filipinos were already consumers of Japanese content. Taking my family as an example, my father is an avid fan of the 1970s anime series *Voltes V*; my mother adores Sanrio products such as Hello Kitty; my siblings and I grew up watching the series *Naruto*. There is no denying that government-funded promotion of culture strengthens the “pull” of people towards a certain country. It certainly did for me.

When the Center for International Studies of the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPCIS), in partnership with Ferris University in Japan, offered students their Short-Stay Visit program, it presented me with a unique opportunity to explore the country that I have always been attracted to because of its rich culture and media.

Just seeing the popular culture that I grew up with made the sights special. Even the media plastered around places like *My Hero Academia* billboards, *Demon Slayer* tarpaulins, anime merchandise, and other popular culture promotions, reminded me how culture and media can affect the reality and experiences of people. The whole setup seems to be an effective manifestation of the Cool Japan campaign.

Aside from being a tourist, I also went there as a media student. It was a rare opportunity to examine the media of a country such as Japan. Observing the media of a particular place can tell you a lot about it. My stay in Japan, while short and brief, provided me with encouraging insights into their use of media.

What interested me the most was the media found inside the trains. Aside from being an efficient mode of transportation, the trains also serve as a locus where information is communicated to the public. Small monitors installed in the carriages display short news reports, advertisements, and other promotions from time to time. As a student of journalism who acknowledges the importance of making these kinds of content available to the people, I see this strategy as an innovative way of keeping the people informed.

Another form of exposure to Japanese media is through the television placed in our dorm's dining room. I actually noticed some similarities and contrasts between the lineup of programs in Japan and the Philippines. Television networks in both countries offer news programs in the morning. During the evening, however, there seems to be a variation. I remember seeing a role-play in a comedy show one night, but also watched a product-endorsing show the following evening. Watching television in a foreign land was interesting for me because media consumption can reveal aspects of a culture. In Japan, similar to the Philippines, their media content provides information and entertainment. Yet, I liked the uniqueness that I found during the evening shows which differed from the primetime teleseryes in our country.

Aside from information dissemination and entertainment, media is also utilized to preserve culture. The Yokohama Noh Theatre, for example, promotes the traditional dance-drama by also posting video performances on their official YouTube channel. Noh Master (Shitekata) and Important Intangible Cultural Property Holder in Noh Theater Umewaka Yasunori or Chozaemon Sensei also owns DVDs and old tapes of his live performances. In this sense, the media in Japan has made it easier to preserve their tradition and culture.



**What interested me the most was the media found inside the trains. .... Small monitors installed in the carriages display short news reports, advertisements, and other promotions from time to time.**

Visiting Tokyo, Yokohama Noh Theater and Chozaemon Sensei's home made me realize that this country was able to show respect for both the traditional and the current. Too much use of technology can result in the diminishing of traditional culture and vice versa, and it seems easy to favor one over the other. However, Japan showed a balance between these two. Advancement does not necessitate throwing out the old. Rather, it is about preserving and protecting important parts of our history and culture and improving the quality of life with the available technology.

In conclusion, as an outsider looking in, Japanese media and popular culture elevates the country. It does more than inform and entertain, but also upholds Japanese tradition and development. Additionally, the "Cool Japan" strategy and Japanese media allowed me to reflect on our own promotional strategy and media. I think the Philippines has a beautiful culture and focusing on building up our image and our soft power, in terms of culture, can be very crucial in developing our own "pull" to other countries for Philippine tourism and economy.

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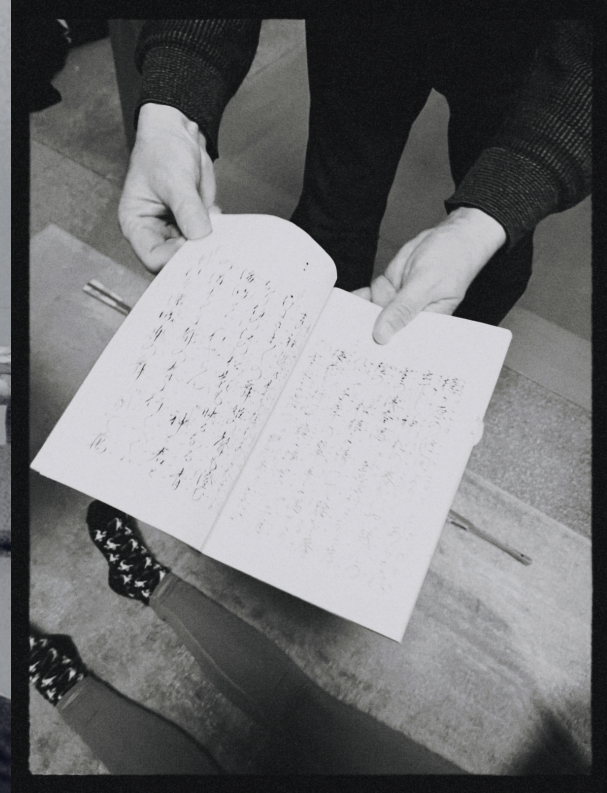
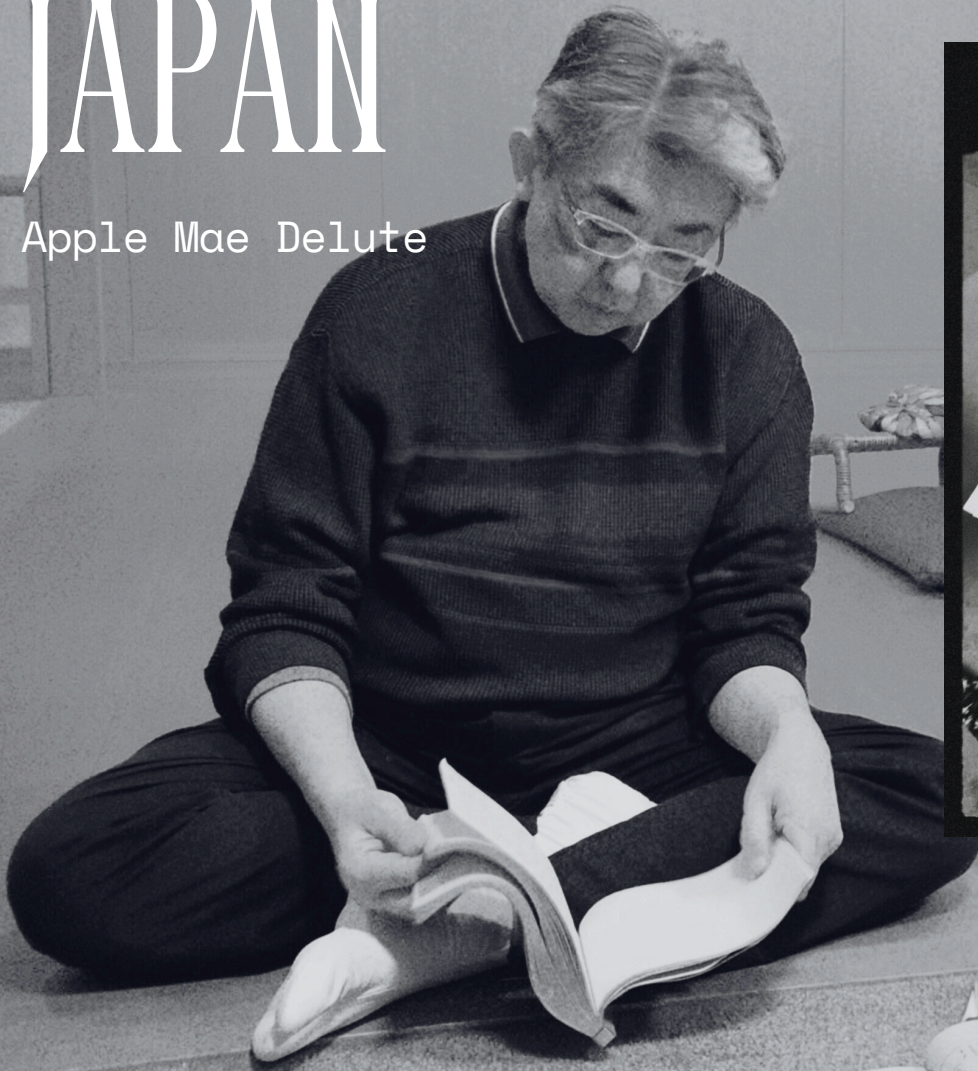
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# EXPERIENCING JAPAN'S 700-YEAR OLD THEATRICAL ART IN JAPAN

Apple Mae Delute



Japan is mostly known for Mt. Fuji, Kabuki, Sakura, ramen, beautiful temples, shrines, and Tokyo Tower. But during our 10-day cultural exchange, we were exposed to one of their unique theatrical art forms coming from the 14th century, the Noh.

I was originally introduced to Noh in August of 2019 when I attended the Noh classes organized by the UP Center for International Studies (UPCIS) every Saturday for about four months. Training halted due to the onset of the pandemic and only resumed when the masters came in November 2022. They trained us for two weeks in preparation for our performance in the Japanese Ambassador's house. These experiences prior to our short visit to Japan helped me a lot as I brought with me the knowledge I gained – discipline and cultural etiquette.



#### On visiting the Yokohama Nogakudo

On the morning of 31 January 2023, we walked to the Yokohama Nogakudo 'Noh Theatre'. Two Ferris University students, Ayaka and Moyo, greeted us. The theater strictly follows COVID-19 safety protocols, such as hand sanitation and monitoring of body temperature. As we entered, the staff handed out papers containing information about the Nogakudo in English.

Moyo, Ayaka, and every one of us - the participants - introduced ourselves before the tour began. I have learned the importance of introducing oneself in order to build a good relationship. The introduction includes letting the other person know your name, age, and even hobbies. After that, we exchanged Instagram IDs.

When we entered the Noh theater, my first thought was, "Wow! So big!" I expected it to be spacious, but I never expected it to be that huge. One of Noh's unique characteristics is that the stage is empty and that everything you see on it has meaning and functions. Indeed, "less is more." Which is why it is very different from what I am used to as a ballet dancer. Most of the time, our stage is filled with sets and props for us to act and make the scenes seem realistic.





Unlike the typical Western theater stage we see, the Noh stage has a roof that draws everyone's attention. The idea is to keep the authentic feeling of how Noh theaters were originally built outside, notably in the feudal lord's (patron who supports the Noh school) temple, shrine, or garden. It contains pillars and staircases where the feudal lord passes to deliver presents or awards if he thinks the performance is satisfying. In dance, whether the performance was good or bad, some give you flowers to congratulate. And instead of coming from the front, they give it onstage from backstage during the curtain call and/or after the performance. Additionally, the audience seats are most of the time facing the stage. In the world of Noh, the audience seats are not called "audience seats" but *kensho* 'viewing place' and are arranged differently. The seats in front are called *shōmen* seats, whereas those on the left side of the stage are called *wakishōmen* seats. Between the two and in the triangular space diagonally to the stage are called *nakashōmen* seats. This arrangement provides a panoramic view.

Another feature I enjoy about a Noh stage is the mirror board. The Yokohama Nogakudo mirror board is quite special because it is the only one painted with flowers of white plum, the family crest of the Maeda family who originally owned this stage. Connecting the main stage and the backstage is the *hashigakari* 'bridgeway' which can be regarded as a link between two distinct realities: the everyday world and the realm of ghosts and spirits. Furthermore, the lighting is designed to simulate natural illumination. In urban legend, because pine trees are evergreen, gods and angels are said to descend from them. The size of the pine trees seen near the bridgeway varies to create a sense of distance.

The *kiridoguchi* 'small door' is positioned at the back, right side, and is a small sliding door used by the stage attendants, the *Jiutai* 'chorus' for entrances and exits, and characters killed over the course of a Noh performance to exit the stage.

The mirror room and dressing room are located backstage. The mirror room is where the *shite* 'lead role' puts on the Noh mask. *Hayashi* 'Noh musicians' also performs the *oshirabe* 'warm-up music' here. The Noh play is said to have begun when the *shite* and *hayashi* enters this area. The dressing rooms are very similar to those found in Western theaters. Except for the *tatami* mats and sliding doors, which are indicative of Japanese aesthetics. Furthermore, the room assignment is divided based on the role – leads and corps – or grade level.

Curtains on Western stages are large enough to hide the entire stage from the audience. In contrast, a Noh curtain only separates the mirror room from the stage. It is the five-colored curtain at the end of the bridge that is manually lifted and lowered for the entrance and exit of the *shite* and opens and closes for the *hayashi*. The way the Noh curtain opens depends on how the *shite* utters *honmaku*. Our group was allowed to try raising and lowering the curtain at the Yokohama Nogakudo. It was really heavy compared to the very light replication of the curtain we used for our performance last November 2022. A line on the floor is seen before the curtain that determines whether you are on stage or backstage. They show incredible respect for their stage. One reason I said this is because one is not permitted to cross the line if you are not wearing clean *Tabi* socks 'split-toe socks'.





**When we entered the Noh theater, my first thought was, "Wow! So big!" I expected it to be spacious, but I never expected it to be that huge.**

Shrines, palaces, and other structures in Japan exemplify the country's efforts to preserve both its tangible and intangible culture. One such example is the Yokohama Nogakudo. The repaired stage still contains dark-colored wood pieces from the original setup. Specialists employed techniques to avoid using nails and better preserve the wood. Committed individuals and organizations have worked tirelessly to preserve the art of Noh for over 700 years.

#### **On undergoing Noh Training in Tokyo**

Three days after our visit to Yokohama Nogakudo, we went to Tokyo to learn more about Noh from Umewaka "Chozaemon" Yasunori sensei 'teacher', the Kanze school's Noh master for shite and an Important Intangible Cultural Property holder in Japan.

His wife greeted us and led us to their mini-Noh stage at home. While we waited for sensei, we prepared ourselves by bringing out our fans and placing them in front of us in seiza (kneeling with legs folded beneath your body and buns resting on heels). While waiting, I was quite nervous because I was not used to training without my UPCIS Noh Ensemble seniors.

When sensei arrived, we greeted him "ohayō gozaimasu" 'good morning' while bowing. After that, he let us use seven of his Noh rehearsal fans for the duration of the keiko 'training'. We sat in two lines on the heated mat. Sensei personally requested that I sit in the center of the back line in order for my fellow SSV participants to hear my voice given that I have experienced keiko before. To begin, we introduced ourselves to sensei first. And we all said together, "dōzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu" 'please take care of us' while bowing.

We started our training with the chanting part of the Noh play Shakkyo as sensei played the hariban, a wooden board used during practice in place of the drums. We had learned a little about the piece from a senpai 'senior' before leaving for Japan, so sensei simply corrected our pronunciation and explained other important details to us. After a break, he also decided to teach us the chant for another Noh play, Takasago. He showed us the notation written in Japanese characters. Fortunately, Takahashi sensei, a Kotsuzumi 'shoulder drum' master, previously wrote a romaji version that non-Japanese speakers could use. Since it was my first time chanting for quite a long time, I could sometimes hear my voice breaking. Chanting is difficult because one needs to breathe differently for every line, and the melodic contour changes from time to time.

During the breaks, Chozaemon sensei generously shared stories about the mementos he showed us – notations to instruments like the Kotsuzumi, pictures of when he first started practicing Noh, masks, and props – which is very unusual for novice Noh students to experience because these are not just some casual props, but props that date back to the Edo period which might have been used by several generations before them. He told and showed us as much as he could, perhaps because he could not bring all these items to the Philippines at once, and probably because it was a rare opportunity to interact with non-Noh practitioners who were very curious about this art. Even though some of what he showed us were replicas, he treated or took care of them as if they were originals.



After the break, sensei divided us into two groups, and sensei instructed me to join both. He lent us seven pairs of Tabi socks, and taught us kamae, the fundamental posture in Noh, and suriashi, the Noh walk. Sensei asked me to stand in front of everyone and jokingly referred to me as "Apple sensei." Every time I do the Noh walk, it feels like I'm being taught how to walk again. He stressed the importance of walking with the left foot first because starting with the right foot means making preparations for seppuku, the Japanese suicide ritual. Similarly, he advised us to treat the fan as if it were a katana 'sword'. It must come from the left side, just like how a katana is placed on the left side of the swordsman, in order not to get hurt and for the sake of convenience when drawing the weapon.

After teaching us Noh walking, he asked everyone to observe as he taught me a new piece called Otoko Mai, a male dance. I learned it quickly because the piece is very similar to Chu No Mai, a dance usually performed by females, which I also learned from sensei when he came for a week-long intensive training last November 2022. The steps were a little difficult because the dance required jumping and leg work. Except for the Shōga, or the written representation of an instrumental performance, I was able to follow and learn some of its details though I wasn't able to fully memorize it.

My brief training in Japan had a similar flow to my training in the Philippines. The main difference would be the clothes and the mode of training. In the Philippines, I usually wear comfortable clothes or yukata, the summer kimono of Japan—something that was not feasible when we went to Japan due to the cold weather. Additionally, there were times when classes were held online or lessons were given through video recordings; I was fortunate to experience an in-person class with sensei.



The two-day Noh experience in Japan inspired me as a Noh practitioner in a way that boosted my interest in learning it more. I hope we get to see a full-length Noh play in a Nogakudo soon. However, one concern raised during our tour was that not many teenagers know or are interested in this art form. All senseis I spoke with said that their students are the same age or older than them. That was sad to hear. Unfortunately, the Philippines shares similar sentiments, mainly because traditional art forms are not appreciated by many. But what Filipinos can learn from Noh when it comes to cultural preservation is that, “People strengthen tradition through consistent practice and perpetuation. Some Noh masters spend their entire lives performing and teaching Noh” (Dr. Umali, Adelina Amparo III. January 31, 2023).

And this reminds me of Umali sensei’s question, “What is the Filipino equivalent of Noh Theater in Japan?” I wish we Filipinos valued and were proud of our arts and culture and found ways to help it thrive.

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# Exploring the Richness of Philippine and Japanese Culture



## And the Negative Impact of Development

Angel Mae Enoc

Japan is the first country that I wanted to visit. I admire this country because of all the stories I've heard about its culture and tradition. As an avid fan of anime, I also often wondered what the scenic views depicted in movies look like in real life. I always wondered about the real look of their streets that are full of sakura trees, the buildings, houses and temples.

The fact that I was able to set foot in Japan did not immediately come; I could not believe that I would make it to the country listed on my bucket list. But after a few days of touring, the struggle and joy I felt amidst the winter season made me realize that I was indeed in Japan. There were a lot of instagrammable sceneries that caught my eyes as I enjoyed the cold season.

One of the goals of going to Japan is to experience firsthand what the daily life of Japanese people is like and to integrate into their culture. One of the things I immediately noticed was the people are always bowing. Bowing in Japanese culture is a significant and traditional gesture that carries various meanings depending on the context and depth of the bow. The practice of bowing has deep cultural roots and is considered a form of non-verbal communication that embodies politeness, respect, humility, and social hierarchy. In contrast, Filipinos usually take the hand of an elder and do "mano," a form of asking blessings. While Japan and the Philippines are distinct in many ways, both nations share some cultural elements owing to historical interactions.



**Bowing in Japanese culture is a significant and traditional gesture that carries various meanings depending on the context and depth of the bow.**

For instance, respect for elders, a strong sense of community, and love for nature are values embedded in the social fabric of both countries. Filipino hospitality, known as “pakikipag-kapwa,” mirrors Japan’s emphasis on social harmony, albeit with unique different forms of expression.

Furthermore, Filipino being noisy is thought to be part of the culture, as it is often romanticized to see Filipinos as cheerful and resilient. However, it is not the same case in Japan. Each one of us had to adjust the volume of our voice as we were talking and laughing so as to not disturb other people around us. People walking in the streets and those riding on trains and buses are very quiet.

People try to keep quiet and are always mindful of others so that everyone can enjoy a comfortable ride. The Japanese tend to avoid disturbing others, and it is a typical example of their unique culture. Based on my research, “being quiet or calm is considered as a virtue which comes from the Samurai period, so in this place, Japanese people tend not to be fond of being too friendly, especially when they talk with strangers. Unlike the infamous “Filipino Time”, the Japanese are also very tight on time. They must be on time, so they walk almost too fast to catch the train or bus.

Furthermore, undergoing basic Noh training was a memorable cultural experience. I also did not realize that this kind of performance is an important part of Japanese culture which some people strive to keep alive.



Through the stories of Chozaemon sensei, a Noh master, it dawned on me that this art form is passed down through generations, along with the tangible items used in performances. It was, however, saddening to hear that the youth are no longer interested in Noh training. Sensei even remarked that the "young people no longer come." I do think that the lack of interest is mainly caused by the changes in the country's economic, political, and social circumstances. These factors contributed to the changes in attitude towards culture and traditions.

I know how sad it is to see culture slowly dying—it is not very different from what we experience as Lumads, the indigenous people of Mindanao. Apart from modernization, militarization and forced eviction from ancestral lands because the land is being seized for plantations, dams, logging, and mining which "significantly affects the preservation of our culture. Large corporations seize lands to construct plantations and dams, as well as conduct logging and mining activities. It is said to be for development, but the negative impact it has on the indigenous people does not coincide with by masking development as a sign of progress. The negative impacts on the lives of the Lumad are disregarded.

Japan owns a banana plantation in Mindanao. Our interaction with Yokohama National University (YNU) students raised an interesting discussion regarding development and its impact on the welfare and, by extension, the culture of indigenous people. Sumifru produces fruit for export. A Japanese company owns a banana plantation in Mindanao. This joint venture with Sumitomo Corporation, a Japanese conglomerate, exports products to other parts of the world. In 2019, the workers revolted against the company because there were not enough wages, and the employees also received no benefits.

While Japanese companies investing in plantations in the Philippines can contribute to economic development and provide employment opportunities, there are still negative impacts associated with such ventures. Our communities have seen and felt the environmental impacts of large-scale plantations. Deforestation and the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers lead to soil degradation and water pollution, negatively impacting the environment and communities reliant on these resources. These also affect food security and the livelihood of smaller local farmers. Worse, in order to make way for these large-scale projects, several indigenous communities like ours are often displaced and are forced to relocate, disrupting our livelihood and culture.

Indigenous communities are not against development, but this development should not exploit anyone and should not be disadvantageous to many. Development is not bad if it is based on the needs of the people and not on the needs of the ruling classes and capitalist countries. Nowadays, behind the growth of some countries comes the exploitation of others. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that Japanese plantation companies in the Philippines adhere to fair labor standards and prioritize the well-being of their workers.

So even for just a brief period of touring Japan, there are many acquired lessons, corrected views, and further-developed knowledge. Cultural exchange is important because it is a platform to not only to learn from other cultures but also a chance for them to learn from us. Because as a student in the University of the Philippines and as an Iskolar ng Bayan, the responsibility of being engaged and sharing knowledge is important. We must also possess the willingness to learn and be part of the solution. Therefore, apart from enjoying the beautiful things to see in Japan, visiting new places is also learning about their culture and politics.

Japanese culture is developing along with the development of their country. There is a big difference between just hearing about concepts and experiencing those firsthand.

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# *Pakikibaka sa Pagkakaiba:* Connecting Experiences and Answering Queries About Japan

Kat Dalon

**S**a sanaysay na ito sa aming karanasan sa pagbisita sa Japan, higit kong ipinapasalamatang ang CIS, sa pagbibigay sa amin ng puwang at pagkakataon upang makapunta at matuto sa Japan at sa pagbibigay ng pagkakataon na ipakita namin sa ibang bansa ang aming kalagayan at kultura, ang aming pakikibaka at pagmamahal sa Lupa. Sa OIL, na tumulong sa amin upang itaguyod ang byahe at mga gastusin, lalong lalo na sa Ferris University sa pagtulong sa aming pinansyal at sa mainit nilang pagtanggap, kina binibining Umali na sinamahan kami, ginabayan, sinagot ang aming mga katanungan, nagpaliwag sa amin sa mga bagay na hindi namin naiintindihan at salamat sa kanyang mga sakripisyo. Kay ginoong Melvin, binibining Lauren at sa lahat ng mga taga CIS na tumulong sa amin upang ilakad ang mga papeles at maitaguyod ang SSV. Salamat sa inyong sakripisyo. Salamat din kay Chiho Sensei, sa pagtugon din sa aming mga katanungan, sa libreng tsokolateng kape nga lami. Kay Mr. Osamu sa pagbibigay sa amin ng malalim na kaalaman sa pulitika ng Japan. Higit sa lahat, salamat sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diliman sa pagbibigay ng espasyo na mas matuto pa nang malalim at malawak. Maraming salamat sa mga kasama ko sa SSV.

In this essay on our experiences in visiting Japan, I genuinely thank the Center for International Studies (CIS) for making room for us and for giving us a chance to visit Japan and learn —and for giving us the chance to show to another country our culture and actual conditions, our struggle and love for land. To the Office of International Linkages (OIL) for helping with our travel and other expenses, and especially to Ferris University for their financial support and for warmly welcoming us. To Dr. Umali, for being with us, for guiding us, for answering all our queries, for making us understand all things we were yet to comprehend then; we are grateful for all her sacrifices. To Mr. Melvin, Ms. Lauren, and everyone in CIS who helped us with all the necessary papers and processes in order to make this SSV possible. Thank you for all your sacrifices. Many thanks as well to Chiho sensei, for addressing all our questions, and for the free chocolate coffee that tastes superb. To Prof. Koike Osamu, for imparting to us a deep knowledge on the politics in Japan. And most of all, to the University of the Philippines Diliman for making room for us to have deeper and more vast learning experiences. Thanks to all who were with me during the SSV.

**... I would want to immerse myself with the farmers in the provinces of Japan and to learn about their ways of life.**

It was an honor for us to step foot onto the grounds of Yokohama National University (YNU) and participate in an enlightening discussion about Japan's political system. From the profound roots of our ancestral land in the Philippines to the vibrant heart of the city in Yokohama, we extend our gratitude for the warm reception given by the students and teachers.

The feeling upon entering YNU felt like a familiar embrace. The campus ambiance reminded us of UP Diliman, and the towering trees were reminiscent of our ancestral homelands in Mindanao. Yet, while parallels are apparent, there were also distinctions between YNU and our campus in Diliman. The library in YNU housed literature written exclusively in their native language. This stands in contrast with the libraries in UP, where the pervasive influence of the United States has led to many academic books written in English. I remember when my friends and I received books in my elementary school, we were excited at first. However, we lost interest because the books were in English, and we needed to translate them before being able to understand its contents.

Another difference between the two campuses was the culture of activism. In UP, the buildings' history ignites the spirit of resistance of its students. For example, the AS Steps or Palma Hall was an avenue of youth action during the Marcos dictatorship. Maybe if we learned more about the history of YNU university and its buildings, and if we only inquired about it, we would have been able to feel its impact and appreciate it more deeply.



Perhaps, the pinnacle of our visit in YNU was the insightful discussion with Prof. Koike Osamu concerning the education and political landscape in Japan. Prof. Koike shed light on the expensive college tuition fees which is a sharp contrast to UP's history of progressive movements that successfully advocated for free education. The significance of quality and free education, as exemplified by UP's history of student struggles, remains crucial. Even now, this fight continues on.

It serves as evidence that immediate and fundamental needs and rights can be secured through the proactive engagement of students. Prof. Koike underscored that it is imperative to fight for the right to education as a fundamental and indispensable cause. I can sympathize with Prof. Koike's disappointment in his students' lack of participation in matters of politics. Even with UP's reputation as a bastion of student activism, there are still those who choose to turn away and are ignorant of the rising tuition fees and budget cuts in the country. As a student leader myself, I feel responsible to open the eyes of others to the call of a free education. The understanding and involvement in political issues of the youth is important because it results in better change.



Concerning the low involvement of Japanese students in political issues, we (the SSV participants) reflected on the reason for this. We surmised that unlike in the Philippines, with issues of campus militarization, red-tagging and other state attacks on students and schools, Japan does not experience any of this and thus, are not further inclined to raise their voices. We recognize that as visitors, we still lacked further research and integration to fully understand the reason behind this.

Our time with Prof. Koike contradicted our initial perception of Japan which was primarily based on a developed country without problems in its systems. Yet, there are nuances to the conditions of their citizens and sectors that are also in need of improvement. Through my indigenous perspective, I reflected on what "development" means for me: free and quality education, food security, accessible health and self-determination of our ancestral rites. Applying that to what I learned from Japan and my experiences in the Philippines, there is still much to improve on for both countries.

The explanation of their judiciary, national diet, and cabinet was intriguing. Prof. Koike mentioned that even farmers had representation in the cabinet. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, our representation in the government are landlords who do not champion the needs of the farmers. Examples of these landlords are Cynthia Villar who converts land into subdivisions, Juan Miguel Zubiri who owns a wide banana plantation in Mindanao and a part of Pulangi Hydro Power Dam which would kill us Lumads in Mindanao. I want to ask if in Japan, there are also indigenous people like us. How are they recognized by their government? Do they also experience our struggles for land ownership?

I remember being amazed by the buildings and other signs of development in Japan. It was surprising to find out that some of the raw materials used for steel and machineries in the country came from the Philippines. According to the journal of Rene Ofreneo "Failure to launch: industrialisation in metal-rich Philippines," Japan used raw materials from the Philippines when they were first starting to become a more developed country. Yet, today, Filipino workers in SUMIFRU encounter abuses from their employers. In the "Resistance to and in the Neoliberal Agri-Food Regime: A Case of Natural Bananas Trade Between the Philippines and Japan" by Kae Sekine, not only worker's rights were the issue but also, issues concerning the environment. Based on our indigenous experience, plantations do not only kill people but also, the land. In the case of the Philippines, Filipino workers continue to struggle with attaining their labor rights.

As we reflect on the disparities and commonalities between YNU and UP Diliman, we recognize the importance of knowing about global education systems. The lessons learned from both environments contribute to our collective understanding of the diverse challenges and opportunities that education entails. If given the chance, I would want to immerse myself with the farmers in the provinces of Japan and to learn about their ways of life.

There were only 10 days for the SSV, but that was a long journey for me, especially since every day, I was able to learn something new. It widened my perspective as a student and as a leader. It widened my world because I realized how there are different systems of politics, education and culture in different countries. There may be differences, but even these differences, with the right cultural exchange, can connect us with each other. Wherever I may go with this journey of pakikibaka, I will always remember Prof. Koike's lesson on the importance of fighting. A university is only small, compared to the wide world outside of academia. In my journey outside of it, I am more determined to journey the mountains.

Overall, we extend our sincere thanks to everyone at Yokohama National University and Prof. Koike Osamu for making our visit memorable and enriching. The bonds forged between our institutions transcend borders and reflect the shared pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and the betterment of society. As we bid farewell, we carry with us the spirit of collaboration and the hope for continued exchanges that bridge cultures and foster enduring connections.

Daghang salamat! Padayon!

Sanggunian

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# DAILY

# SCHEDULE

## Day 1: Arrival in Japan (January 30, 2023)

- 1st - Greeted by a chilly 6°C temperature upon arrival at Haneda Airport
- 2nd - Limousine Bus Ride to Yokohama City Air Terminal (YCAT) in Kanagawa Prefecture
- 3-5th - ¥700 Taxi Ride from YCAT to Dormy.
- 6th - Groufie in Dormy's Elevator
- 7th - Quick Dormy tour with Honda-san, the dorm manager
- 8th - Dormy Yokohama Nishi signage
- 9th-13th - Dormy room with fridge, kitchen, bathtub, balcony - our cozy little home for our 10-day stay.



**Day 2: Yokohama Noh Theater Tour, Welcome Program, Orientation and Courtesy Call at Ferris University Ryokuen Campus (January 31, 2023)**



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- 1-2nd - Honda-san walks us to Sakuragicho Station, the meeting place.
- 3-4th - Off to the Yokohama Noh Theater on foot
- 5th - In Front of the Noh theater
- 6th - Exchanging Instagram IDs with Moyo and Sayaka, students from Ferris University
- 7-8th - Tour inside the theater
- 9-10th - Delicious Japanese lunch
- 11th - Ferris University welcomes UP students
- 12th - With Ferris University President Prof. Makoto Arai
- 13th - 15th - At Ferris University



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**Day 3: Yokohama National University Visit and Lecture on Japan's Political System (February 1, 2023)**



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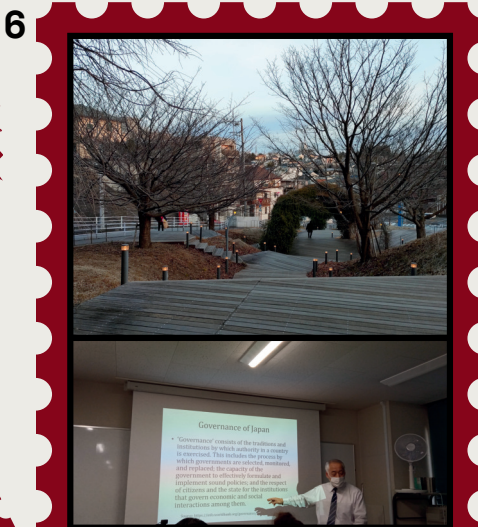


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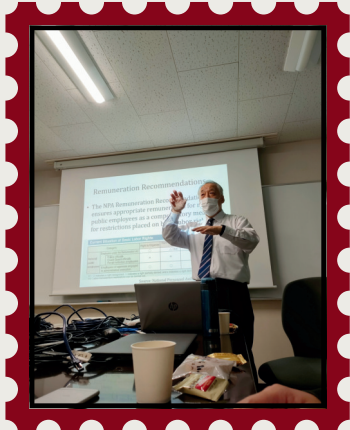
- 1st - First breakfast at Dormy
- 2nd - Waiting for the bus to Yokohama Station on the way to YNU
- 3rd - At the YNU Monument with graduate students of Takaaki Kobayashi sensei
- 4th - The YNU Monument
- 5th and 6th - YNU Campus tour
- 7-9th - Lecture by Koike Osamu sensei on Japan's education and political landscape
- 10-11th - YNU campus tour with students of Kobayashi sensei
- 12th - At a bus station near YNU
- 13th - Taking a break by a vending machine near Dormy
- 14th - Post-lecture photo with Hiromi Kabashima sensei, Kobayashi sensei, Osamu sensei, and graduate students of YNU



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Day 4: Day Trip to Kamakura (February 2, 2023)



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- 1st - Healthy Breakfast at Dormy
- 2nd - Exploring Ghibli store
- 3rd - At the Taiizan Buddhist Temple
- 4th - The Great Buddha of Kamakura
- 5th - At the San-no Torii, the gate to Hachimangu Shrine
- 6th - At the Maruyama Inari Shrine
- 7th - Washoku Lunch
- 8th - Apple and Kat posing with shop owners
- 9th - Train to Dormy
- 10th - Noh Chanting Practice at Dormy



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**Day 5: Experience Japan's Culture: Noh Theater Training-Rehearsal with Umemaka Chozaemon Sensei (February 3, 2023)**



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- 1st - 2nd - Navigating our way to Chozaemon-sensei's house
- 3rd - In front of Chozaemon sensei's house
- 4th - Sensei's Noh rehearsal space at the basement of his house
- 5th - Noh dance fans
- 6th - The wooden hour glass of a tsuzumi or Noh drum
- 7th - A young woman's mask
- 8th - A Noh prop
- 9th - Split-toe tabi socks
- 10th - A cabinet with Noh fans, noh song books and audio player of recorded Noh music
- 11th - Otoko Mai Noh flute music



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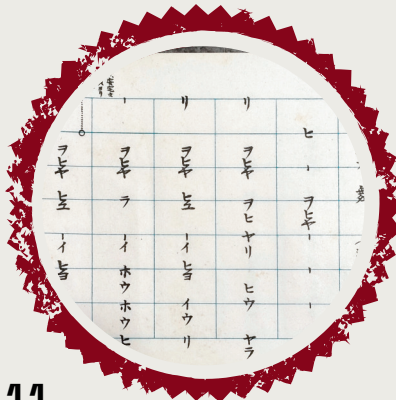
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**Day 5: Experience Japan's Culture: Noh Theater Training-Rehearsal  
with Umewaka Chozaemon Sensei (February 3, 2023)**

- 12th - Vintage wine cellar
- 13-17th - Noh chant and dance training-rehearsal
- 18th - After class-picture



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Day 6: TOKYO Tour (February 4, 2023)



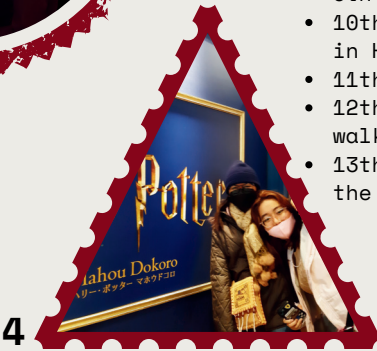
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- 1st - Waiting for the train to Tokyo!
- 2nd and 3rd - At the Tokyo Skytree Town
- 4th - At the Harry Potter exhibit
- 5th - In front of the Tokyo Skytree
- 6th - Train to Shibuya
- 7th - With Hachiko at Shibuya Station
- 8th - The Shibuya crossing
- 9th - Ramen lunch
- 10th - Finding Takeshita Street in Harajuku
- 11th - Lining up for crepes
- 12th - Resting from all the walking while eating crepe
- 13th - A groupie before boarding the train at Shibuya



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Day 7: Cultural Tour of YOKOHAMA (February 5, 2023)

- 1st - Morning walk to Minatomirai
- 2nd and 3rd - Breakfast at St. Marc Cafe
- 4th to 5th - Exploring Minatomirai
- 6th-7th - At Yokohama Landmark Tower, the second tallest building in Japan
- 8th - Yokohama Cosmo World
- 9th-10th - Taking purikura aka as Print Club
- 11th - View from the Cosmo World ferris wheel
- 12th - Ghibli store exploration in Minato Mirai Landmark Plaza
- 13th - Walking home after buying omiyage (souvenir)



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**Day 8: Presentation, Discussion and Cultural Exchange Workshop  
(February 6, 2023)**

- 1st - - At the grounds of Ferris University
- 2nd - A glimpse of Mt. Fuji from the classroom
- 3rd-8th - Discussion with the Halo-Halo Club and some international students
- 10th - Post-Lumad presentation group picture
- 11-14th - Lunch, coffee and tea from Uchida-sensei
- 15th-16th - Reunited with friends from the Kamakura trip

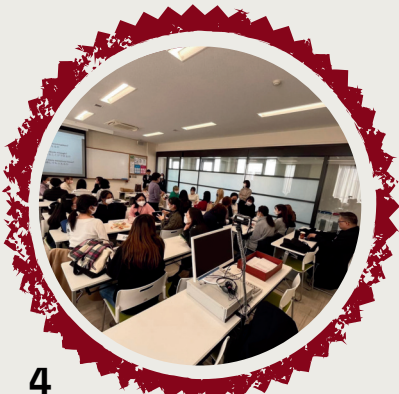


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**Day 9: Visit to Japan Women's University and Closing Program at Ferris University (February 7, 2023)**



- 1st - In front of JWU
- 2nd - Visitor's card
- 4th, 6th to 8th and 24th - JWU campus tour
- 5th - Vendo machine for academic documents
- 9th - Obento lunch provided by JWU and some omiyage (souvenir)
- 10th Bus terminal inside the campus
- 11-12, 17-23rd - Closing Program at Ferris University
- 13th - Thank you gift of a beadwork for Chiho sensei
- 14th - Thank you to Ferris University for hosting the SSV
- 15th - Thank you gift to Honda san and the shokudo no obasan-the kind dining hall aunties - who took care of us



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Day 10: Departure from Japan (February 8, 2023)



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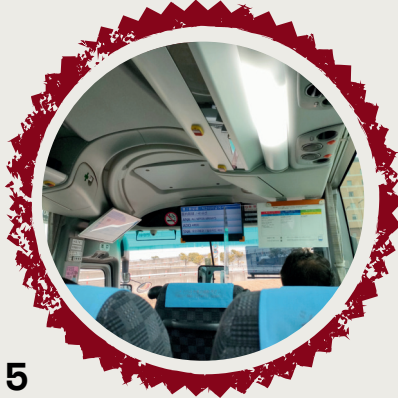
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- 1st to 2nd - Luggage all set for home
- 3rd - Waiting for our ride to YCAT
- 4th - Taxi ride from Dormy to YCAT
- 5th - Limousine Bus from YCAT to Haneda Airport
- 6th to 7th - At Haneda Airport
- 8th - Arrival at NAIA and distribution of Honda-san's gifts

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# How the Lumad and the Japanese Show Their Reverence and Gratitude for Their Food

Joe-ann Bazar



The Lumad are a group of indigenous people who live in various parts of Mindanao, the second-largest island in the Philippines. They have a strong connection to their ancestral lands and the crops they cultivate, especially rice, which is their staple food. This group includes 18 ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Manobo and B'laan, each with its own sub-tribes. For example, I belong to the Obo Manobo, which is a sub-tribe of the Manobo. They value the earth—the land as the source of life and sustenance, and they practice rituals to express their gratitude and respect for the natural environment.

This ritual is somehow similar to the Japanese custom of *itadakimasu* (いただきます), which means ‘I humbly receive’ and is said before eating a meal, according to Mami Suzuki, in her article “What Does Itadakimasu Mean?.” The Japanese are East Asian people who inhabit the archipelago of Japan, which consists of four main islands and thousands of smaller ones. They have a rich and diverse culture that is influenced by Buddhism, Shintoism, and other religions. They also have a high regard for the food they consume and the people who produce it, as shown by their practice of saying *itadakimasu*. In this essay, I will explore how the Lumad and the Japanese share a common appreciation for the food they consume and the people who produce it, and how their ritual expressions reflect their awareness and appreciation of the interconnectedness of all living things.

The ritual that I am referring to is performed by the Lumad before planting and harvesting their crops—especially rice, which is their staple food—is called ‘*Tudak*.’ This practice is specific to the Obo Manobo ethnic group. In this sacred practice, they offer prayers and chants to the spirits of the land, air, water, and sky, seeking their blessings for the well-being of the crops and a bountiful harvest. Before planting, the community gathers, led by their Datu, who guides them in a prayer. Following this, they engage in the ‘*Minanuwo*,’ a traditional dance. As part of their offerings to the spirits, they bring betel nuts, manika leaves, apog, and tobacco. Additionally, eggs and chickens are sacrificed, cooked, and shared among all participants. When the harvest arrives, the Lumad express gratitude through another ritual. Dancing and preparing food, they celebrate the successful yield as a collective act of thanksgiving.



This ritual is similar to the Japanese practice of saying *itadakimasu* (いただきます) before eating a meal, which also expresses reverence for the life of the food ingredients and gratitude to the people involved in the food production and preparation. By saying *itadakimasu* (いただきます), the Japanese show their respect and appreciation to the farmers, the hunters, the chefs, and the servers who have contributed to their nourishment. They also recognize the plants and animals that have given their lives for their sake. Before eating, you should follow these four steps: put your hands together, say ‘*itadakimasu*’, bow slightly, and pick up your chopsticks to start eating. It’s also a way to respect the people who made the meal: you should eat everything on your plate, and not leave even a single grain of rice. Once you have eaten, you should give the people who prepared the meal your respect and gratitude by saying *gochisousama deshita* (ごちそうさまでした). Both the Lumad and the Japanese demonstrate a sense of humility and gratitude for the food they receive, and a recognition of the interdependence of all living things.



**The Lumad and the Japanese have a lot in common in terms of their respect for the food they eat and gratitude to the people who produce it.**

Unlike the Japanese practice, the Lumad ritual is done only when planting and harvesting, whereas in Japan they do it every time they eat. Moreover, the Lumad ritual—Tudak is no longer being passed on to the younger generation, mainly because of the displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands. The Lumad have been subjected to violence, harassment, and intimidation by armed forces and paramilitary groups who are employed to protect the interests of mining, logging, and plantation companies that extract and exploit natural resources. The Lumad have been forced to flee their homes and farms, and to seek refuge in evacuation centers or urban areas where they have limited access to their traditional livelihood and culture. As a result, their ritual practices and their connection to the land have been disrupted and endangered. Although the Tudak is no longer performed, the elders tell the younger generation about it in order to prevent it from being entirely forgotten and to instill in the children the belief that they should be grateful to those who prepared the meal and to nature.

When I visited Japan as an exchange student for 10 days, I saw that the Japanese still practice saying *itadakimasu* (いただきます) even among the youth of this generation. From the dorm we stayed in Dormy Yokohama Nishi to the restaurants we visited; Tokyo, Shibuya and Kamakura, I still hear them saying *Itadakimasu*.



# WALKING DISTANCES

Patricia Anne Asuncion

The first full day of our short-stay visit to Japan began with a morning walk. Our dorm manager, Honda-san, offered to take us to Sakuragicho where we were supposed to meet professors Jina Umali and Chiho Ogaya. The immediate question that came to mind upon learning that we were to walk for around twenty minutes to reach the destination was: Are there no buses or trains headed in that direction? We also came up with possible reasons why Honda-san preferred to walk. This might be part of his morning exercise. Or he probably wanted to show us around the area. Or perhaps this was his way of welcoming and helping us Filipino students. After crossing streets and sneaking through alleyways that I presume were shortcuts, I was glad that he suggested taking us on this stroll—we would have missed sights and experiences had we taken a bus instead. As an example, aside from getting a glimpse of the houses in the local neighborhood, we were able to pass by several convenience stores and ramen shops—places that we considered essential for the rest of our stay. In addition, a couple of our little first-times in Japan happened during that walk: feeling the cold weather despite seeing the sun, using pedestrian lanes respected by vehicle drivers, and seeing the Cosmo Clock 21, an iconic Ferris wheel, even from afar. It was also when we first marveled at how clean and peaceful it is on that side of Yokohama. I would later realize that this walk was the first of our walking adventures in ten days.



**The immediate question that came to mind upon learning that we were to walk for around twenty minutes to reach the destination was: Are there no buses or trains headed in that direction?**

Walking is crucial not just in terms of mobility but also in participation and by extension learning. Anthropologists Tim Ingold and Jo Lee (2006) discuss the “resonances between walking and anthropological fieldwork,” specifically how the two related activities “[reinforce] certain meanings within each other” (p. 68). They elaborate on how doing fieldwork on foot entails perceiving, routing, and socializing.

**Perceiving**

Drawing insights from interviews and participant observation, Ingold and Lee (2006) identify three perspectives on how walkers perceive and interact with the environment. They contend that walking prompts the acts of looking around, looking within, and also transcending the separation between the body and the environment. While walking, one has the liberty to either direct his attention to his surroundings or to his inner thoughts. Interestingly, the walker’s interaction with the environment can result in “the co-production of a walking experience” (p. 72) dependent not solely on the eyes but also on the feet, ears, and skin. Reflecting on my experience as a walker in Yokohama and Tokyo, I could say how, on one hand, these three modes of perception operate independently, and how, on the other hand, co-operate to produce a much richer walking experience.



Much looking around has also been done during one of our longest exposures outdoors: during our trip to Kamakura with Ferris students. The long stretch of Komachi Street houses significant fragments of Japanese culture, traditions, and wonders. Stopping by almost every shop introduced us to different products and practices. There were all sorts of stores: those that demonstrate how soaps and rings are made; those that preserve fruits and meat; and those that sell charms and precious stones. It was a pity, though, that Ann and I were not able to catch sight of the owl cafe; we only learned about it when one of our Ferris friends mentioned it in passing.

In contrast, quiet moments while walking provide time to think. During the first two or three days of our educational tour, I exerted a conscious effort to internalize the idea that I was in Japan at the moment. Part of the introspection was constantly reminding myself of the purpose of being there before looking forward to the activities of each day. Being in a foreign land also prompted mental comparisons between the familiar and the unfamiliar. From time to time, I ponder what I like about Yokohama and Tokyo, and also wondered if I like them better than Marikina and Quezon City. Furthermore, observations on how our co-pedestrians respect personal spaces, how locals maintain neat lines, and how almost everyone cooperates in maintaining a quiet atmosphere urged me to also wish that our local cities were a little more orderly.

In terms of what Ingold and Lee call an “embodied experience” (p. 69), it was most evident in our encounter with the cold weather. There were instances when I did not even attempt to remove my gloves, or wish that I donned a thicker jacket. It was when we were at the Tsurugaoka Hachimangū, an iconic Shinto shrine, that I felt partial numbness in both my hands and feet. Being in that elevated place, on one hand, allowed me to see the view from above and also witness some ways of worshipping the deities. On the other hand, it somehow reminded me of the layers of clothes and accessories that I had to wear to protect myself from the chilling temperature. Being situated there made me more aware of my surroundings.

Apart from visiting the Tokyo Sky Tree on a Saturday, and the Yokohama Landmark Tower and Cosmoworld on a Sunday, the two free days we had were also very memorable because those were spent wandering with frozen feet towards the end of each day. We often got tired and wished we could ride a tricycle or a jeep to the train station, but we made do with walking and appreciating the opportunity to claim that we survived by traveling on foot.



## Routing

Ingold and Lee point out that “People not only move between places, but also form them by movement itself. By interweaving of routes over time, or concurrently, a place is made” (p. 78). This can partly account for the identification of elaborate bus and train routes which are characteristic of Japanese precision and ingenuity. The reliable timetables, moreover, add to the efficiency of taking such routes. Knowledge of this was crucial to the preparation for each day which always began the day before. After noting down the agenda for the following day, crucial details were secured in order to plan and coordinate. A member of the cohort identifies the location of our destination through an online map; checks timetables showing the arrival and departure of buses and trains; and relays all information before setting an assembly time. In many ways, we were expected to be organized and responsible since we were following a schedule arranged for this short-stay visit. One of our constant goals was to arrive on time.

Before getting to Ferris, we had to walk an uphill trail from the train station. We also used a four-way pedestrian crossing that led to another uphill path, the end of which is the campus entrance. In contrast, entering YNU by bus was more convenient. We alighted the bus at a stop inside the campus, almost near the building where we were expected to meet our counterparts. The journey to JWU was probably the most challenging. Aside from a long train ride with several transfers and the numerous flights of escalators taken to reach the surface, we walked quite a distance partly because the map was not aware of the shortcut that we later learned from a personnel of the university.

## Socializing

Sharing walks with others is also a special form of socializing. Apart from physical companionship, this activity engenders “[a] shared bodily engagement with the environment, [a] shared rhythm of walking” (p. 79–80), fostering the idea and feeling of togetherness. A bond is formed and sustained through subconscious awareness of a companion’s pace, movements, and overall presence, in conjunction with the conversation that the walkers might be having.



In sum, walking, we must consider, is not plainly that mechanical action of the body. If we take into consideration the contextual situation of when, where, and even how one walks, we can, undoubtedly, mine thoughts, feelings, and introspective ideas entailed by this complex movement or process. I wanted to write about walking because it was what was constant during our 10-day visit, apart from learning and experiencing new things. I also think that the act of braving long distances is very relevant to UP students who seemingly welcome and embrace the characteristic of being patient long-walkers.

In retrospect, there were a couple of advantages of walking with someone during our study tour. First, walking in pairs or in threes and together as a group was necessary to avoid getting lost—this setup was a way of looking after each other whenever we were outside our dorm. We were mindful of the members of our cohort while making sure to follow the group’s navigator. Second, it gave us the chance to share observations, compare ideas, and recount memories of the preceding days. As first-timers in Japan, we were delighted to see unfamiliar sights and eager to absorb as much information regarding our surroundings. Walking together was a time to process and assess bits of what unfolded before us. Additionally, we got to know each other better during our walking escapades.





# *Ways of Seeing:* AN INTROSPECTIVE

Ann Jeline Pablo

Japan has cultivated a reputation for being one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Due to its massive cultural impact—from fashion, food, and pop culture—people will find a variety of reasons to visit, on top of discovering great sceneries and uncovering thousands of years of history embedded in well-preserved shrines, temples, and museums. Japan’s legacy that attracted an average of 23 million visitors in 2023 (JTB Tourism Research and Consulting) can become a double-edged sword: much like how elevated images of Paris, France theoretically caused disappointed tourists feelings of hysteria in a phenomenon dubbed the ‘Paris Syndrome,’ a fictionalized, often polished depiction of a place can cause unrealistic expectations that can disappoint both tourists and locals alike. The tendency to put Japan—and by extension, Japanese culture—on a pedestal distorts our capacity to interact with, and fully understand its people and their culture.

What I loved the most about our ten-day visit to Japan is that being able to live a routine that is close to how students would live and experience things which allowed us to look at and experience Japan and Japanese culture through a more grounded lens. Of course, the ten days we spent is not enough to fully immerse ourselves—in fact, it would take perhaps a lifetime to fully understand a country and its people—but it genuinely gave us a much richer experience, something that we would not be able to have had we visited Japan with the sole intention of going to tourist spots and taking great pictures.

The world appreciates Japan for its ability to stick to routine: transportation routes nailed to the second and punctuality becoming a prime value within people is efficiency and discipline that is not often found in many countries. It was honestly refreshing having the ease of knowing that your train will arrive on time, and that you could calculate your time of travel to the tee, as opposed to the gamble in Manila that challenges you with traffic and uncertainty of vehicle routes. As someone who was raised to be hyper-conscious of time, it felt good knowing that everyone is called on to be aware about being late.



Our friends who toured us in Kamakura were prime examples of this: They checked the time often and we were back at the meeting place a few minutes before we were supposed to. But when talking to our counterparts at Ferris University during our egress, they said that hearing foreigners gush about this is interesting to them because it seemed very innocuous in their daily lives, and that more often than not this rigidity seemed tiresome, especially when it does not allow for flexibility in their schedules. Most of the other Japanese people would express something of the same degree—they were shocked to hear why people would like to visit their country, because everything else just seemed rather normal.

Hearing this, it makes me think about how it seemed rather strange to hear foreigners wanting to visit the Philippines too, because nothing in my home country seemed particularly fascinating to me. However, it made me realize that perhaps hearing from us gave them a newfound sense of appreciation for their mundane, the same way that I would gain that sense of appreciation if anyone had told me something they found interesting about Manila.

Looking from the outside, Japan, like many other first-world countries, seemed perfect. That's why it was important for us to have walked around Yokohama without rose-colored glasses. One of our companions asked if there were any homeless people in Japan—and true enough—we were able to find a couple of street peddlers along the streets near our dorm. One of our lectures in JS 100 in the previous semester was concerned with the political situation and the overall political involvement of Japanese people. The professor at that time mentioned how vastly different the Japanese youth are compared to Filipinos in terms of their involvement in political discussions.

For example, the Philippines' 2022 National Elections saw a heavy turnout in student voters, meanwhile only 34% of the Japanese population aged 18 and 19 participated in the 2022 general elections, the "lowest overall figure since the voting age was dropped from 20 to 18 six years ago," (Glass). In one of our lectures at Yokohama National University (YNU), a sensei expressed disappointment in the waning interest of the youth to partake in scrutinizing the government, comparing it to the strong political fervor among the Filipino youth. Talking to several graduate students of YNU also shed light on issues in Japan that we were not aware of. What was particularly striking to me was the fact that the country is faced with a rural development problem, something that we were able to draw connections with issues in the Philippines.



**It was honestly refreshing having the ease of knowing that your train will arrive on time ... as opposed to the gamble in Manila that challenges you with traffic and uncertainty of vehicle routes.**

Taking low political involvement into consideration, this is not to say that they are not concerned with or are aware of issues that they face in their everyday lives. In our lecture at Ferris University, I came in not really thinking about how menstruation can be an issue, especially because it's an open topic between me and my female friends. I remember how it's commonplace—even back in high school—to ask your friends upfront about whether or not they can spot blood on your skirt or if they had a spare sanitary pad they could give you. I brought this up with the group I was assigned to during the discussion, and they were surprised to find out that it wasn't as big a deal as it was within their circles. They explained that menstruation is a taboo and acknowledged that this is what hinders them from receiving proper social services when it comes to women's health. One of the girls mentioned that they believe menstrual products should be free and accessible and that women should take advantage of menstrual leave. Thus perhaps although statistics point towards a disinterest among the youth to participate in the issues that plague society, they are still somewhat aware of the things within their proximity; this is no different from Filipinos, especially those who study in the University of the Philippines, whose main point of entry towards outright political involvement is their direct confrontation with societal and economic barriers that hinder personal progress.

Spending our free day in Tokyo brought us the quintessential tourist experience—and having stayed in Yokohama prior to this trip painted Shibuya as a place for tourists rather than for daily life. Going back to our dorm that day gave me a sense of relief away from the hustle and bustle of the day, from filing in long lines for crepes and trying to breathe in cramped train cars, desperate to go home.

In one of my Comparative Literature classes, we had been taught that although Asia only exists as an arbitrary border set by white supremacy, it remains a valid point of scrutiny because we are more similar than we think. This trip gave us an opportunity to interact with a foreign country as humbly as we could, and we came out of it with a better connection with a fellow Asian country. It gave us friends that we will never forget, and we were able to carve ourselves into a little corner of the world that would inevitably stay with us for the rest of our lives. There is a kind of intimate connection that would not be made otherwise, and it gave me new perspectives to use when looking at how I can use my education and my privilege to contribute to local communities and issues that affect us directly.





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