

Field Reports

Field Trip to Kyushu and Shikoku: Glimpses of Japan

By Leslie E. Bauzon

It is often said that travel is one of the best if not the best way of getting an education. Through travel, one gets a first-hand look at the way of life of a people, thus enhancing his understanding of the society they live in, both in its historical and contemporary aspects. The field trip to Kyushu and Shikoku undertaken by a team of four Japanese and four Southeast Asian scholars, not to mention those who joined this team partly in Kyushu and in Shikoku, was remarkably true in this respect, particularly for the non-Japanese participants. It was literally a process of "getting lost" in the Japanese countryside in order to immerse ourselves in Japanese culture.

Briefly, the field trip covered the period from 19 August to 3 September 1979. The team was composed of good colleagues who are all regular members of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, namely Professors Yoshikazu Takaya, Narifumi Maeda, Tsuyoshi Kato, and Mr. Yumio Sakurai. Mr. Kazuo portion while Mr. Tetsuzo Yasu nari, also of the Funahashi of Ryukoku University joined the Saga Center, participated in the coverage of Shikoku Island. Those from Southeast Asia are Professors Mattulada Ahmad, Boonyawart Lumpaopong, Thak Chaloehtiarana, and myself.

The itinerary involved a systematic, academic-oriented visit to places decidedly off the beaten path. Our team visited Jomon, Yayoi Kofun and Yamatai archeological sites; historic places like *samurai* quarters and feudal castles or their remnants; shrines and temples; museums; and ecologically-interesting areas like the Saga delta, and so on.

As a Filipino traveller in Japan, naturally the

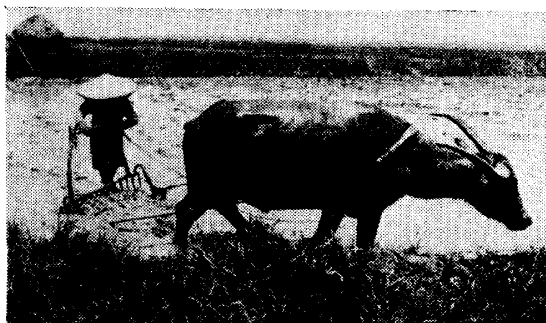
most obvious impression I have pertains to the widespread evidence of economic and industrial prosperity across the country. Specifically, this field trip reinforced my initial observation concerning the high degree of the development of Japanese agriculture, unlike Philippine agriculture which is still widely conducted according to time-worn methods developed generations if not centuries ago. The relative backwardness of Philippine agriculture is aggravated by centuries-old and pervasive landless tenancy and the concentration of wealth (e.g., land) in the hands of a few families; usurious moneylending practices; governmental negligence toward the establishment of effective infrastructural

support systems designed to uplift rural conditions; inefficient production methods; landlord opposition to meaningful agrarian reform; and the deplorable lack of discipline as well as self-reliance among the Filipino farmers themselves.

The unfavorable situation in the Philippines contrasts sharply with what I

have seen in Japan, where owner-cultivatorship is nearly 100 percent; where wealth dissipation prevails rather wealth concentration; where credit facilities are available to the Japanese farmers for low-interest crop loans; where the government is sensibly attuned to the essential needs of the farming population as well as to the realities of village life; and where the farmers are properly organized and readily mobilized for self-help projects intended to improve community conditions, further tightening the closely-knit character of their relationships.

However, it should be added that there is a discernible trend among the Japanese farmers of



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over-investing in farm machineries. For example, a farmer purchases a combine costing around ¥1,500,000 to facilitate harvesting and threshing. However, the farmer uses the expensive machinery only for two days a year, or at most two weeks, while for the remainder of the yearly agricultural cycle, it is idle. This seems like a senseless waste of capital resources which could perhaps be channeled into other useful expenditures like healthful leisure activities very badly needed by the over-worked farmer so as to prolong his precious life. The aggressive or high-pressured salesmanship of the agricultural machinery firms partly explains the proliferation of machines in the farms. The farmers though should be held responsible too for this trend because of their insatiable appetite to keep up with the latest farming technology. The machines they discard are then re-conditioned and profitably exported to such countries as the Philippines, although I should stress that their price as second-hand pieces of machinery is still beyond the reach of the majority of miserably poor Filipino farmers.

Moreover, I have the impression the government is overly pampering the farmers with farm subsidies and sophisticated irrigation and drainage infrastructures where simpler and cheaper ones which are just as effective would suffice. This politically-motivated pampering is directed to a very small group in relation to other interest groups in Japan. Again, perhaps a sizeable portion of the huge sums invested by the government for the benefit of this small group could best be spent for the good of the few deprived lower-class elements of Japanese society. Be that as it may, the attention given to the Japanese farmers is admirable when compared with the attention given by the Philippine government to the Filipino farmers. In my country, the farmers actually enjoy a minority status in terms of rights and privileges even if they comprise the majority of the population.

In comparison with the Philippines, which has wide plains, Japan is a highly mountainous country. One therefore cannot help but be impressed by the maximum utilization of available space. This is true in the agricultural sector. It is easy to see how

little land is devoted only to agricultural production, especially for paddy growing. Nonetheless, the Japanese farmers, most of whom belong to the *san-chan* category (*ojiichan*, grandfather; *obaachan*, grandmother; and *okachan*, mother) and are engaged in what is normally called *san-chan nogyo* (three-*chan* agriculture), and who constitute a tiny fraction of the national populace, are able to produce enough rice to feed the people, in addition to a surplus which is growing by leaps and bounds annually despite the vigorous efforts of the Japanese government to reduce production by granting all kinds of incentives to paddy farmers to make them bring down their grain yields.

The overabundance of this staple food is possible because of the use of a highly developed agricultural technology in an industrialized society; superb irrigation and drainage facilities; scientific farming; the positive role of cooperatives; and the use of high-yielding varieties. This is not to mention the historical factor wherein rice served as the basic commodity of value and exchange during the feudal era and the wealth of a region was measured in terms of its rice production, thereby stimulating land reclamation and growth in productivity.

I would like to note here though that the rice surplus available in Japan, which has a five-year stockpile of the staple food, is likewise attributable to the changing eating habits of the Japanese people, who consume less rice today than a decade or even a generation ago. Many now prefer to partake of bread instead of rice during mealtime.

The developments in the agrarian sector are not the only impressive features of Japanese society and culture. Being a historian by training, I find it very striking indeed to see the Japanese people possess a deep sense of history. Everyman is his own historian. Japanese history is a rich and utterly fascinating subject, and the Japanese people are not only fascinated by it. They are enamored with it and they savor every morsel of fact concerning their historical background as a nation.

In other words, the Japanese demonstrate a deep sense of history probably unmatched by any other people anywhere in the world. This sense of history, this strong consciousness of the past,



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which is not as evident among the Filipinos as in the Japanese, is concretized in the careful preservation of archeological relics dating back to the dawn of Japanese history and in the intensive investigation of the beginnings of Japanese culture by native scholars. Archeological relics are dug up and preserved; for instance, an amateur archeology practitioner discovered and excavated the earliest Yayoi site, and therefore established where Japanese agriculture all started, in Fukuoka. In so doing, he upstaged the trained academics of Kyoto and Tokyo universities. Moreover, buildings and structures testifying to Japan's glorious heritage are restored. They have inculcated in themselves a great pride in their culture and they are constantly seeking their roots. There is a proliferation of museums at all levels, including the village level, to which they flock conspicuously obey the *kanko* busloads.

In fact, my impression really is that Japan is in itself a museum and to re-live the atmosphere as well as the excitement of the original historical situation, there is no better thing to do than literally "get lost" in the countryside not yet too cluttered with the onslaughts of modernism. And even if modernity has crept, in the traditional co-exists with the modern, and it is amazing that the dynamics of the people's behavior and thought patterns is basically traditional despite the appearance of very modern facades especially in the urban centers. By immersing himself in Japanese culture this way, one is able to appreciate its positive and beautiful aspects.

In the Philippines, many people regard history as "boring" mainly because of teachers who reduce the course to mere storytelling by simply arranging events in their chronological sequence without making interpretations and conceptualizations. Moreover, history is viewed as a course with a "low marketability" as in the University of the Philippines. To me, these attitudes are clearly reflective of the poor sense of history of the Filipinos, who do not even have a decently-housed national museum, while a museum outside Manila is a rarity. Museums are useful as repositories of relics and artifacts concerning the history and culture of a people. They are essential in fostering nationalistic values and pride; history itself helps a people's search for national identity. Unfortunately, the Filipinos still have a long way to go

along these lines, primarily because of such barriers as linguistic diversity; insularity; fierce regionalism; lack of a sense of racial solidarity and national discipline, in addition to the absence of a deep sense of history. The Filipinos can truly learn much from the Japanese people and how their nationalism became a dynamic force which propelled them to modernization and industrial prosperity.

As a way of concluding, I would like to say I sincerely believe the Visiting Research Scholar program of the Center, under which an academic from Southeast Asia is invited to spend from six to twelve months in Japan for research purposes, serves as an open door leading to a broader vista needed for the understanding of Japanese culture and society, not to mention the enormous possibilities the program opens up for academic and intellectual exchange and cooperation between Japanese and Southeast Asian scholars.

Expressed in another manner, the Visiting Research Scholar is afforded a chance to see Japan beyond the four walls of the office provided him by the Center, and thus experience what is really like in the countryside still untrammelled to a degree by the creeping tides of modernism. While it is true Kyoto is historically the fountain of Japanese culture, the true home of aesthetic accomplishments, it is patently wrong to project what one sees here nationwide. One has to get to the rural areas and have a closer look at the interesting variations of the theme called Japanese culture. This can be done fruitfully through a field trip similar to the one I just went through with my colleagues from Japan and Southeast Asia. This kind of field trip, if institutionalized by the Center, will serve as an effective mechanism for making the Visiting Research Scholars derive valuable lessons from the Japanese experience. Their understanding thus enhanced, they can help pave the way for better mutual cultural exchanges between their respective countries and Japan.

This brief impressionistic report is incomplete if I do not state that the trip has left in me indelible imprints of pleasant memories concerning the hospitality of the Japanese people. For this I am deeply grateful because it made my trip not only educationally worthwhile but also enjoyable. (**Visiting Scholar, 1979, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University**)